

Recruitment and Retention of Racial and Ethnic Minoritized Students in School Psychology Graduate Programs

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BACKGROUND

The lack of racial and ethnic diversity in school psychology has been a longstanding concern in the profession. According to the most recent membership survey of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), White practitioners comprise 86% of the profession (Goforth et al., 2021). While this indicates some degree of change over time since 1990 when the profession was 94% White (Walcott & Hyson, 2018), school psychology remains a racially homogenous field. In contrast, almost 50% of the school-aged population in the United States is from racial and ethnic minoritized (REM) groups (de Brey et al., 2019). Although all school psychologists regardless of race/ethnicity should be adequately prepared to serve the needs of REM youth, there is value in having a profession that more closely mirrors the population it serves. The in-school presence of adults representing minoritized groups is critical to the achievement and health of children who are also members of these groups (Maylor, 2009). Moreover, increased racial and ethnic diversity in graduate programs enhances the discourse around diversity topics and facilitates the development of trainees' cultural competence and humility (Kennedy et al., 2014). The need for a racially and ethnically diverse workforce is clear.

For this to happen, continued efforts by training programs to recruit and retain REM graduate students are needed. As such, the purpose of this technical assistance brief is to present an overview of recruitment and retention strategies targeted towards REM students.

To increase diversity in the field, NASP has made efforts to recruit and retain REM students through programs such as the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Ambassadors of Recruitment program and the NASP Exposure Project. The purpose of these programs is to intentionally expose REM undergraduate students to school psychology as a viable career option (Proctor & Romano, 2016), emphasize the field's commitment to diversity (Bocanegra et al., 2016), and show that diversity exists in the profession by having REM school psychologists as presenters (Proctor & Truscott, 2013). In addition, the 2020 NASP *Standards for the Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* emphasize the importance of valuing human

diversity and social justice in the field as reflected in school psychology program admissions and student characteristics (NASP, 2020).

Program efforts to diversify school psychology have primarily focused on graduate student recruitment; however, in the absence of targeted retention strategies, REM individuals are at greater risk of leaving their programs prior to degree completion (Callahan et al., 2018; Sowell et al., 2008). To remain motivated and work toward degree completion, it is important that REM students feel a sense of connectedness to the profession and their graduate programs and perceive that the overall environment is supportive and conducive to their success (Cooke et al., 1995). However, due to their minoritized status in most programs and institutions, REM graduate students often encounter unique challenges in obtaining relevant social experiences and support.

Compared to their White counterparts, some REM graduate students report feeling invisible in their programs and receiving little institutional support to acclimate to the program and develop relationships with peers (Lewis et al., 2004); they report more barriers in their program environment and stereotypical representation in curricular materials (Maton et al., 2011); and they report less social support and more frequent microaggressions (Clark et al., 2012). The microaggressions REM students experience in their programs convey the message that they do not belong in academic spaces or in the profession. Relatedly, these deficit perspectives of REM students impact access to mentoring. REM students are less likely to receive the same quality of advising and mentoring as White students (Lott & Rogers, 2011; Proctor & Truscott, 2012) as they may not be perceived as “talented” or “coachable.”

In comparison to other fields of psychology (i.e., clinical, counseling), school psychology has a higher attrition rate for graduate students across years in training programs (American Psychological Association, 2017). Some argue that the risk for attrition is even higher for REM students due to the reasons mentioned above as well as greater financial concerns. For example, compared to White students, Black students acquire larger amounts of student loan debt in college. On average, Black students owe \$7,400 more than their White peers (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016). This trend continues in graduate school, causing Black students to experience greater financial stressors (Wilcox et al., 2019).

