



NASP Technical Assistance Brief

DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY FIELD SITES

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The success of any school psychology program is intricately linked to the quality of its practica and internship experiences, and especially to the quality of supervision provided during such experiences. A strong, collaborative relationship between the graduate program and field sites is important to assuring that (a) candidates are adequately prepared for the experiences they will have; (b) field experiences and supervision are consistent with the program's philosophy, goals, and objectives; and (c) graduates will have the knowledge and skills needed to enter the field and positively impact those they serve. For nationally approved/accredited programs, it is also important for field experiences to be consistent with national standards. As stated in Standard 3.5 of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) *Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* (<http://www.nasponline.org/standards/2010standards.aspx>), "The school psychology internship represents a collaboration between the school psychology program and internship placement agency that is consistent with program goals and assures attainment of competencies by interns."

The first step to establishing a successful relationship with field site personnel is to recognize that a *collaborative* relationship is one that includes mutual respect and is mutually beneficial. Professional relationships in which one party is taken for granted or in which one party benefits at the cost of the other are not likely to be successful.

The following are some recommendations for fostering successful collaborative relationships between school psychology graduate programs and field sites.

PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A common understanding of the expectations for, and responsibilities of, all parties involved in school psychology field experiences is the foundation for a successful program–field site relationship. It is usually helpful, if not necessary, to specify or reference such expectations and responsibilities in a written plan, agreement, or contract that includes the following:

- Expectations and requirements for all parties, including the candidate/intern, the field site and field supervisor, and the graduate program and faculty supervisor. This would include requirements in NASP and/or APA standards.
- Goals or objectives for practica or internship.
- NASP and/or APA ethical standards as an expectation for all parties.
- Expectations for supervision (e.g., minimum number of supervision hours) and supervisor (e.g., supervisor credentials).
- Evaluation and grading responsibilities (if any) of the field supervisor.
- How the field site and program will deal with trainees exhibiting problematic behaviors.

PROVIDE SUPERVISORS WITH THE TOOLS AND TRAINING NEEDED FOR SUCCESSFUL SUPERVISION

Becoming a supervisor for the first time is an overwhelming experience for many school psychologists, especially those with few years of experience. In addition, many school psychologists have never had formal coursework or training on how to provide high quality supervision. Even seasoned professionals may be leery of providing field supervision, because they have been out of school for quite some time and may feel their theoretical knowledge is not current. These factors, coupled with an often already hectic workload, pose challenges when trying to ensure high quality supervision. In order to help overcome these obstacles, universities should consider providing materials and opportunities such as:

- articles or books on supervision (e.g., *Professional Development and Supervision of School Psychologists* by Virginia Harvey and Joan Struzziero);
- training opportunities or workshops, perhaps in conjunction with state conferences;
- a supervisor handbook that includes university faculty contact information, expectations related to supervision, and information about and samples of university requirements;
- an orientation for new supervisors at the university;
- an annual meeting that brings together all faculty and field supervisors to discuss the upcoming year, including any requirement changes that have occurred.

ESTABLISH MECHANISMS FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION, AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Establishing and maintaining open communication between the university and field sites will help ensure a positive experience for both parties. Having a solid collaborative system in place is also vital when bumps in the road occur. This may not happen often, but when situations arise with a trainee or supervisor, having an established relationship will provide a starting point to resolve dilemmas more effectively. Mechanisms for good communication, collaboration, and problem solving include:

- fostering trust in the relationship (e.g., by emphasizing honesty, discussing confidentiality in communications);
- maintaining frequent communication between program faculty and field sites;
- having face-to-face meetings, when appropriate, between the supervisors (university and field site) and trainee, as well as with other school officials invested in the internship (e.g., district supervisor of school psychologists);
- establishing a program advisory board that includes supervisors and/or a representative from each district;
- establishing a supervisor Listserv (but being careful to clearly define what can and should be discussed so as to avoid feedback or issues that should be confidential).

PROVIDE INCENTIVES OR REWARDS FOR DISTRICT FIELD SUPERVISORS

Although many field supervisors are motivated to give back to the field and impact future generations of school psychologists, incentives play an important role for school psychologists, with many competing demands for their time, making the decision to commit to providing supervision to a practicum student or intern. The following are examples of incentives that university programs might offer to supervisors in exchange for their commitment to supervise an intern or practicum student:

- coteaching courses (for pay);
- stipends or tuition waivers;
- documentation needed to qualify for supervision hours toward continuing professional development requirements for NCSP or state credentials;
- adjunct or affiliated faculty status;
- university library privileges;
- access to other program or department faculty, for consultation on various issues, and to other university resources (e.g., students can do literature reviews for supervisors on clinical issues);
- a limited number of no-cost professional development hours to districts;
- a recognition breakfast or luncheon with certificates of appreciation for supervisors.

EVALUATE FIELD EXPERIENCES AND SITES, AND USE RESULTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Every field experience has strengths and areas for improvement. Evidence-based practice necessitates that field experiences be evaluated from the perspective of key stakeholders, and that results be used to recognize strengths and make improvements on a continual basis. In some cases, evaluations may lead to decisions as to which field sites to utilize, or which sites provide the best experiences for candidates with particular strengths, weaknesses, or needs. The evaluation of field placements and experiences might include the following components:

- informal, formative evaluations from stakeholders over the course of the experience;
- candidate/intern evaluation of their experiences at field sites and associated support upon completion of such experiences;
- feedback from field site supervisors about university preparation of and support for candidates and the field experience;
- candidate evaluation of the quality of university and site supervision.

FOSTER THE GROWTH OF NEW SITES

It is natural for field sites and supervisors to change as time passes. New administrators move into leadership positions and supervisors retire, move to new positions, or experience changes in their assignments. It is not atypical for such changes to occur or become known just before a new semester begins. It is therefore important for university preparation programs to have a ready source of sites and supervisors to draw upon. Possible sources include:

- alumni, who can be rich sources of potential field sites and supervisors;
- articles in state association newsletters and presentations at state conferences describing the program, practica, internship, supervisor requirements and qualifications, and incentives that might stimulate interest;
- collaborations with other university preparation programs on such initiatives as a letter to all school psychologists detailing the need for practicum and internship sites and requirements (a sample letter is available from Mark Swerdlik at meswerd@ilstu.edu);
- offers for supervision training, including requirements for practica and internships, to new supervisors or those interested in becoming supervisors.

School psychology programs and field sites are also encouraged to follow internship best practice guidelines developed by NASP (<http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/mocq378internship.aspx>) and the Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs (<http://sites.google.com/site/cdspphome/cdsp-internship-guidelines>).

Keywords: Internship; NASP internship standards; Field sites; Field supervision.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Harvey, V. S. & Struzziero, J. A. (2008). *Professional development and supervision of school psychologists: From intern to expert* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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