Recruitment, Retention, and Inclusion of Racially and Ethnically Minoritized School Psychologists in Graduate Education Programs

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is an advocate of effective educational, mental, and behavioral health services for all youth. Despite some growth in the racial/ethnic and linguistic diversity of school psychologists, most identify as White and provide monolingual services in English (Goforth et al., 2021). Conversely, an increasing majority of school-age children and youth come from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds1, experience economic marginalization (Barrett et al., 2019), or speak a language other than English, highlighting the need for culturally responsive school-based practices (Jimerson et al., 2021). NASP recognizes the need to increase the number of racially and ethnically minoritized school psychology graduate students, practitioners, and graduate educators and to enhance the delivery of culturally responsive practices among all school psychologists. Therefore, the focus of this statement is on recruitment, retention, and inclusion2 of racially and ethnically minoritized students in school psychology training programs, which is crucial to the achievement of these goals.

Although recruitment, retention, and inclusion of racially and ethnically minoritized students are key to the diversification of the field, various barriers impede success. These include:

- inadequate outreach to undergraduate students
- rigid admission criteria and processes
- shortage of minoritized faculty and practitioners
- lack of academic content related to diversity
- limited field experience in diverse communities
- unwelcoming institutional policies, practices, and climate
- insufficient mentorship
- geographical limitations and lack of online programming, impacting students’ access to graduate education
- minimal part-time programming options, impacting those who wish to maintain employment while in training (Chandler, 2011; Grapin et al., 2015; NASP, 2016a; Zhou et al., 2004).

These challenges are compounded by policies that prohibit the consideration of student identity in admissions processes and ban the incorporation of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) in curricula (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2021, 2023). To overcome these obstacles and further diversify the field, NASP urges school psychologists—and allied professionals—to take intentional and coordinated action.

STRAATEGIES TO PROMOTE RECRUITMENT

Research suggests several strategies that may promote the recruitment of racially and ethnically minoritized students (see Bocanegra et al., 2022; Ding et al., 2021; Grapin et al., 2016; Grapin, 2022; Morrison et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2021).

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1 The term racially and ethnically minoritized refers to individuals who racially self-identify as African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American, or Middle Eastern and North African. This term intentionally recognizes that we are not describing these communities by any biological differences but instead are recognizing the way systemic racism impacts their existence. The authors acknowledge that this term does not account for the distinctly different ways that historical and current racism impact these communities, both within the United States and globally.

2 The authors define inclusion as a distinct process that may augment retention efforts by honoring, acknowledging, and integrating students’ cultural identities, strengths, and capital throughout their training experiences.
Use a variety of modalities to disseminate information on the profession of school psychology, particularly to high school and undergraduate students (e.g., presentations and informational sessions in school settings, campus organizations that connect racially and ethnically minoritized students, web-based and print promotional materials, social media, personal contacts, and advocacy in community settings). Resources for dissemination are readily available through ongoing NASP initiatives, such as the NASP Exposure Project. School psychologists are encouraged to coordinate with other school community members to maximize their efforts and promote the collaborative nature of the profession. Given the added labor related to these activities, graduate students and faculty should be compensated for their participation in diversity recruitment initiatives.

Highlight training program features related to diversity and multicultural responsiveness across program websites, social media, and print materials. Include detailed information on how the program meets the NASP’s (2020) Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists pertaining to human diversity and social justice (i.e., Program Standard 1.5). Programs should also consider adopting a written mission statement articulating their commitment to diversity recruitment and retention.

Engage in targeted recruitment through minority-serving institutions of higher education, including historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and Asian and Pacific Islander-serving institutions (APIs), and through minority-serving offices and organizations within other institutions (e.g., ethnically identified student organizations, offices of diversity, TriO Programs, McNair Scholars). Graduate programs should strive to enhance the visibility of school psychology emphasizing career opportunities and benefits, training opportunities, and their commitment to diversity and multicultural responsiveness.

