



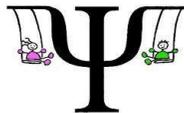
North Carolina School Psychology Association

The “State of the State” regarding School Psychological Service Provision in North Carolina

Position Paper developed by: NCSPA Professional Practices Committee

The North Carolina School Psychology Association gratefully acknowledges the Professional Practices Committee Members in contributing their time, energy, and expertise to the development of this document outlining school psychological service provision in the state of North Carolina. The depth of their knowledge and understanding of the role of school psychologists functioning within public school settings, and of 21st Century provision of services, has guided the work and maintained a focus on the needs of students in our public schools of North Carolina. The authors of this document include:

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Role and Function of School Psychologists

Twenty-first century schools require highly trained personnel and instructional leaders. School psychologists have extensive training in data management, research and program evaluation, and problem-solving within the instructional environment, but their skill sets are often overlooked. In addition, they are some of the more qualified mental health personnel in schools.

School psychologists help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators, parents, and other mental health professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community for all students (NASP, 2014).

School psychologists are highly trained in both psychology and education, completing a minimum level specialist degree consisting of 60 semester hours or more of graduate level training, including at least a 1200 hour internship. North Carolina has five university training programs in school psychology and all are accredited by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) or the American Psychological Association (APA) or both. Utilizing leadership, school psychologists promote a respectful environment for diverse populations, use their knowledge of school environments, child development, curriculum, and instruction to improve student achievement, and support student learning through the use of a systematic problem-solving approach. In addition, school psychologists utilize collaborative relationships with colleagues, families, and communities to reflect upon and improve their practices (NC Professional School Psychology Standards, 2009). Often, the set of skills that school psychologists bring to the public school arena are overshadowed by factors that have contributed to limiting their role and function within public school practice.

Data Review

The *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services* represents the official policy of the National Association of School Psychologists regarding the delivery of comprehensive school psychological services (NASP, 2010, http://www.nasponline.org/standards/2010standards/2_PracticeModel.pdf). Within this model, the recommended school psychologist to student ratio is 1 school psychologist to every 500-700 students. In order to obtain information regarding current ratios and role and function of school psychologists within the state of North Carolina, data were gathered using two survey tools.

Data from a needs assessment survey conducted from March-June 2014 and a follow-up survey conducted in August 2014 were collected from 109 of the 115 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) across the state (six LEAs did not respond to either survey) and a current ratio was obtained. This ratio is estimated to be an alarming 1 school psychologist to every 2,010 students, which is approximately three times the recommended ratio for delivery of comprehensive services to students. The ratio analysis revealed a range from 1:942 to 1:9,881; reflecting that there are currently no LEAs operating within the NASP recommended ratio (1:500-700). Further, 61% of the 115 LEAs are currently operating at a ratio of 1:2000 or higher (n=70).

Additionally, the survey conducted in August yielded data regarding the total number of student psycho-educational evaluations from approximately 67% of the total LEAs across the state (n=77). Within this number reporting, an estimated 39,490 evaluations were conducted in 77 districts during the 2013-2014 school year. These data indicate that the average number of evaluations completed last school year by school psychologists within these districts was 69. These estimates suggest that school psychologists are spending a disproportionate amount of time involved in assessments and assessment-related activities, most likely due to the current ratios falling

substantially above (3x) what is recommended. As a result of the amount of time spent in activities related to assessment, there is a much lower percentage of time spent in other role-related collaborative efforts and activities described above.

Of the 115 LEAs in North Carolina, 23 do not have a school psychologist on staff, indicating that service delivery is being contracted out through private practitioners/agencies. Within these LEAs, services provided are often limited to assessments/evaluations of students for the purpose of determining eligibility for special education services. Although data were not formally collected from NC Charter Schools at this time, it is estimated that approximately 90% of the 148 Charter Schools in the state do not have a school psychologist on staff. Instead, these schools typically contract with outside agencies for services related to conducting evaluations of students for the purpose of determining eligibility for special education services.

In reflecting on these data, one must consider that school psychologists are evaluated on their performance based on a comprehensive model of service delivery, yet, currently, it appears nearly impossible for school-based practitioners to function effectively within this model due to the current ratio falling substantially above what is recommended. Additionally, some LEAs, as well as most charter schools, do not employ full-time equivalent school psychologists. These factors lead to greater risks for students, with much less time spent involved in activities related to prevention and intervention to support positive outcomes for students.

Limitation of Role and Function of School Psychologists

Historically, the roles of school psychologists have been tied to special education regulations and a medical model of diagnosis and classification (Cantor, 2006). The current perception of the need and value of school psychologists is primarily related to services provided for special education, such as conducting psycho-educational evaluations for disability determination and special education placement decisions.

