COMPETENCY CONTINUUM

FOR

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL

prepared by:
The Training and Accreditation Committee

of

The National Association of School Psychologists

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INTRODUCTION

The National Association of School Psychologists has moved forward to accept the fact that competencies form a better basis upon which to measure progress than the more traditional academic unit. This is not to negate the idea that many competencies may be developed in formal courses of training. The needs of the school systems and the students served by School Psychologists are so great, however, that it is essential to utilize every person who can perform any of those competencies which bear upon these problems, regardless of their formal academic training programs. At the same time, formal training programs will be improved if they sequentially develop specific competencies for students in training.

The NASP Training and Accreditation Committee was charged with the responsibility of formulating a competency continuum describing the complexity of tasks normally associated with school psychological services. The following materials attempt to break down into relatively discrete steps those nine areas where personnel of varying levels of professional training and experience could operate effectively. Although the functions listed below are broadly associated with school psychology, whether or not they are part of a specific school psychologist’s job description varies considerably from district to district and region to region. The important issue is that these tasks need to be provided for in all school organizations and that, because of their extreme importance to the lives of the students concerned, they must be assigned only to people who are competent to carry them out. Seven Levels of Competency have been defined:

PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

Competency Level 1 . . . The Master School Psychologist

This Professional functions at a higher level than would be expected of the basic school psychologist. This higher level of competency can be seen in an additional expertise in one or more areas, in improved ability to operationalize good psychological services for an entire district or in an ability to extend psychological practices into new and improved areas. Whereas such competencies may be associated with advanced academic training, it is more typically developed through substantial experience and a systematic plan of self-improvement. Although Level 1 psychologists tend to become supervisors of other psychologists and to assume positions of district-wide leadership, a psychologist could serve at a Competency Level 1 in certain one-to-one relationships, i.e. diagnosis of deaf children.

Competency Level 2 . . . The School Psychologist

The professional who has attained competency Level 2 is able to work in a school setting without direct supervision from another psychologist. He or she can perform capably over the broad range of activities normally associated with accepted school psychological services, and will normally be competent to identify the need for support personnel and to recruit, train and supervise them. Competency Level 2 is normally associated with a “Master’s Plus” level of academic training typically extended over two graduate years leading to certification as a School Psychologist. Although a Level 1 Competency may not have been demonstrated in any one area, such a professional will demonstrate a systematic approach towards improving his or her skills.

Competency Level 3 . . . The Provisional School Psychologist

Persons at this level possess the minimum academic qualifications for entry into Professional School Psychology and can perform routine
psychological functions. They should function under the supervision of a Level 1 or Level 2 School Psychologist. Level 3 has completed a basic Master's Degree training program. Although certification procedures in some states have sometimes permitted people to function at this level more of less permanently, this level is currently envisioned as that stage in training which moves toward the fully trained School Psychologist (Level 2) commonly associated with a supervised internship. There is a trend within the profession for this internship to be a full-time experience, lasting one full school year, under the supervision of a Level 1 or Level 2 School Psychologist, and paid at approximately the teacher's salary level.

**Competency Level 4 . . . School Psychologist Associate (Aide I)**

Bachelor's degree or equivalent

**Competency Level 5 . . . School Psychologist Assistant (Aide II)**

Associate of Arts degree or equivalent

**Competency Level 6 . . . School Psychologist Technician (Aide III)**

High School Diploma or equivalent

**Competency Level 7 . . . School Psychologist Aide (Aide IV)**

Non-completion of High School (Including all those still in school).

Competency levels five through seven represent the activities associated with support services for school psychologists. This is an artificial breakdown, since it is not likely that any school district will utilize this many levels of personnel. It is illustrative of the fact that specific duties can be delineated according to levels of complexity which personnel from varying levels of sophistication and training can be utilized to provide valuable support to students, parents, community agencies and school personnel.

The emphasis in this paper is on the competencies that these support people can perform under the supervision of school psychologists; whether they are recruited as volunteers or whether they are compensated for their services is a separate issue.

The levels of competency are predicated on the assumption (which may not always be valid) that higher levels of academic training are often associated with intangible factors such as basic ability, willingness to learn, adaptability, and the making of mature judgements at critical times.

It is felt that support personnel, as part of a dynamic profession, can provide significant help to the school psychologist, especially in routine areas, permitting professional school psychologists to utilize their time more efficiently and effectively, thus ultimately serving more people.

