



What School Administrators Need to Know About School Psychology

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**Comprehensive
Service Delivery**



Introduction

Maximizing the impact of school psychological services benefit not only students, but also families, school staff, and the school community. Administrators with an understanding of the comprehensive skill set school psychologists bring to the role can purposefully collaborate with their school psychologist to design an impactful model of psychological service delivery for their local education agency (LEA). The purpose of this publication is to provide an overview of the practice model for school psychologists, and highlight several impactful practices for consideration to enhance school psychological service delivery.

School psychologists play a critical role in ensuring the success of students, from early intervention through high school graduation. Trained in the areas of assessment, consultation, and intervention, school psychologists provide a continuum of services to support all students, including students with complex needs. School psychologists' training and expertise in problem-solving, evidence-based practices, and systems-level change positions them as key assets at the classroom, school, district, and community levels. In a traditional model of service delivery, school psychologists are often viewed as professionals who provide assessment services as part of a multidisciplinary evaluation to determine a student's eligibility and need for special education services; however, their skill set is much more comprehensive.

School psychologists have expertise across myriad topics, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Assessment;
- Special education eligibility evaluation;
- Individualized Educational Program development;
- Data collection and analysis;

- Data-based decision making;
- Prevention and intervention planning, implementation, progress monitoring, and evaluation;
- Evidence-based instructional and behavioral practices;
- Consumer of and generating research;
- Program evaluation;
- School law/regulations and ethical practice;
- Interaction of diversity, development, and learning;
- Family-school partnerships;
- Academic and behavioral consultation;
- Small group and individual counseling;
- Social/emotional development and mental health;
- Trauma-informed practices;
- Suicide risk and threat assessment; and,
- Crisis prevention, response, and recovery.

These areas of expertise are couched within and across the tiers of Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS), "a standards-aligned, comprehensive school improvement framework for enhancing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes" (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], n.d.). Expanding the roles of Pennsylvania school psychologists to include comprehensive service delivery could lead to improvements in prevention and early identification, more efficient and targeted service delivery, improved school climate, and ultimately, enhanced student outcomes (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2016).

NASP Practice Model

The current practice model for the delivery of school psychological services promotes an integrated and comprehensive approach across ten domains (NASP, 2020). This model of comprehensive service delivery is also reflected in the Educator Effectiveness Observation & Practice: Framework for Nonteaching Professionals: School Psychologist used for school psychologists' annual evaluation of job performance in the state of Pennsylvania (PDE, 2021). Additionally, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 indicates provisions for related services provided by school psychologists that include consultation and direct intervention services consistent with a comprehensive service delivery model. Despite official policy from NASP, state performance evaluations, and federal law that promote the delivery of comprehensive school psychological services, many school psychologists are unable to realize these goals in their day-to-day professional activities. According to the 2020 NASP Professional Practices Survey, most school psychologists spend the majority of their time in activities related to the special education eligibility process (Farmer et al., 2021), consistent with the previous survey from 2019 (McNamara et al., 2019).

One significant barrier to fully realizing the NASP Practice Model is the national shortage of school psychologists, a key contributor to the high ratio of school psychologists to students. NASP recommends a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students (NASP, 2020). According to the 2020 NASP Membership Survey, however, the current national average ratio stands at one school psychologist per 1,046 students (Farmer et al., 2021). In Pennsylvania, the ratio is even higher than the national average, at 1:1,078 (School Psychology Board of the Pennsylvania Psychological Association, 2021). Importantly, increased ratios are associated with less engagement in mental and behavioral health services, crisis intervention and response, instructional consultation, and systems-level programming (i.e., safe & supportive school environments, social/emotional wellness, bullying prevention; Farmer et al., 2021). Pennsylvania is also experiencing shortages of certified school psychologists, with the central region of the state impacted the most (PDE, 2024). As a result, Pennsylvania is engaging in

statewide efforts through the Bureau of Special Education's Attract-Prepare-Retain efforts to attract new individuals to the field and retain the current school psychologist workforce.