The time invested in traditional activities and special education activities prohibits North Carolina school psychologists from providing a system of comprehensive service that would have a broader impact on student achievement and adjustment. Comprehensive service delivery includes but is not limited to the following functions: school-based mental health services, instructional support and consultation, intervention planning for student diversity and development in learning, support for families, multi-tiered systems of support for academic and positive behavior interventions, school crisis prevention and intervention, risk and threat assessment, and data-based problem solving. These activities positively impact student performance in a number of areas including: achievement, school safety, graduation rates, resiliency, 21st century skills, college and career readiness, health, well-being and responsibility, and respect for diverse populations.

Even as the profession has called for role expansion in light of the needs and challenges facing students and their families, the vast majority of different stakeholder groups in any given district lacks awareness of school psychologists as highly skilled practitioners with expertise in both education and psychology. This distinction is important because the failure to recognize the specialized training and benefits of school psychologists has negative implications for the profession's role and practice, as well as funding for school psychologist positions.

School psychologists' expertise and extensive training are critical in helping schools affect positive outcomes for students. Some examples as cited in NASP (2010) include: school psychologists assisting teachers with academic and behavioral interventions, which have led to improvement in academic performance and behavior problems (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005; Nelson et al., 2002); school psychologists providing support for students' social, emotional, and behavioral health, which has been found to result in better academic achievement (Fleming et al., 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004); and school psychologists working with teachers in the design and implementation of progress monitoring systems. In addition, research (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2007) has shown that school staff rated assessment, consultation, counseling, and behavior management services as very important.

Students today are coming to school with more complex social, emotional, and learning needs that are creating diverse educational challenges. Traumatic stress affects 7.1% of high school youth, which includes 8.7% of females and 5.4% of males (Kann et al., 2014). In addition, Kann et al. (2014) report the prevalence estimates among high school youth who made a suicidal attempt has risen 3.5% for females and close to 2% for males. Other mental health challenges as reported by Perou, et al. (2013) for youth aged 3 – 17 years include anxiety (3.0%), depression (2.1%), bipolar disorder (2.9%), and panic disorder (2.3%).

These barriers to student learning require the implementation of student learning supports (Adelman and Taylor, 2006) and illustrate how crucial it is to have adequate numbers of well-trained school psychologists. However, in many places, school psychologist positions are either being cut or funding is not provided for additional positions, even as school enrollment increases and the need for prevention and intervention services and a focus on mental health becomes more prevalent. Consequently, quality of service is impacted in two important ways. First, school psychologists find that grossly disproportionate school psychologist to student ratios keep them from providing comprehensive services. According to Curtis et al. (2003), more intervention-focused practices are possible with a lower student to school psychologist ratio. Secondly, some districts reduce funding for school psychologist positions and elect to contract for services. In these situations, limitations on the role and practice of school psychology means there is also limited opportunity for school psychologists to build, enhance, or demonstrate competence as dictated by the North Carolina School Psychology Evaluation Instrument and consistent with the North Carolina Professional School Psychology Standards. Moreover, the outcomes that school psychologists are asked to demonstrate professionally are not linked to the role and practice expectations of the schools.

Training for school psychology students today is far more extensive and intensive, resulting in a greater array of skills in areas such as mental health, crisis prevention and management, collaborative consultation and program evaluation, intervention design and progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making and accountability. A comprehensive model of service delivery will attract and retain more people to the profession. To remain viable in the 21st century, the field of school psychology must advocate for service delivery that involves systemic consultation and intervention so that the broader educational community can be served. Young professionals are more inclined to seek out those opportunities where they can apply their skills and practice their craft in a supportive environment.

The priorities and initiatives as articulated by school districts are clearly aligned with the goal of ultimately helping all students stay engaged and become successful in school. School psychologists possess a specific skill set and are uniquely positioned to provide support and resources to schools and districts as they seek to raise the performance bar, close the achievement gap, demonstrate accountability for learning outcomes, implement early intervening services, and provide comprehensive research-based interventions for all students. In order to maintain the skills required to deliver comprehensive services to meet the increasingly complex needs of all students, school psychologists will require ongoing opportunities and support to engage in high quality professional development.

Funding Sources for School Psychologists in the State of North Carolina

There are various sources available for funding school psychologist positions within general education and special education and at the federal, state, and local levels. For funding options through special education, the Local Education Agency (LEA) must use monies provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) Funds to supplement and, to the extent practical, increase the level of state and local funds expended to educate children with disabilities (see Appendix A). If LEAs utilize only specific types of special education funding sources for school psychologist positions, it limits the role and function of school psychologists.