Because of such challenges, it is important that school psychology training programs engage in specific, intentional efforts targeted towards REM students in addition to generic recruitment and retention strategies. However, research suggests that this may not occur. In a survey of school psychology program coordinators, 60.5% reported implementing specific recruitment strategies and 50% had specific retention strategies in place (Malone & Ishmail, 2020). However, a closer examination of the strategies reported indicates that most were not specific to REM graduate students. This suggests that faculty may have limited awareness or may underappreciate the unique challenges REM students often encounter (i.e., perceived lack of belongingness and support, greater barriers to success, and the experience of racism/microaggressions).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT

Historically, school psychology recruitment efforts have largely been passive, with students often describing their exposure to school psychology as happenstance or serendipity (Bocanegra, Rossen, & Grapin, 2017). Research has shown that most undergraduate psychology students have little exposure to school psychology (Bocanegra et al., 2015; Bocanegra et al., 2019; Haselhuhn & Clopton, 2008). Thus, scholars have generally advocated for the creation of recruitment pipelines and more concerted, strategic efforts on recruitment, particularly towards REM students (Bocanegra et al., 2019; Grapin et al., 2015;

Proctor et al., 2014). Several scholars have highlighted historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as a potential pipeline to increase the racial and ethnic diversity in school psychology (Chandler, 2011; Proctor & Truscott, 2013); however, this outreach effort appears to be seldom utilized (Beeks & Graves, 2017). While the specific reasons for this are unknown, it is possible that lack of targeted recruitment reflects implicit biases suggesting that students from HBCUs are not as capable of being successful in school psychology programs (Proctor & Truscott, 2012).

Likely due to school psychology’s role in forwarding social justice and advocacy, much of the literature regarding student recruitment into the field has focused on REM recruitment (Bocanegra et al., 2019). However, currently, there are dual, but interrelated, issues forwarding recruitment efforts: (a) the general shortages crisis and (b) lack of racial/ethnic diversity in school psychology. We contend that both issues are of importance and, although often overlapping, different strategies may be needed to overcome these issues. Thus, in order to properly highlight the importance of each issue, we have subdivided recommendations for recruitment into *General* recruitment strategies and *REM* recruitment strategies. Moreover, it should be noted that many of these general recruitment strategies (see in Table 1) may also benefit REM student recruitment; however, they may not be specific to this population and may not have a significant impact in increasing the overall diversity of the profession. We further contend that minoritized populations are an untapped human resource that brings additional benefits such as increased perspectives, lived experiences, and opportunities for promoting shared understandings and advocacy in training programs and in schools. These benefits would be in addition to helping reduce the current personnel shortage in the field.

Table 1. General Recruitment Strategies

Plan Strategically	
	Conduct workforce analysis at the regional, state, national, and program levels in order to better identify needs, strengths, and areas of opportunity for recruitment (APA, 2018; Morrison et al., 2020).
	Establish a recruitment plan that considers both regional and national applicant pools (Bocanegra et al., 2020).
	<p>Become more strategic and proactive with recruitment efforts by establishing recruitment pipelines both within the local community and undergraduate training programs (Bocanegra et al., 2020):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target undergraduate students in psychology and related programs. This targeting of undergraduate students, even those not enrolled in psychology courses, may be important due to a recent finding suggesting that 33.6% of school psychologists were employed in a related field the year before entering their current school psychology graduate program (Bocanegra et al., 2017). Thus, related professions or related training programs may be an untapped resource. • Target related school personnel for potential recruitment. This can be done by actively discussing the benefits of a career in school psychology and by school psychologists becoming more visible within schools. Relatedly, increased availability of respecialization programs in the field may serve to advance this effort.
	Increase funding to support graduate school psychology training/education through grant writing, advocating for institutional support (e.g., alumni scholarships, graduate assistantships), and partnering with local and state education agencies.