Problem Solving & MTSS

The varying academic, social, behavioral, and emotional needs of all students can be supported by school psychologists through the implementation of an MTSS framework. An essential component of an effective MTSS is data-based decision-making at the district, school, grade, classroom, and individual student level. While Tier 1 involves instruction for the entire student population, Tier 1.5 provides classwide approaches for all students as a supplement to core instruction at Tier 1. Tier 2 provides more specialized approaches for students who are at risk based upon similar areas of need. Finally, Tier 3 supports provide students with highly individualized interventions (e.g., McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Kovaleski et al., 2023). This application of the problem-solving process at all three tiers requires professionals who are trained in a variety of assessment techniques and are knowledgeable about using assessment data for various purposes in an MTSS framework (e.g., screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic assessment, and program evaluation). School psychologists have training in unique assessment skills that are valuable to an MTSS framework, including Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Curriculum-Based Assessment (CBA).

FBA is an evidence-based assessment process for understanding the variables that contribute to interfering behaviors (Cooper et al., 2020). FBAs have strong empirical support as an effective and efficient means of improving student functioning across a broad range of behaviors and student populations. The use of FBAs is also a critical component of MTSS frameworks implemented with fidelity (Algozzine et al., 2014). As such, schools interested in implementing an effective MTSS in schools need to make use of qualified personnel who can coordinate FBAs. With expertise in various assessment methods and their functions, school psychologists are an excellent resource when it comes to conducting an FBA (NASP, 2020). As educators and school leadership collaborate to develop an effective behavioral intervention plan,



school psychologists can assist greatly in the process of collecting and guiding the interpretation of data as all members of a student's success team identify and intervene upon challenging behaviors and the environmental events that occur before and after them (Center on PBIS, 2022).

Similarly, CBA refers to an assessment framework that is typically viewed as an alternative to traditional, norm-referenced assessment. CBA posits that skills assessed should be the same as those taught in classrooms and measured in the same manner in which they are expected to be performed in the classroom. CBA also emphasizes assessment for the purpose of developing and monitoring interventions and makes use of measures that have a wide range of uses including screening, goal setting, progress monitoring, program evaluation, and special education eligibility (Kovaleski et al., 2023; Marcotte & McKenzie, 2023; Witmer, 2023). Research supports the use of CBA as part of an MTSS framework and suggests that the use of CBA for diagnostic and instructional matching purposes

results in better outcomes over screening and progress monitoring alone (Burns, 2002; Burns et al., 2010; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2005). Many school psychologists have training in CBA. Combined with other assessment skills, school psychologists are often untapped resources to support the various assessment activities that a well-functioning MTSS framework requires.

As a result of their comprehensive training, school psychologists enter the field with a wealth of knowledge about human development, learning, and cognition. With this knowledge, school psychologists also have the potential to collaborate with leaders and educators in planning and implementing a research-based curriculum that is developmentally appropriate for the students. In combining their expertise in research and the foundations of psychology, as well as in interventions and instructional support, school psychologists have the potential to shape the curriculum that impacts all students, beginning at the universal level, all the way through students receiving Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 supports (NASP, 2020).



Consultation

In an era of significant school psychologist shortages coupled with increased academic and mental health needs, consultation is an effective and efficient way to support all students and staff. Moreover, this method of psychological service delivery also happens to be the most preferred and fulfilling activity of school psychologists (e.g., Gutkin & Curtis, 2009; Kratochwill et al., 2002). During the consultation process, all vested partners bring with them unique ideas and perspectives. The school psychologist typically acts as the consultant or facilitator, as they work to support the consultee, who are typically families, teachers, or other school personnel. School psychologists help teams identify the challenges a student or client faces in the classroom, while also playing an instrumental role in implementing interventions and monitoring progress. Involvement of school psychologists in systems level consultation is also on the rise, as more schools harness their expertise in problem solving and data-based decision making (Farmer et al., 2021).

The extant literature base lends robust support for instructional consultation, a model that is rooted in the notion that when effective instruction is

provided, academic and behavioral outcomes are likely to improve. Through this consultation process embedded within Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, not only student, but also staff performance is supported, as the consultant and educator work collaboratively to determine ways in which classroom instruction can be altered or improved to better support student needs (Kaiser & Newman, 2023). Through the process of instructional consultation, the school psychologist can guide educators as they begin to identify the instructional variables that are barriers to student learning and achievement. Through the collaborative process, they can develop prevention and intervention strategies to support improvements in academic achievement at the whole-class, small group, or individual level (Kratochwill et al., 2002). By emphasizing growth in the knowledge and skills of teachers and staff, school psychologists can form positive relationships with educators as they work together to identify and address these issues through the modification of classroom instruction (Kaiser & Newman, 2023).