All employees who are paid from federal funds, or those whose salaries are used to match federal funds, must document their time and effort. Time and effort documentation acts as a “receipt” for payroll expenditures. A cost objective is a federal term which refers to a contract, grant, function, organizational subdivision, or other activity for which details on cost data are needed and for which costs are incurred. A single federal cost objective reflects 100% of an employee’s time as being spent on identified IDEA activities allowed in the grant. Multiple federal cost objectives are when an employee works on more than one type of activity tied to a grant. Time and effort documentation for school psychologists who are funded from federal sources results in their job duties being tied completely into the work of special education. The problem becomes highlighted when the school psychologist evaluation instrument (<http://ncees.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/file/view/2013-09-27+School+Psych+Users+Guide.pdf>) outlines the requirement for school psychologists to work with “all students”, however, the funding source certification requirement for 100% of their work to be tied to students with disabilities ultimately prevents them from having access to students without Individual Education Programs (IEPs). This ultimately hinders their ability to carry out their required job responsibilities highlighted through the NASP Practice Model and in the school psychologist evaluation instrument. LEAs are then faced with the dilemma of restricting use of their personnel or inhibiting certain employees from carrying out core job responsibilities that are outlined in the NASP

Practice Model and included in the standard evaluation instrument.

Recommended Actions for Change and Solutions

Some targeted actions for school psychologists, administrators, superintendents, local and state boards of education, and legislators to consider have been established. Short-term actions for these groups to consider in order to address the current challenges related to provision of school psychological services within North Carolina's public schools are listed below:

Actions for School Psychology Administrators/Leads and School Psychology Practitioners:

- Participate in developing a strategic plan that includes a needs assessment of provision of services within your school district
- Develop a plan for improving the school psychologist to student ratio within your school district
- Identify ways to make services visible (e.g., newsletter, executive summary, presentation to school boards or executive staff at district office)
- Communicate the roles, responsibilities, and services of school psychologists to stakeholders
- Advocate for ongoing professional development through allocated time and financial support (e.g., state and national school psychology organizations, conferences, other professional development opportunities)

Actions for Special Education Administrators, General Education Administrators, and Superintendents:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of the role and function of school psychologists
- Invite school psychologists to be stakeholders in strategic planning and school improvement activities
- Examine your district's ratio of school psychologists to students and adjust to better align with the national recommendation of 1:500-700
- Maintain current school psychologist positions and engage in strategic planning to increase the number of school psychologists. This could be accomplished by exploring internal funding sources, budget options, etc.
- Support school psychology internships through provision of internship stipends
- Support a comprehensive service delivery model as outlined by the North Carolina School Psychology Evaluation Instrument
- Support ongoing professional development through allocated time and financial support (e.g., state and national school psychology organizations, conferences, other professional development opportunities)

Actions for Local and State Boards of Education:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of the role and function of school psychologists
- Maintain current school psychologist positions and engage in strategic planning to increase the number of school psychologists. This could be accomplished by exploring internal funding sources, budget options, etc.
- Encourage and support districts to better align school psychologist to student ratio with the national recommendation of 1:500-700
- Support a comprehensive service delivery model as outlined by the North Carolina School Psychology Evaluation Instrument
- Provide an increase in salary for school psychologists in recognition of advanced training
- Collaborate with county commissioners to support the role of school psychologists

Actions for Legislators:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of the role and function of school psychologists
- Increase the salary of school psychologists in recognition of advanced training
- Recommend Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) Licensure and pay an additional supplement for school psychologists having this credential
- Draft state legislation that is more closely aligned with the nationally recommended ratio of 1:500-700
- Consider reimbursing school districts for line item funding to support full-time school psychology internships
- Consider providing stipends for field supervisors of graduate students involved in school psychology practicums/internships

Appendix A

Method of Distribution for Special Education Funds

Federal Funding through special education for school age children (6-21) is allocated to eligible agencies through a formula that includes each LEA's:

- December 1, 1998 child count;
- Current average daily membership (ADM) for public and nonpublic students; and
- Current count of children living in poverty.

Federal Funding through special education for preschool age children (3-5) is allocated to eligible agencies through a formula that includes each LEA's:

- December 1, 1996 child count;
- Total K-12 enrollment in public and private schools; and
- Current count of children living in poverty.

The LEA must comply with the requirements for providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, before funds are released to be used for purposes other than direct services to these students.

In accordance with a child's IEP, IDEA funds may be used for the costs of special education and related services and any supplementary aids and services provided in a regular class or in other education-related settings.

Program Report Codes (PRC) for Special Education Funds

Under the special education funding sources, the Uniform Chart of Accounts is used and includes a Program Report Code (PRC) which denotes the activities for which funds can be allocated.

Some examples of PRC Codes and their respective appropriations include:

PRC 032 (State Public School Funds) includes monies to be used specifically for students with disabilities.