Increase Awareness	
In regard to the content of recruitment initiatives, it is important that recruitment initiatives focus on increasing knowledge and exposure to the field, perceptions of positive benefits of entering the field, and self-efficacy for doing well in graduate training programs (Bocanegra et al., 2016).	
	Celebrate and highlight the work of practitioners in news or social media (making more visible their roles in pre-K–12 classrooms and communities); a news article could open opportunities for students to talk with practitioners and/or receive mentoring.
	Partner with undergraduate programs to advocate for increased inclusion of information about school psychology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify opportunities for school psychology faculty as well as current practitioners to present in undergraduate psychology, education, and related classes. • Create stand-alone undergraduate school psychology courses (Grapin et al., 2016) and/or school-based field experiences (e.g., shadowing a school psychologist).
	Create and have potential students take part in Realistic Job Previews (RJP). RJPs can use short videos (e.g., testimonials from current students or practicing psychologists) or interactive scenarios to provide potential applicants with realistic expectations about graduate study or the field of school psychology. RJPs have been found to increase job commitment, survival, and satisfaction (Premack & Wanous, 1985).

Although general recruitment strategies are likely to be effective for REM populations, these strategies in isolation may not be sufficient to markedly increase the recruitment of REM students into school psychology graduate training programs. Hence, the strategies in Table 2 are specific to REM students and should be implemented in addition to the aforementioned strategies.

Table 2. REM-Specific Recruitment Strategies

Plan Strategically	
	Conduct a REM recruitment specific workforce analysis to better identify program readiness for increased REM recruitment. This would include identifying program needs, strengths, and areas of opportunity for recruitment (Morrison et al., 2020; Proctor et al., 2014).
	Target recruitment at undergraduate institutions with specialized expertise in supporting REM students (i.e., minority serving institutions which include HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions. Researchers have suggested that creating a recruitment pipeline with such institutions may improve REM recruitment (Chandler, 2011; Graves & Wright, 2009; Proctor & Truscott, 2013).
	Evaluate the readiness of your program, department, and institution to ensure there is an authentic and visible climate of inclusion that values diversity and acceptance and that truly acknowledges the benefits that REM students can have on their program, the field, and their future clients (Proctor & Truscott, 2013; Proctor et al., 2014). This climate should be evidenced throughout the program and in program-related advertising materials, so that prospective REM students can assess a program’s authenticity when it comes to valuing acceptance, social justice, and antiracist views.
	Recognize the unique financial circumstances and stressors faced by some REM students. Offer opportunities for monetary support/funding for graduate education when possible (Chandler, 2011; Rogers & Molina, 2006).
Increase Awareness	
	Conduct and disseminate research that benefits the lives of minoritized populations (Chandler, 2011; Rogers & Molina, 2006).

	Involve REM faculty in the recruitment process and reaching out to minoritized prospective students while also being careful not to increase the burden they may already carry within the program (Rogers & Molina, 2006).
	Increase exposure to the field of school psychology within REM communities and establish a REM-focused pipeline as early as elementary school (Proctor & Truscott, 2013).
	Provide mentoring and support to potential students from REM backgrounds, including a consideration of potential factors affecting their future graduate education, such as social capital and dealing with microaggressions, tokenism, gate keepers, and other nuances of the academic environment (Chandler, 2011).

For a more in-depth overview of recruitment recommendations, please review:

National Association of School Psychology Shortages Task Force. (2016). Addressing shortages in School Psychology resource guide. National Association of School Psychology. <http://www.nasponline.org/demos/shortages-in-school-psychology-resource-guide>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RETENTION

In addition to using the strategies outlined above for effectively recruiting students, it is equally important for school psychology training programs to actively engage in strategies for retaining REM students in their programs. It is vital that graduate training programs engage in focused retention strategies such as those outlined in Table 3. While many of these recommendations support the retention of all graduate students, their use may be more critical for combatting the documented barriers faced by graduate students from REM backgrounds (e.g., Lewis et al., 2004; Maton et al., 2011).