As the reader compares the competency levels ascribed to the support personnel listed in each area of school psychological performance, it is hoped that he will appreciate that many aspects of his present job could be accomplished efficiently with such assistance.

The school psychologist should also realize that in some cases support personnel may very well perform more effectively than the professional. For example, a parent may much more easily accept assistance from a support person who "speaks my language" than a school psychologist who has never lived in that particular attendance area.

In considering this Competency Continuum, SIX MAJOR CONSIDERATIONS should be kept in mind:

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1. The Continuum is based on demonstrated competencies rather than relying solely on accumulated academic credit. There are many ways to develop competencies, only one of which is through formal course-work leading to academic credits. Many people who are formally trained at one level have, through extensive professional experience, wide reading, and active participation in professional groups, developed skills at higher levels of competency than would be indicated by their formal training alone.

2. Intra-individual variation can be expected. Modern School Psychology has become so complex that no one can be expected to have attained mastery in all or in even a large number of areas. In fact, it is very possible for an individual to work actively at providing basic school psychological services and develop a Level I Competency in only one area. Usually this attainment comes only through careful planning and a systematic program of self improvement.

3. Level I Competencies are designed to have an impact on district-wide policies and procedures. Although there is still extensive value in working with the individual, our growing awareness of the complexities of the modern educational system, together with the enormous number of problems to be solved, have placed a higher priority on those procedures which have potential for effecting good psychological services for the entire district or school system being served.

4. The type and size of the school system affects the degree of competency required of the school psychologist. In large districts there is more likely to be a higher degree of specialization. In smaller districts, the psychologist is more likely to be called upon to perform a wider variety of services. One of the problems that has traditionally faced school psychologists is how they could gain a higher level of competency than was provided in their basic training program in order to meet the demands for extended services.

5. No one individual can be expected to attain the highest level of competency in all areas. These materials are designed to cover all of the major areas of responsibility associated with school psychology; specific functions may vary with personal competencies and district need.

6. Since School psychology is constantly growing, such a list cannot be static and must be constantly changing. As psychologists solve different kinds of problems and as the demands for their time change, there is a constant need to identify new ways to provide service and a need to identify all possible resources with which to meet those problems. There is a wide variety of opinion about how School Psychology can and should change and develop; any listing such as this should be considered tentative and flexible.

If a program of support services to the school psychological staff is to be successfully initiated and developed, school systems should plan with considerable care exactly how the services are to be utilized.

1. An initial phase should be the development of clear job descriptions for all levels to be served by personnel on the Competency Continuum. Primary and secondary roles and functions should be delineated. Goals and objectives for the school psychology staff should be described at all levels, preferably in terms of specific and measurable objectives. Administrative and supervisory relationships must also be clear before such services become operational. Time sequences for major activities will also assist in the planning phases.

2. Selection criteria for support personnel should be established which consider such factors as personality, adaptability, ability, prior training and ability to profit from pre-service and in-service training. Acceptability to the school’s professional staff, other support personnel, community
agencies, students and parents and community in the attendance area to be served should also be considered. The selection criteria should relate to the job description established for each support member of the school psychological services staff.

3. Consideration should be given as to whether or not such personnel meet civil service or other requirements, or if there are special state certification or licensing requirements. Should there be a written contract? Is the person providing the support services going to be a volunteer, or paid? Would the salary be based on an annual, monthly, or hourly rate? How long is the work day and the work year? What fringe benefits must be considered (hospitalization, sick leave, retirement, workman's compensation, unemployment compensation)? Are there specified increments in pay? Does the contract specify that additional training be obtained? Even if the service is voluntary, are many of these considerations part of an implied contract?

4. Since many support personnel will have had little opportunity for prior training for the specific tasks to be assigned, it is critical that pre-service and in-service opportunities be systematically provided. Therefore, for a program of support services to be effective, specific training strategies should be developed. The goals and objectives of the training sessions should be well defined, and overall responsibility for the training sessions needs to be delegated.

5. What are the expected measurable outcomes of the support services? Who supervises the staff member and how is he evaluated? What is the ratio of supervisors to support personnel? In what way has there been built into the system of evaluation periodic review of program effectiveness, with provisions for recycling new information or changing priorities?

These are the major areas that school districts should consider. When programs of support services experience difficulty, it is often because one or more of the above factors have not been considered.

The Competency Continuum has been developed for a number of reasons, including:

1. The sequential development of graduated tasks should encourage school psychologists to critically evaluate the complexity of their function.