Another consultation model that is frequently used in schools is behavioral consultation. This empirically validated model encompasses an extensive amount of knowledge and skills from the field of

psychology, including human learning and behavior, as well as social learning theory. Through collaborative work, the school psychologist and educator operationally define and measure student behaviors that either support or interfere with learning. They then functionally assess and analyze the factors that precede and follow the operationally defined behavior. Through this problem-solving process, they develop and implement evidence-based behavioral interventions and determine who implements these strategies, when and where the interventions will take place, and determine when changes in a student's behavior can be expected to occur. As a result, student behavior is likely to improve, especially as consultation team members monitor student progress during intervention and make modifications as needed (Hughes et al., 2014).

Similar to the widely used behavioral consultation model, the conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC) model emphasizes the importance of not only the involvement of educators, but also of a child's primary caregivers. This consultation model is rooted in a wealth of research that supports the role of caregivers not only in child and adolescent development, but also in their academic achievement. Prior research has suggested that there are connections between strong family-school partnerships and increased school attendance, decreased disciplinary concerns, and a more positive attitude toward school (Christenson & Christenson, 1998). With the key ecological assumption that a child's behavior may appear differently across contexts, a CBC approach can be highly effective in understanding and operationalizing behavior in the school, home, and community. The CBC process begins with the school psychologist working simultaneously with the child's teacher and primary caregivers, with an emphasis on identifying barriers to learning such as the intensity, frequency, and duration of a problem behavior taking place in the school and/or in the home. Throughout this process, each vested partner works together with the school psychologist, as they determine and implement effective interventions in each environment. In particular, CBC is helpful in ensuring continuity and consistency in the services delivered and interventions implemented, as well as in maintaining adequate treatment across multiple contexts (Sheridan et al., 2005). In this way, school psychologists are in an excellent position to utilize

CBC as a means to help bridge the gap between the school and home environment (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008).

School-Based Mental Health Supports

Mental and behavioral health are critical influences on student success. School psychologists are well-prepared to help establish safe and supportive school environments that promote positive behavior and mental health for all students (NASP, 2020). One major component of supporting safe learning environments is ensuring that a crisis preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery model is in place (Nickerson, 2021). School psychologists can use their knowledge of evidence-based practices to help develop a physically and psychologically safe school environment, prevent violence, and utilize trauma-informed practices (NASP, 2020, 2021a).

School psychologists can incorporate critical skills as they work to ensure a safe school environment, such as collecting and analyzing data on their school's safety and overall climate. Developing and implementing positive behavior and discipline practices, another important role of the school psychologist, is essential to promoting a safe, positive school climate. Additionally, the highly collaborative nature of the school psychologist's work makes them a valuable member of a school's crisis prevention and preparedness team, often composed of school administrators, families, and outside agencies. These crisis prevention and preparedness teams implement and evaluate day-to-day practices to prevent crises and quickly respond to emergencies at the building, district, or community-wide level (NASP, 2021b).

School psychologists are also well-equipped to aid all students in achieving greater success not only in terms of their academic achievement, but also in other aspects of their lives. A growing body of research supports this notion, as students who receive instruction in social and emotional learning and have access to mental health supports throughout their education demonstrate increases in learning and engagement in the classroom, report feeling a greater sense of connectedness to the

school community, and perceive a more positive school climate. School psychologists possess a comprehensive understanding of the biological, social, and cultural influences on learning, development, and cognition and they are in an excellent position to implement evidence-based strategies that support students' development of resilience and positive mental and behavioral health (NASP, 2021a).

PaTTAN Supports for the Field

The School Psychology initiative at PaTTAN supports the comprehensive service delivery model for school psychological services. Comprehensive and

preventative psychological services in schools result in increased student achievement and social-emotional competencies. School psychologists come from diverse training programs that may emphasize different aspects of a comprehensive service delivery model. To support school psychologists and the districts and communities they serve, the PaTTAN School Psychology Initiative provides training and technical assistance opportunities that align with this comprehensive school psychological practice model.

For more information about the School Psychology initiative at PaTTAN, visit <https://www.pattan.net/Evidence-Based-Practices/School-Psychology>.



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