Table 3. REM-Specific Retention Strategies

Program Climate and Support	
The retention of a diverse faculty in school psychology training programs is vital to the retention of a diverse student body (Haizlip, 2012) including representation of REM faculty and staff across the larger institutions in which programs are housed.	
	Encourage and provide support for all faculty to engage in professional development to increase their capacity to support REM students (Malone & Ishmail, 2020).
	Establish professional and supervisory relationships with school psychologists of diverse backgrounds.
	Recognize the increased burden that recruitment, advising, and mentoring activities often place on faculty of color: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide workload recognition to faculty involved in REM-related retention initiatives. • Explicitly recognize these activities in criteria for merit, promotion, and tenure.
	Programs should “be explicit in their statements toward the promotion of diversity and their creation of coursework that results in expertise in multiculturalism ... to be on par with other specialties of health service psychology (e.g., clinical and counseling psychology) that have shown great success in diversifying their profession” (Blake et al., 2016, p. 308). Relatedly, programs should demonstrate to students that they clearly value human diversity and social justice as promoted in the NASP 2020 Professional Standards (NASP, 2020).
REM-Specific Student Support	
	Provide opportunities for students throughout their training to work with a wide variety of populations, particularly those matching their own cultural background (Blake et al., 2016; Maton et al., 2011). Similarly, programs should emphasize how school psychologists of

	color in the field can make a difference in contributing to their own communities (Proctor et al., 2014).
	Provide close one-to-one advising and mentoring of graduate students, ideally with mentors similar in REM status, with the purpose of encouraging a greater sense of belongingness (Bowie et al., 2018). Mentorship should include the recognition that students may be experiencing racial discrimination and/or microaggressions throughout their training and being open to exploring conversations around such issues.
	Recognize the unique financial circumstances and stressors faced by some REM students. Promote availability of resources including ongoing financial supports (NASP, 2016).
	Provide access to professional networks serving diverse populations.
	Create a diverse student body in which discussions around race and racism, as well as common difficulties and concerns, are not only tolerated but encouraged (Goforth et al., 2016; Trainers of School Psychologists, 2020). Share options for support groups on and around campus for those students who might benefit from additional supports.
	Systematically foster the success and sense of belonging of REM students by providing guidance in what may be an unfamiliar world of academia. This can include but is not limited to inclusion on research teams, support for presenting research both locally and nationally, publishing research findings, and working with a broad range of populations and professional environments, when applicable.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

It is vitally important that graduate training programs in school psychology develop and maintain a strong commitment to the recruitment and retention of REM students in the field. The strategies outlined in this technical assistance brief can serve as an effective means for accomplishing this goal. It should be noted that many of these strategies can only be realized through (a) a focus on developing a program climate that explicitly values social justice, diversity, and multiculturalism; (b) a sustained commitment to supporting students, including when challenges arise; and (c) the ongoing evaluation and support of the cultural competency of program faculty. These efforts should be integrated with larger diversity efforts across the university in which the training program is housed. Should a lack of current university-wide efforts exist, school psychology faculty are encouraged to become leaders (i.e., applying skills in systematic consultation) in advocating for the need for such integrated efforts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

American Psychological Association. (2018). A Summary of Psychologist Workforce Projections: Addressing Supply and Demand from 2015-2030.

American Psychological Association. (2021, April). Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention, and Training in Psychology Task Force (CEMRRAT2).
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National Association of School Psychologists. (2016). *Recruitment and retention of culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists in graduate education programs* [Position statement].
<https://www.nasponline.org/x36852.xml>

National Association of School Psychologists. (n.d.). Shortages in School Psychology Resource Guide.
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-psychology/shortages-in-school-psychology-resource-guide>

School Psychology Unified Anti-Racism Statement and Call to Action. (2020).

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice/school-psychology-unified-anti-racism-statement-and-call-to-action>

Trainers of School Psychologists. (2020, June). Call for Action for Anti-Racism in School Psychology Training Programs.

<https://tsp.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/TSP%20Call%20for%20Action%20on%20Racism%20June%202020.pdf>

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