



Improving School and Student Outcomes: The Importance of Addressing the Shortages in School Psychology

Educators and policymakers across the country are working to identify and implement the systems and strategies that will best meet students' learning needs. Lowering barriers to learning and ensuring supportive and equitable learning environments are paramount. Increasingly, education leaders are recognizing the importance of addressing students' social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health, along with academics, in an integrated multitiered system of supports. School psychologists are key members of the school teams that do this work.

School Psychologists Are Critical to Students' Positive Mental Health and Learning Outcomes

With expertise in both education and mental health, school psychologists are uniquely qualified to help address the needs of students and schools. They help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally, and they partner with families, teachers, administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community. School psychologists are skilled at data collection and analysis. They develop, deliver, and monitor evidence-based interventions at the student, classroom, school, and district levels to address the needs of individual students and promote equitable outcomes for the entire school community. While not an exhaustive list, school psychologists:

- assess students' learning needs and provide direct interventions and consultation with teachers to support students' academic success;
- provide culturally responsive social-emotional learning, provide mental and behavioral health services, and facilitate effective communication and collaboration with community agencies/providers;
- support diverse learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities;
- are critical members of school safety teams that facilitate comprehensive school safety, crisis prevention, and intervention efforts that balance physical and psychological safety;
- provide consultation to families, teachers, and administrators to address school and student need;
- deliver professional development to teachers and other school staff;
- support school climate, foster positive conditions for learning, and foster trusting relationships among students, staff, and families.
- help develop and implement effective discipline strategies, including positive behavior interventions and supports and restorative justice practices; and
- promote family engagement.

How Shortages in School Psychology Impede Access to Needed Services

Shortages in school psychology, like shortages in other related education and mental health professions, have the potential to significantly undermine the availability of high-quality services to students, families, and schools. Shortages include an insufficient supply of qualified school psychologists and school psychologists from diverse backgrounds, graduate faculty, and qualified practicum and internship supervisors as well as an insufficient number of positions within districts to meet the needs of students.

Increasing public school enrollment, increasing numbers of students experiencing poverty and trauma, and growing prevalence of mental and behavioral health disorders prove that the services school psychologists provide are becoming more integral to children's success in school. For example, though approximately 17% of children in the United States experience a mental disorder each year, only about half of those students receive the treatment they need; of those that do, the majority of the students receiving any services initially receive them at school. Further, children with mental health disorders are more likely to be retained in a grade, show impaired academic functioning, and have an Individualized Education Program. Consequences of the shortages include:

There is a critical shortage in school psychology, both in terms of practitioners and in the availability of graduate education programs and faculty needed to train the workforce necessary to keep up with the growing student population.

- unmanageable caseloads;
- the inability for school psychologists to provide critical prevention and early intervention services;
- limited ability for school psychologists to regularly consult with families, teachers, or administrators;
- reduced access to mental and behavioral health services for some students;
- limited scope of service delivery focused primarily on legally mandated special education practice;
- disjointed or incomplete services, or less effective services delivered by less qualified professionals or those not trained to work in schools;
- overreliance on contracted services, which often only serve the students with the most significant needs and neglect critical prevention, early identification, and early intervention services; and
- teacher burnout due to lack of support.
- Regrettably, research indicates that longstanding shortages of school psychologists continue to threaten students' access to needed school psychological and mental and behavioral health services.

Selected Research

References for the following research data points can be found in the research summaries listed below in the resources section.

- In order to meet the NASP recommended ratio of no more than 1 school psychologist per 500 students, we need to add approximately 63,000 school psychologists to the existing workforce.
- Between 2015 and 2020, the self-reported estimate of years of work prior to retirement remained stable at approximately 16 years, though the age of the workforce decreased, suggesting that the rate of retirements remained fairly stable (Goforth et al., 2021; Walcott & Hyson, 2018). Paired with static graduate program enrollment numbers (Gadke et al., 2018, 2019, 2021), national ratios are unlikely to improve in the short term.
- During the 2018–2019 academic year, 2,816 students graduated from school psychology programs, of which 2,226 entered employment in the school setting. Assuming no changes in student enrollment, no attrition from the workforce, and no changes in availability of graduate education or respecialization in school psychology, it will take 28 years to ensure adequate access to school psychologists in the United States.
- There are some shortages of school psychologists in all regions of the country and considerable shortages in the Northwest, Great Plains/Midwest, Northeast, Alaska, and Rocky Mountain regions. Shortages in these regions have been growing over the past 5 years (American Association for Employment in Education, 2020).
- The availability of graduate programs differs substantially by state. States such as New York and California have upwards of 26 and 37 institutions offering a school psychology program, respectively, whereas many states have only one program. Hawaii, Alaska, and Wyoming have no school psychology programs.