2. Certain tasks can be identified as being less complex and thus could be handled by less trained individuals, thereby freeing those with higher levels of training to perform along a broader professional scope.

3. Manpower can be utilized in a more efficient and effective manner.

4. There might be some areas where a lesser-trained individual could perform better than a highly trained specialist (i.e., some support personnel may be able to communicate better in the primary language of the parent.)

5. A career ladder concept can be developed so that support personnel can see that, with additional training and experience, higher levels of professional functioning can be obtained.

6. The major hope we have of extending psychological services to all those in the public school who need them rests on our ability to train and utilize a large number and variety of support personnel.

The areas around which the Competency Continuum have been organized are as follows:
AREA 1: Improving the School Climate

A: Learning/Cognitive
1. Plans and implements district-wide procedures for assessing the learning needs of students and recommends strategies for increasing learning efficiency (1).
2. Consults with appropriate personnel in the development of a district-wide instructional program (1) or (2).
3. Assists school personnel in the writing of appropriate and measurable instructional objectives (1) or (2).
4. Plans and implements district-wide procedures for developing and using criteria based achievement tests (1) or (2).
5. Conducts an assessment of learning needs on a building and grade-level basis (2).
6. Devises a strategy for improving the learning environment in the school and the classroom through a planned and sequenced program of inservice education (2).
7. Consults with individual teachers about classroom environment (2) or (3).
8. Assists teachers in developing a systematic plan for implementing behavior management techniques to facilitate learning (2) or (3).
9. Assists parents in fostering positive approach to children's learning (3) or (4).
10. Identifies materials for learning resource center (3) or (4).
11. Assists teachers in writing and implementing programs to facilitate maximum learning (3) or (4).
12. Assists teachers in administering, scoring, and utilizing criterion referenced achievement tests (3) or (4).
13. Assists teachers in applying reinforcement techniques in the classroom (3) or (4).

14. Identifies and distributes literature about learning difficulties or conditions designed to improve the learning climate (3) or (4).

15. Operates a learning resource center under supervision (4).

16. Tutors individuals or small groups on specific learning strengths (4).

17. Assists in making and utilizing specific instructional materials appropriate to the identified educational objectives (4) through (7).

18. Collects materials for learning resource center (4) through (7).

19. Carries on routine tutoring under supervision (6) or (7).

B. Social/Affective

1. Plans, develops, and implements district-wide procedures for assessing the social/emotional needs of students and recommends strategies for increasing growth in this area (1).

2. Consults with appropriate personnel in the development of district-wide programs to improve the classroom climate (1).

3. Assists school personnel in establishing objectives for social/emotional growth (1) or (2).

4. Devises a strategy for improving the emotional climate in the school and the individual classroom through a planned and sequential program of inservice education (1) or (2).

5. Consults with individual teachers about fostering healthy social/emotional climates in the classroom (2) or (3).

6. Assists teachers in implementing behavior management and reinforcement techniques (2) or (3).

7. Assists parents in fostering positive emotional growth in their children (2) to (4).

8. Identifies and distributes literature about maintaining and improving mental health in the classroom (3) or (4).

9. Utilizes lay and other personnel as role models in providing emotional support for students (5) through (7).

AREA 2: GROUP ASSESSMENT

1. Recommends, plans, and executes system-wide group assessment program (1).

2. Plans for the interfacing of group assessment programs with appropriate computer services (1).

3. Analyzes and interprets results of group assessments to the Board (1) or (2).

4. Establishes procedures for communication results of group assessment to students, parents, and school personnel (1) or (2).

5. Analyzes, interprets, and recommends changes in instructional techniques and methodology to:
   a. District personnel (1) or (2).
   b. School personnel at the local building level (2).
   c. Individual teachers (2) or (3).

6. Develops the procedure for establishing local norms (2).

7. Trains teachers and other support personnel to administer and interpret group assessment instruments (3).

8. Interprets group test results to students and parents (4).

9. Processes orders for tests (5) or (6).
10. Prepares data for analysis:
   a. Preparing descriptive statistics (5).
   b. Scoring tests (6) or (7)
   c. Card punching (7)
11. Catalogues tests (6).
12. Records group assessment results on student records (6).
13. Proctors the administration of assessment procedures (6).
15. Checks accuracy of answer sheets (7).

