

Recruitment and Retention of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse School Psychologists in Graduate Education Programs

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) promotes the delivery of effective educational and mental and behavioral health services to all youth. To this end, NASP recognizes the need to increase the number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) school psychology graduate students, practitioners, and graduate educators, and to enhance culturally responsive practices among all school psychologists. The focus of this statement is on recruitment and retention of CLD individuals in graduate education, which plays a crucial formative role in the attainment of these goals.

Historically, the profession of school psychology has lacked racial and linguistic diversity. Today, despite some growth in the racial/ethnic and linguistic diversity of school psychologists, the vast majority of school psychologists identify as White and provide monolingual services in English (Walcott, Charvat, McNamara, & Hyson, 2015). Conversely, a rapidly increasing majority of school-age children and youth come from CLD backgrounds. NASP values individual, cultural, and contextual diversity in professional interactions and service provision through the cultivation of multicultural responsiveness among all school psychologists and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity within the field. Key to this diversification is the recruitment and retention of CLD graduate students in school psychology.

Researchers have identified numerous conditions that hinder successful recruitment and retention of CLD graduate students, such as inadequate outreach to undergraduate students; rigid admission criteria and processes; lack of minority faculty and practitioners; lack of academic content related to diversity; limited field experience in diverse communities; unwelcoming institutional policies, practices, and climate; insufficient mentorship; and limited financial support (Chandler, 2011; Grapin, Lee, & Jaafar, 2015; Zhou et al., 2004). To overcome these challenges and diversify the field, NASP encourages graduate education programs to engage in coordinated activities conducive to the recruitment and retention of graduate students from CLD backgrounds.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE RECRUITMENT

Research highlights several strategies to increase recruitment of students from CLD backgrounds (Hough & Squires, 2012; Rogers & Molina, 2006; Zhou et al., 2004).

- **Use a variety of modalities to disseminate information** on school psychology as a career and about individual training programs, including presentations in secondary and postsecondary school settings, undergraduate school psychology courses, Web-based and print promotional materials, social media, personal contacts, and advocacy in community settings such as career fairs, youth centers, and job centers.
- **Highlight program features related to diversity and multicultural competence** in program websites, social media, and print materials. Include information on multicultural coursework, faculty research related to diversity, field experiences in diverse schools and communities, and bilingual or

multicultural specializations in program promotional materials. Explicitly articulate commitment to diversity recruitment and retention, such as adopting a written mission statement. More generally, recruitment efforts can identify the ways in which school psychology research and practice can support effective services for CLD students, families, and communities.

- **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., ethnic-minority student organizations, offices of diversity, TRiO Programs, McNair Scholars). Graduate programs should strive to enhance the visibility of school psychology as a profession among students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, emphasizing career opportunities and benefits, training opportunities, and commitment to diversity and multicultural competence.
- **Adopt flexible admissions criteria** that account for the diversity of students' educational and experiential backgrounds. Interviews and multifaceted admissions standards that rely on more than essays, grades, and GRE General Test scores (e.g., letters of recommendation, prior work experience, video essays rather than written statements, GRE subject scores, performance during facilitated discussions or simulated problem-solving activities) provide students enhanced opportunities to demonstrate their strengths, fit with programs, and professional goals.
- **Evaluate recruitment and admissions processes to ensure they are inclusive.** Programs should consider whether their processes or practices inadvertently alienate, screen out, or eliminate diverse applicants (e.g., inappropriate weighting of specific student data, unwelcoming process, exclusionary prerequisites). Consistent with NASP's Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Policy (2012), programs should provide equal opportunity and a safe, welcoming environment for all potential graduate students.
- **Offer financial support** to students from CLD backgrounds through assistantships, scholarships, training fellowships, and contracts with education agencies or clinics. Resources in programs, departments, schools, and universities should be clearly identified in recruitment materials.
- **Encourage graduates of school psychology programs from diverse backgrounds to become graduate educators themselves.** Students from CLD backgrounds are generally attracted to programs with diverse faculty and research related to diversity, so increased diversity of school psychology faculty and research on multicultural topics is important in recruiting and retaining CLD students. Programs should strive to recruit and retain multiple faculty from underrepresented backgrounds to prevent faculty isolation.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE RETENTION

It is not enough to merely recruit and matriculate graduate students from CLD backgrounds. Graduate programs must take additional steps to foster engagement and success of all students to support CLD students in completing their training programs and entering practice. Programs and faculty may engage in several strategies to promote retention (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012; Grapin et al., 2015; Rogers & Molina, 2006).