Addressing Shortages in School Psychology Is a Wise Investment in Student and School Success

Addressing the shortages in school psychology requires multifaceted short- and long-term approaches. Strategies must address workplace roles, conditions, and salaries; differences in context (e.g., rural, urban, suburban) and school community populations; and the graduate education pipeline. At the local level, implementation of the NASP Practice Model provides school districts with a framework and steps for improving and expanding comprehensive and integrated service delivery overtime. Additional strategies include efforts to:

The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of no more than 500 students per school psychologist; the national ratio is 1:1,211.

- Improve *recruitment* by introducing school psychology to more high school and undergraduate students, providing incentives to enter the field, developing new graduate programs in areas most impacted by shortages, and mentoring prospective faculty.
- Establish school-university *partnerships* to create a pipeline of qualified school psychologists to high need and hard to staff districts.
- Ensure *sustained financial investments* to allow districts to hire and retain adequate numbers of school psychologists to serve the school population.
- Recruit a more *inclusive and diverse* workforce by emphasizing themes of multiculturalism, equity, and social justice, ensuring school psychology program faculty represent a range of minoritized backgrounds, and directly and personally contacting applicants from minoritized backgrounds.
- Make *respecialization and professional retraining* more accessible by offering flexible options for those returning to school and to help recruit professionals from related fields (e.g., school counseling, clinical psychology).
- Improve *retention* by providing both professional and administrative supervision and mentorship, increasing opportunities for high-quality professional development, and ensuring positive working environments.
- Implement or expand grant or loan forgiveness opportunities to increase the number of students entering and remaining in the field of school psychology.
- Create pathways to grant credentialing reciprocity for school psychologists across state lines, such as the Nationally Certified School Psychologist certificate, to help remedy the shortages in rural and other underserved areas.

Federal Legislative Priorities: FY2022 Appropriations

- Robust funding to support continued availability of the [Mental Health Services Providers Demonstration Grant](#) and the [School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program](#). We request \$606 million in FY22 for the Safe Schools National Activities Program, authorized by ESSA, to support this work.
- \$300 million for personnel development grants (IDEA Part D Section 662). This program is designed to increase the pipeline of well-prepared special education teachers, leaders, early interventionists, administrators, school-employed mental health professionals, and specialized instructional support personnel.

Other Legislative Priorities

- Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act (S.1811/H.R.3572)
- Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act (H.R. 4198)
- Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act (Coming Fall 2021)
- Continued authorization of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program
- Targeted investments to increase the availability of school psychology graduate education programs at HBCUs and other minority serving institutions.

- Expand the focus of the Higher Education Act to include efforts to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse workforce of school psychologists.

Research and Strategies to Address the Shortages in School Psychology

- Research Summary: [Shortages in School Psychology: Challenges to Meeting the Growing Need of U.S. Students and Schools](#)
- Research Summary: [School Psychologists: Improving Student and School Outcomes](#)
- [School Psychologist Ratios by State: 2019–2020](#)
- [School Psychologist Staffing Supply and Demand](#)
- [What is the Cost of Providing Students With Adequate Psychological Support?](#)
- [Addressing Shortages in School Psychology Resource Guide](#)

Key NASP Policy Documents

- [NASP Federal Public Policy and Legislative Platform](#)
- [Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach: Guiding Principles for Effective Schools and Successful Students](#)
- [School Psychologists: Qualified Health Professionals Providing Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Health Services](#)
- [NASP Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services: NASP Practice Model Overview](#)

Please cite this document as:

National Association of School Psychologists. (2021). *Improving School and Student Outcomes: The Importance of Addressing the Shortages in School Psychology* [handout].