Engage in targeted recruitment through minority-serving local, state, or national organizations that support prospective minoritized students’ access to higher education. There are many organizations across the nation that are working to promote social justice in education for racially and ethnically minoritized students (e.g., the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Indian Education Association, National Cares Mentoring Movement). Their support to students ranges from direct financial aid to one-on-one mentoring. These organizations may include activities that assist prospective and current college students in making career choices. Sharing materials about school psychology with these organizations could create a greater interest in the field.

Adopt an individualized approach to student admissions. Graduate training programs need admissions criteria that account for students’ diverse educational and experiential backgrounds. Use interviews and multifaceted admissions standards that rely on more than essays, grades, and GRE General Test\(^3\) scores (e.g., letters of recommendation, prior work experience, video essays rather than written statements, GRE Subject Test scores, performance during facilitated discussions or simulated problem-solving activities). Flexible approaches should provide students enhanced opportunities to demonstrate their fit with the program and field, professional goals, and strengths that may allow them to thrive as school psychologists. Notably, many graduate psychology programs are relying less on the GRE General Test (Assefa et al., 2023), because of concerns of racial bias, based on its history of significant score discrepancies (Bleske-Rechek & Browne, 2014) and limited predictive validity (Feldon et al., 2024). However, programs may consider the utility of the GRE Psychology Subject Test in admissions processes, as the subject tests have been found to be better predictors of graduate school success (Kuncel et al., 2001).

Employ inclusive recruitment and admissions processes. Programs should consider whether their processes or practices inadvertently exclude diverse applicants. Consistent with NASP’s (2020) Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists, programs should provide equal opportunity and a safe, welcoming environment for all prospective racially and ethnically minoritized graduate students. All admissions committee members should engage in antibias and antiracism training prior to an admissions cycle (Carter et al., 2020), as doing so has been associated with an increase in matriculated minoritized students in health-related training programs (e.g., Capers et al., 2017). Admissions events should also highlight diversity-centered campus organizations. Furthermore, programs should consider costs associated...

\(^3\) According to the Educational Testing Service, the GRE General Test measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills, rather than a specific field of study. In comparison, the GRE Subject Test in Psychology gauges knowledge an applicant is expected to have gained through their undergraduate psychology coursework.

NASP Position Statement: Recruitment, Retention, and Inclusion of Minoritized School Psychologists in Graduate Education

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with attending on-campus interviews, which can be ameliorated by providing funding for potential racially and ethnically minoritized graduate students or offering virtual engagement options.

**Clarify the hidden costs of attendance.** Finances and debt cause significant distress to psychology graduate students (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012), with Black and economically marginalized students being the most student loan indebted (Wilcox et al., 2021). To help prospective students financially plan, graduate programs should make transparent the hidden costs of program attendance (e.g., transportation to practicum sites, professional association membership dues, conference attendance, internship application fees). Although some opportunities may be optional (e.g., conference attendance), they may provide racially and ethnically minoritized students with vital socialization that can promote feelings of inclusion and belonging. Therefore, programs are encouraged to provide students with funds to offset hidden costs whenever possible. Relatedly, programs should specify their expectations regarding student employment, as some applicants may assume they can maintain their current level of employment and may not be able to take a loss of income (see Schilling et al., 2021 and Guiney et al., 2019 for additional guidance).

**Encourage the participation of current graduate students in the recruitment and admissions process.** Current school psychology students are prime candidates for connecting and offering support to prospective students. This allows students to have agency in their graduate training and to feel invested in the long-term success of the program. Student interviewers can conduct one-to-one interviews to provide information regarding the program’s social climate, as well as peer and campus supports.

**Encourage student advocacy** by appointing candidates to serve as student program representatives. Students can also be selected as leaders at the state or national levels (e.g., NASP Student Leaders Program) and engage in advocacy activities during National School Psychology Week.

**STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE RETENTION AND INCLUSION**

It is not enough to merely recruit and matriculate racially and ethnically minoritized students, who may encounter greater personal and social challenges when compared to their White peers during their graduate education (e.g., exposure to microaggressions, lack of positive interactions with faculty and peers; Proctor & Truscott, 2012; Proctor et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2021). Therefore, school psychologists must intentionally promote engagement of racially and ethnically minoritized students and provide individualized supports to ensure successful program completion and entry into professional practice.

Inclusion is central to retaining racially and ethnically minoritized school psychology students (Proctor & Owens, 2019). Program faculty should focus on ensuring that students’ voices are included within the curriculum, practical experiences, decisions regarding the program, and the greater institution’s community. Furthermore, program faculty and site supervisors must ensure student presence, expertise, accomplishments, and contributions are explicitly acknowledged, elevated, and valued. Additionally, programs and institutions should determine ways to validate and support the lived experiences of racially and ethnically minoritized students by providing spaces to build community (e.g., affinity groups). (For practical strategies, see Fleming et al., 2013; Hays, 2022; Proctor & Truscott, 2012; Proctor et al., 2016, 2018; Malone & Harper, 2022; Sue et al., 2007; and Williams et al., 2021).

**Cultivate a program culture of open-mindedness, trust, commitment to multicultural sensitivity, and social justice,** particularly in classroom discussions and other faculty–student interactions. To facilitate a positive program culture, encourage activities to promote feelings of belongingness and safety among all program members. Faculty should commit to professional development in guiding and managing difficult conversations regarding cultural diversity (e.g., power and privilege) that includes best practices on how to self-reflect and check their biases. General knowledge can be obtained through a review of peer-reviewed literature, consulting with colleagues who specialize in culturally responsive teaching practices, and engaging in continuing education through state and national associations of psychology (e.g., professional conferences; the NASP Online Learning Center and APA’s Office of Continuing Education in Psychology). Programs seeking professional development opportunities specifically designed for their unique campus community are encouraged to consult with their institutional leadership (e.g., Office of Diversity and Inclusion/Equity, Office of Institutional Equity). Once trained, faculty should model self-reflective practices and how
to combat acts of racism and discrimination. Programs should incorporate self-reflective exercises, and difficult conversations across classes, so that students have a pattern of expectations on how to engage in them. The effectiveness of training efforts should be monitored through periodic assessments of program culture based on feedback provided by racially and ethnically minoritized students, faculty, and staff, to support the development of a culture of belonging. There are several measures in the literature that can be used to gather such feedback (e.g., Multicultural Environmental Inventory-Revised, Pope-Davis et al., 2000).

**Promote awareness and prevention of racial microaggressions** within training programs, institutions of higher education, and practicum/internship sites. Black school psychology students often report the highest frequency of microaggressions, committed by both peers and faculty (Proctor et al., 2016, 2018). These experiences often increase during internship (Proctor et al., 2016). Therefore, program members and field-based supervisors should engage in ongoing self-reflection and examination of their biases related to racially and ethnically minoritized populations. Program faculty can model for colleagues and students how to engage in self-analysis and take corrective action to restore justice when members of an institution have engaged in microaggressions and other acts of discrimination.

**Integrate diversity and social justice into all aspects of training,** in accordance with NASP’s (2020) Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists (i.e., Standard 1.5), to ensure students receive opportunities to develop multicultural knowledge and skills across didactic, field, and research-related experiences. Based on these standards, programs should offer more than a course on “diversity” to promote appropriate trainee development. Engaging in curriculum mapping can ensure courses intentionally center racially and ethnically minoritized-generated scholarship and contain content that aligns with antibias and culturally responsive practices (Mena et al., 2023). As part of curriculum mapping, programs should consider the inclusion of critical texts that promote an understanding of oppression in the field (e.g., Critical Theories for School Psychology and Counseling, Proctor & Rivera, 2022; We Want to Do More Than Survive, Love, 2019; Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls, Morris, 2016). Programs also are urged to facilitate the development of supervised experiences in marginalized communities, by connecting with local and regional school-based and clinical practitioners, which may promote student development of cultural humility (Fisher, 2020).