AREA 3: SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONS/SUPPORT

1. Devises and implements master plan for school community relations in providing needed services for students (1).
2. Organizes and encourages the community in its efforts to provide services for students (2).
3. Interprets pupil services, policies, and procedures to the School Board and community and enlists their support for same (1) or (2).
4. Plans for liaison between the school and culturally unique community groups (2).
5. Provides direct professional contribution to and liaison with community organizations (2).
6. Identifies specific community concerns, attitudes and feelings about school policy, programs, and procedures:
   a. Designs systematic data collection procedure including questionnaires, structured interviews, etc. (1) or (2).
   b. Interprets to the Board the community concerns about adequate services for students (1) or (2).
   c. Collects data from community questionnaires, interviews, etc. (5) or (6).
   d. Summarizes information obtained from questionnaires and/or structured interviews (5) to (7).
7. Identifies, enlists, and assists in the training of volunteers for the school and community (4).
8. Identifies and utilizes community resources in working with individual students (4).
9. Serves as a translator for students and parents who typically communicate in non-standard English (7).

AREA 4: INDIVIDUAL STUDY OF THE CHILD

A. Preliminary Data Collection
1. Plans and implements district-wide system of collecting data to identify children with specialized needs (1).
2. Obtains and interprets data from non-school agencies (2).
3. Assesses individual child's personality and social development through interviewing, observation, etc. (2).
4. Analyzes data obtained from interviews to assist in planning for the individual child (2).
5. Uses interview techniques on a systematic and planned basis to obtain pertinent data about the child from other sources:
   a. Other professionals in the community (2).
   b. Non-school community agencies (3).
   c. Parents (3).
   d. School personnel (4).
   e. Peers (4).
6. Administers, scores, and utilizes the results of criterion referenced measures of achievement (3).

7. Obtains personal data from the individual child through interviews (3).

8. Interprets school records (cumulative, health, etc.) (3).

9. Uses systematic observational processes to obtain pertinent data about the child by means of:
   a. Interactional analysis within the family (4).
   b. Interactional analysis within the school environment (teacher-pupil; pupil-pupil) (4).
   c. Interactional analysis within the community environment (5).

10. Collates discrete data from school-community records (5).

11. Obtains parental permission for in-depth assistance from psychological services (5).

12. Makes frequency counts of specified observed behaviors (6).

B. Individual Assessment

1. Plans and implements district-wide standardized assessment procedures (1).

2. Administers and interprets instruments of personality assessment (2).

3. Synthesizes data collected into appropriate intervention strategies (2).

4. Assesses and interprets the level of cognitive development of individual children (2).

5. Administers and scores instruments designed to assess language/communication skills (3).

6. Administers and scores instruments designed to assess sensory-motor development (3).

7. Administers and scores individual instruments designed to measure intelligence (3).

8. Assesses and interprets group standardized measures as they relate to the individual child (3).

AREA 5: INTERVENTION TECHNIQUES

1. Plans and implements system-wide individual and group intervention strategies (1).

2. Plans and implements building and classroom-wide intervention strategies (2).

3. Develops and plans intervention strategies for individual children (2).

4. Coordinates intervention strategies with other student support services in the school and community (2).

5. Implements changes in the classroom/instructional program (2)

6. Refers and follows through on referral to community specialists (2).

7. Insures that support personnel are suitably oriented to the intervention strategy and that they carry out the techniques with individual children (3).

8. Implements the intervention strategy utilizing the following continuum of services:
   a. Supportive counseling (2).
   b. Psycho-educational counseling (2).
   c. Specific behavioral management (4).
   d. Tutoring (under supervision) (7).

9. Serves as recorder for group counseling sessions (4).

10. Serves as an emotional support for students who need it (7).
AREA 6: PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN WITH EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS

1. Helps to plan and implement district-wide programs for meeting specialized student needs (1).

2. Participates actively in Special Class Committee placement procedures (includes admissions, program evaluation, and annual review procedures) (2).

3. Helps to plan and implement an in-service program for personnel serving children with specialized needs (2).

4. Makes initial plans in cooperation with school personnel about student's individual learning experiences (2).

5. Cooperates with special education personnel in periodic ongoing decisions relative to changes in special placement (2).

6. Maintains liaison between medical personnel and other community agencies (2).

7. Assists in the planning and delivery of appropriate in-service opportunities to parents of students with special needs (3).


9. Assists in the planning for effective transition for students moving between special and other educational opportunities (3).

10. Assists in the collection and reporting of data required for district and state special education reports (4).

11. Provides direct assistance to special education students as they interface with other educational programs (4).

12. Assists special education personnel in providing appropriate transportation, scheduling, and other necessary administrative details (5).