PRC 029 (Behavioral Support Funds) are to be used for allowable activities specified by the program.

PRC 060 (IDEA 611 Funds) and PRC 049 (IDEA 619 Funds) are accessed via the IDEA 611 Grant Application and are to be used to fund those activities approved in the grant.

PRC 007 (Instructional Support), PRC 031 (Low Wealth), PRC 034 (Academically Gifted), and PRC 069 (At risk) are additional state funds that are available and could be used by LEAS to support School Psychologists.

Appendix A (continued)

Exceptional Children Division State and Federal Funds for Per Child Allocations for Children with Disabilities	
FUND	DESCRIPTION
State Aid (PRC 32) – state funds	Per child allocation is for children with disabilities school-aged 5 through 21 counted on the April 1 child count. Funds are limited to 12.5% of the local education agency’s average daily membership (ADM). The per child allocation will differ for those LEAs who are over the 12.5% cap.
IDEA, Part B – Preschool Disabled (PRC 49) – federal funds	Formula is based on December 1, 1996 child count (\$486.19 per child). 85% of the remaining funding is distributed based on the total K-12 enrollment in public and private schools and 15% is based on the number of children living in poverty (free and reduced lunch). (Application must be submitted electronically)
Out-of-District Placement Program (PRC 60) – federal funds	Out-of-district funds are for students with disabilities placed in programs outside of their LEA for special education and related services. The out-of-district placement program will pay up to 50% of placement costs. This includes residential and extended school year services. (Application process)
Children with Disabilities – Risk Pool (PRC 114) federal funds	IDEA 2004 has a provision which gives states the opportunity to reserve a percentage of the states “set-aside” funds for implementing a neutral cost sharing and reimbursement program of high need, low incidence, catastrophic, and/or extraordinary aid to LEAs/charter schools providing special education and related services to “high need” students. (Application process)
Targeted Assistance – (PRC 118) federal Funds	Funds for targeted areas of need including establishment and coordination of behavioral support sites, Positive Behavior Support Coordinators, Positive Behavior Support Training, Autism Problem-Solving Support Teams, Related Service Retention and Content Literacy will be placed in this program reporting code.
Targeted Assistance Preschool – (PRC 119) federal funds	Funds for targeted areas of need for preschool initiatives, including; assessment teams, early literacy sites, outdoor learning environments, and Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning (CSEFEL) sites.
Special Education State Improvement Grant – (PRC 82) federal funds	These funds are allocated to LEAs and charter schools for the development of reading/writing and/or math centers and sites.
Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) – (PRC 70) federal funds	IDEA regulations mandate 15% of IDEA 611 and 619 funds are set-aside for any LEA with significant disproportionality (SD) based on race or ethnicity with respect to the identification of children as children with disabilities, the identification of children in specific disability categories, the placement of children with disabilities in particular educational settings or the taking of disciplinary actions. These funds are for non-identified students in K-12 who need academic and/or behavioral supports to succeed in the general education environment. LEAs without significant disproportionality may use up to 15% of their IDEA 611 and 619 funds for CEIS (permissive use).
State Aid Preschool (PRC 32) – state Funds	Each local education agency receives a base amount equal to the average salary of a classroom teacher plus benefits and the remainder is distributed based on the April 1 child count of 3, 4, and pre-K5 children with disabilities.
Average Daily Membership – state Funds	This ADM is established for use in determining the per child allocation for group homes and out-of-district placements. This is not the ADM for children with disabilities.
Developmental Day Center Program (PRC 63) – state funds	Developmental day funds are for students with disabilities served in a certified developmental day center. (Application Process)
Community Residential Center Program (PRC 63) – state funds	Community residential funds are for students with disabilities served in a certified community residential center. (Application process)
Group Home Program –state(PRC 32 LEAs)(PRC 36 charter schools) –and federal (PRC 60) funds	Group home funds are available to LEAs and charter schools for students with disabilities placed in group homes for residential services that were not counted on the December 1 or April 1 child count. Formula includes ADM, State Aid and Federal IDEA, Part B funds. (Application process)
Special State Reserve Program (PRC 63) – state funds (PRC 36 charter schools)	Special State Reserve funds are available to LEAs and charter schools for students with extraordinary needs who enter their system after available funds have been expended and budgets have been committed. (Application process)
Behavioral Support Grants (PRC 29) – state funds	These funds are for children with disabilities needing specific educational/behavioral support services. (Application process)
IDEA, Part B (PRC 60) – federal funds	Each LEA will receive 75% of their allocation for December 1, 1998. This establishes their base. The remaining funds will be distributed as follows: 85% will be allocated based upon the number of children who are enrolled in public and private elementary and secondary schools and 15% will be allocated based on the number children living in poverty (free and reduced lunch). (Application must be submitted electronically)

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