- **Cultivate a program culture of open-mindedness, trust, and commitment to multicultural sensitivity**, particularly in classroom discussions and other faculty–student interactions. Encourage activities to promote feelings of belongingness among all students; facilitate respectful discussion of diversity issues; challenge all students and faculty to reflect on and challenge their own assumptions and belief systems regarding diversity; and create a safe, welcoming place for all.
- **Integrate diversity into all aspects of training.** Graduate programs should guarantee students are provided with opportunities to develop multicultural knowledge and skills in both didactic training and field experiences (NASP, 2010). In addition, conducting research related to diversity and hosting regular professional learning activities (e.g., symposia, colloquia, conferences) related to multicultural competence reflects a commitment to diversity.
- **Offer flexible programs of study for students who need additional coursework to prepare for program requirements.** Some otherwise strong students may benefit from an initial semester, summer courses, or supplemental training through classes or tutoring to boost subject matter knowledge, writing skills, critical thinking, or analytical skills. Graduate programs should assess students’ skills where conventional coursework or demonstration of specific competencies is lacking and help students to identify remedial or supplemental learning experiences conducive to success within the training program, and eventually, within the profession.
- **Ensure ongoing peer and faculty mentoring and access to professional networks.** Students from CLD backgrounds should have access to ongoing social support and mentoring within the program and larger institution. Graduate programs should ensure the availability of regular mentoring from faculty and more senior graduate students who are knowledgeable of issues in cross-cultural mentoring and peer mentoring. Graduate programs should also help students to engage in local, state, and national professional networks to support socialization into the profession and facilitate development of broader social supports.
- **Promote institutional resources.** Programs and faculty should be knowledgeable of the financial, academic, and social supports available within their institution and local organizations, and should make this information easily available to CLD students.
- **Promote awareness and prevention of racial microaggressions** within training programs and institutions of higher education. Racial microaggressions are brief day-to-day verbal and nonverbal communications that convey derogatory messages about racial minority status and heighten CLD students’ emotional distress while reducing feelings of belongingness (e.g., comments about individual’s physical characteristics, language, immigration, socioeconomic status; comments about students’ scholarly or professional skills or aptitude relative to perceived characteristics; assumptions of individual’s beliefs or preferences based on an individual’s actual or perceived race or ethnicity; Sue et al., 2007).

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

NASP affirms the essential role of school psychologists in mentoring students and early career practitioners. As field supervisors and mentors, school psychologists can complement students’ didactic training by modeling respect for human diversity and social justice, engaging in effective decision-making, and delivering culturally responsive services. School psychologists should model cultural

responsiveness and assist supervisees in understanding and responding to the diverse characteristics and needs of the students, families, professionals and communities with whom they interact. School psychologists should address the ways in which various dimensions of culture shape one's own professional conduct, perspectives, and practices, and they should model ongoing self-reflection, ongoing problem-solving, and continued professional development. Practicing school psychologists may also contribute to the recruitment of diverse trainees by acting as ambassadors for school psychology in the education settings in which they work, thereby increasing awareness of the profession among school-age students.

SUMMARY

NASP is committed to the diversification of the profession. NASP encourages school psychologists and graduate education programs to engage in activities to improve recruitment and retention of graduate students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as an essential precursor to diversification of the field. The strategies above are conducive to the recruitment and retention of students generally, but they hold particular importance for diversifying graduate education programs and the field of school psychology. Through sustained, systemic efforts, school psychologists and graduate educators can attract, matriculate, and graduate more students from CLD backgrounds.

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