13. Orders, catalogues, and distributes materials for students with specialized needs (5) or (6).

14. Reproduces and maintains specialized learning materials (5) through (7).

15. Maintains periodic reassessment schedules as required by established administrative procedures (6).

16. Maintains records showing student progress (6).

AREA 7: RESEARCH

A. Planning

1. Devises over-all research design, i.e., procedures and ways of collecting necessary data, etc. (1).

2. Devises strategies for obtaining necessary funding (1).

3. Interprets related literature as it affects the planned research design (1).

4. Develops the hypotheses into a researchable design (1) or (2).

5. Selects and/or devises appropriate evaluation instruments (2).

6. Identifies and collects data from previous research (4).

7. Collects needs-assessment and other related data to help identify researchable problems (5).

8. Orders research materials (5) or (6).
B. Data Collection
1. Devises periodic management review systems (i.e., “go, no-go” decisions, modification of research design), etc. (1).
2. Devises interview strategies for obtaining data from professional personnel in schools and community, parents and lay persons, and students (2).
3. Conducts interview sessions to obtain subjective data (2) or (3).
4. Observes and records subjective personal/social interactions (2) or (3).
5. Tests and scores complex assessment instruments (i.e., individual intelligence tests, perceptual motor, etc.) (3).
6. Conducts structured interview sessions to obtain objective data (4).
7. Administers and scores routine group assessment instruments (4).
8. Observes and records discrete personal/social interaction (4).
9. Collates data which has been collected (6).
10. Scores standardized group tests (7).
11. Collects data in a systematic and sequential way (7).
12. Distributes results of data collected (7).
13. Files and records data (7).

C. Data Analysis
1. Establishes procedures for complex statistical analysis (1).
2. Conducts advanced statistical analysis (1) or (2).
3. Analyses computer print-out (1) or (2).
4. Provides systematic checks to insure that others properly complete assigned statistical tasks (2) or (3).
5. Organizes results to facilitate analysis (3) or (4).
6. Performs routine statistical procedures (5) or (6).

D. Dissemination
1. Develops district-wide commitment to utilize research results (1) or (2).
2. Prepares articles for publication in professional literature (1) or (2).
3. Interprets research results to:
   a. School Boards.
   b. Professional personnel in schools and community (2).
   c. Parents and lay persons (3).
   d. Students (3) or (4).
4. Writes reports on research conducted within the district (2).
5. Prepares support material for presentation to groups, i.e., audio-visual, handouts, etc. (6).

AREA 8: SECRETARIAL SUPPORT*
1. Establishes district-wide master plan for the employment, distribution, assignment, and in-service education for secretarial assistance to psychological services (1) or (2).
2. Hires appropriate secretarial help (3).

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3. Arranges for part-time secretarial help (4).

4. Organizes and supervises clerical staff under the direction of the supervising psychologist (4).

5. Assists in scheduling and manages the workload of the clerical staff (4).

6. Handles routine personnel matters (i.e., sick leave, mileage, etc.) (4).

7. Identifies and maintains a schedule of "due dates" for district and state reports and advises on steps for proper execution (4).

8. Screens applicants for clerical staff (4).

9. Initiates routine correspondence and arranges for necessary travel of psychological staff (4) or (5).

10. Takes and transcribes psychologist's dictation (5).

11. Makes appointments for psychological staff and maintains appropriate stock of professional and clerical supplies (5) or (6).

12. Maintains appropriate telephone communications (5) or (6).

13. Reviews and distributes incoming mail (5) or (6).

14. Assists in the preparation of routine, required departmental reports (5) through (7).

15. Duplicates and distributes articles and research materials (6) or (7).

*Administrative Secretary (4)
Clerk-Stenographer (5)
Clerk-Typist (6)
File Clerk (7)

AREA 9: SUPERVISION/TRAINING

1. Devises and implements system-wide plan for using psychological support personnel (1).

2. Develops job descriptions for psychologists and psychological support personnel (1).

3. Establishes strategies to insure adequate financial support of psychologists and psychological support personnel (1).

4. Plans and conducts staff meetings for school psychology staff (1).

5. Plans and implements an over-all strategy for in-service education for psychological personnel (1).

6. Cooperates with institutions of higher learning in training students going into full-time school psychology (2).

7. Supervises psychometrists and psychological interns (2).

8. Maintains over-all supervision of support personnel (in cooperation with other appropriate personnel) (2) or (3).