**Offer flexible programs of study for students who need additional coursework to prepare for program requirements.** Faculty should consider whether their course sequences facilitate the scaffolding of desired skills in a manner that meets the needs of all students. To differentiate instruction, faculty may consider employing nontraditional methods of assessment (e.g., collaborative projects, video/media, infographics). Regardless of the method, faculty should acknowledge how differing world views can affect their perceptions of each student, as well as the role oppressive trauma histories can have on a student’s development and current functioning.

**Offer part-time or online coursework to accommodate students who cannot attend full-time or in person.** Programs should strongly consider permitting students to attend part-time to meet the needs of those who cannot commit to full-time enrollment because of financial, family, or other obligations. Additionally, programs should consider offering courses online, allowing students who are geographically limited to access an education. Recent literature suggests there is promise in using virtual training platforms to help students develop competencies for practice (Bocanegra & Gallup, 2019).

**Ensure faculty and peer mentors engage in continued learning and professional development regarding cultural diversity and social justice.** Students from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds are at a greater risk of receiving lower-quality mentoring compared to their majority counterparts (Proctor et al., 2016, 2018). Mentors who fail to acknowledge social identities can reinforce experiences of bias and social stigma. Therefore, mentors must engage in ongoing self-assessment to determine if alterations are needed to their mentoring approach. NASP offers a professional growth plan that can be used to identify mentoring goals. More formal assessment can be achieved through measures of mentoring proficiency (e.g., Mentoring Competency Assessment; Fleming et al., 2013) and by seeking constructive feedback from colleagues. Ultimately, faculty should provide individualized mentorship that meets the unique needs and goals of the student and accounts for the interaction of cultural identities in the mentor–mentee relationship. Models of identity are available to facilitate cultural identity analyses (see ADDRESSING Framework; Hays, 2022).
**Broden support networks.** Graduate programs should connect students with local, state, and national professional networks specifically founded to promote the inclusion of racially and ethnically minoritized individuals in the field of psychology (e.g., NASP's Multicultural Affairs Committee and Diversity Communities; the Black School Psychologists Network; APA Division 45- Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race; Association of Black Psychologists; National Latinx Psychological Association; Society of Indian Psychologists; Asian American Psychological Association; AMENA Psychological Association). Engaging with fellow racially and ethnically minoritized colleagues can provide students with a greater sense of community, validation, and normalization. Whenever possible, graduate programs should invite (and appropriately compensate) racially and ethnically minoritized scholars and practitioners to discuss their expertise and work in the field.

**Promote institutional and local resources, and ensure they are accessible to racially and ethnically minoritized students.** As noted previously, finances and debt are significant stressors for graduate students (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2021). Therefore, programs should be aware of and actively seek other forms of academic, social, and financial support available within their institution, and in local or national organizations (e.g., graduate assistantships, scholarships, fellowships). NASP offers a scholarship specifically for racially and ethnically minoritized students (i.e., NASP-ERT Minority Scholarship Program). Programs should proactively share information regarding these alternative funding sources when speaking to racially and ethnically minoritized students. Outside funding should also be sourced to address basic student needs (e.g., food and housing insecurities, access to professional attire). Financing may be achieved through donations or external funding (e.g., grants).

**Remain up to date regarding policies prohibiting DEAI efforts, and the implications of the Supreme Court's decisions in the Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) cases.** Programs are strongly encouraged to continually monitor legislation that would prohibit DEAI by liaising with state and national school psychology leadership and by using online tools (e.g., The Chronicle’s DEI Legislation Tracker). Programs also should review resources created by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division designed to help postsecondary institutions advance diversity initiatives post-SFFA (i.e., Dear Colleague Letter and Questions and Answers). Guidance and strategies for advocacy (e.g., engaging with state and national legislatures, forming coalitions, engaging students in initiatives to demonstrate program commitment to diversity) are available via NASP’s advocacy tools. Those seeking formal professional development to further develop their advocacy skills may consider attending NASP’s Public Policy Institute.

**THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS**

NASP affirms the essential role of school psychologists in training and mentoring graduate students. School psychologists can model respect for human diversity and an ongoing commitment to social justice, engage in effective culturally responsive practices in school and clinical settings, and participate in ongoing efforts to dismantle oppressive systems at all levels of training and service delivery. To achieve these goals, school psychologists must first understand the various ways the field has negatively impacted racially and ethnically minoritized communities (e.g., disproportionate representation in special education categories, disciplinary actions; Malone, 2024; Sullivan & Proctor, 2016; Gage et al., 2019); such acknowledgment is necessary if the field is to meet its recruitment, retention, and inclusion goals (Proctor, 2022). Furthermore, it is crucial that all school psychologists routinely self-assess how the various dimensions of their cultural background influence their professional conduct, perspectives, and practices (including an investigation of one’s implicit biases and cultural blind spots). Such self-reflection demands that school psychologists commit to ongoing self-reflection, ongoing self-accountability, and improving one’s problem-solving and professional development. Ultimately, school psychologists should embody aspirational goals centering on the liberation of racially and ethnically minoritized individuals, focusing their practice in ways that promote radical healing (French et al., 2020). School psychologists can refer to professional organizations (e.g., NASP, 2016b), peer-reviewed texts (e.g., Connecting Across Cultures: The Helper's Toolkit, Hays, 2012), and other online resources made available through research centers (e.g., Bauer et al., 2022) for questions and activities to promote self-reflection related to cultural diversity and social justice in practice. School psychologists also can take self-assessments that may be useful to monitor their development of multicultural competencies (e.g., School Psychology Multicultural Competence Scale-Revised; Malone et al., 2016).
NASP is committed to not only diversifying the profession, but also to elevating the voices of marginalized students. To this end, NASP encourages members of the profession and allied fields to engage in activities to improve recruitment, retention, and inclusion of individuals from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds as an essential precursor to diversification of the field. Although the strategies above are applicable to most graduate-training settings, they hold particular importance for diversifying education programs and the field of school psychology. Through sustained, systemic efforts, school psychologists, graduate educators, and members of allied fields can attract, matriculate, empower, and graduate more practitioners from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritize federal and state investments to support the formation of new or expansion of existing graduate education programs within HBCUs, HSIs, TCUs, and APIs, or other institutions of higher education with demonstrated commitment to increasing diversity within school psychology.
- Allocate state and federal funding to lower any financial barriers that inhibit recruitment and retention of racially and ethnically minoritized graduate students. Such investments could include tuition stipends, loan forgiveness, paid internships, and financial support to address the needs of racially and ethnically minoritized students.
- Federal and state government agencies, and the technical assistance centers they support, should develop and disseminate guidance and effective strategies to recruit and retain racially and ethnically minoritized students within school psychology graduate programs. Such guidance should be informed by the lived experiences of racially and ethnically minoritized students and faculty and by others with demonstrated commitment to creating inclusive learning environments that center diversity and social justice and dismantling systems and practices that harm racially and ethnically minoritized students.
- Reject any effort to limit or prohibit developmentally appropriate discussion and formal curricula on critical topics including systemic racism, cultural responsiveness, diversity, social–emotional learning, sexual orientation, gender identity, and equity in both pre-K–12 and higher education.
- Protect curricula, instruction, discussion, and professional development related to: equity and diversity, culturally responsive practices, cultural humility, systemic racism, mitigating implicit bias, social–emotional learning, or any other topic of relevance in K–12 schools and within the higher education system.

REFERENCES


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