



Legislative Talking Points

Setting the Stage for Advocacy: *The Basics*

- Thank the legislative assistant/Delegate/Senator for taking the time to visit with you.
- Introduce yourself and each person in your group and provide a **brief** statement about yourself and your experience in school psychology.
- Offer some basic information about role of school psychologists and the importance of our work in supporting student behavior and learning. Feel free to share relevant anecdotal comments throughout the meeting.
- Focus on the comprehensive role of a school psychologist including, prevention, intervention, and consultation services with school staff and families.
- Emphasize the need for *all* school-employed mental health professionals in schools: school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. The needs of students and families are best met when we work collaboratively together.
- Don't worry if you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to. Do not give false information, rather let them know you will follow up with them.

Key Talking Points:

School psychologists play a critical role in creating safe and supportive learning environments that promote student success. Schools must address the academic needs of students, but they must also provide support for the behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health needs of all students. Unfortunately, non-academic learning and mental health supports are given marginal attention and too often, students struggle in meeting their academic potential, or fail to complete school due to the lack of access to these critical services. (See Specific Talking Points)

Broad Policy Goal:

Improve Access to School Based Mental Health Services and School Employed Mental Health Professionals. Comprehensive and coordinated learning and mental health supports directly contribute to more positive student outcomes and increased academic achievement. School employed mental health professionals, such as school psychologists, have unique training that allows them to deliver these services within the context of learning, and in support of the mission of schools. Policies, as well as funding, that improve student access to these professionals and services can help ensure that all students needs are identified and met.

Ways to address this policy issue:

- 1) Provide sufficient student support services and access to qualified school employed mental health to meet the needs of students and to promote healthy learning and development by coordinating services across a continuum of care that integrates schools, families, and community providers.
- 2) Encourage schools and districts to work toward the NASP recommended ratio of 500-700 school psychologists to 1 student.
- 3) Encourage policies that establish programs fostering supportive relationships between students in transition and caring adults (e.g., mentoring, educational liaisons, educational advocates, specific program coordinators).
- 4) Provide state leadership for addressing barriers to learning and advancing specialized instructional and student support services.

CLOSING:

1. Ask if the legislative assistant/elected official has any questions.
2. Ask what their general perception of these proposals and requests are and if they think that their boss can support these issues.
3. Offer to provide future input if needed. (Follow up as requested.)
4. Thank them for their time and attention to your issues.



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Specific Talking Points

Facts about School Psychologists in WV

- The National Association of School Psychologists recommends one school psychologist for every 1,000 students. The current US average is 1:1,621. West Virginia falls very behind with a ratio of 1:2,300
<http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq336numsp.aspx>
<http://wveis.k12.wv.us/ses/StatSum/Professional.cfm>

What School Psychologists do to help schools:

- School psychologists work with administrators to design, implement, and garner support for comprehensive school mental health programming^{9,10}, and school mental health programs have been shown to improve educational outcomes by **decreasing absences**, **decreasing discipline referrals**, and **increasing test scores** (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).
- School psychologists work with students and their families to support students' social, emotional, and behavioral health^{11,12}, and research has shown that **students who receive this type of support achieve better academically in school** (Fleming et al., 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).
- School psychologists promote development of children's communication and social skills, problem solving, anger management, self-regulation, self-determination, and optimism^{13,14}, and research has shown that children's developmental competence is integral to their academic competence (Masten et al., 2005).
- School psychologists work with parents to **encourage effective parenting and discipline strategies**^{15,16}, and there is substantial research evidence for the effectiveness of interventions designed **to prevent the development of aggressive and antisocial behavior and related problems** (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009).
- School psychologists work with teachers to motivate all students to engage in learning^{1,2}, and interventions that foster students' engagement in school have been shown to **reduce high school dropout** (Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998) and **improve academic performance** (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004).
- School psychologists work with students and their families as part of a multidisciplinary team to **evaluate eligibility for special education services and to design interventions**^{3,4}, and research has revealed that the strategies they employ produce substantial positive impact on student outcomes (Forness, 2001).
- School psychologists work with teachers to design and implement academic and behavioral interventions^{5,6}, and interventions using positive behavior supports have been shown to **improve academic performance and decrease behavior problems** (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002).
- School psychologists **provide instructional consultation for other educators on strategies and interventions for remedying barriers to learning**^{7,8}, and evidence has shown that supporting teacher-reflective activities enables their teaching skills to grow and, subsequently, to improve student outcomes (Rosenfield, Silva, & Gravois, 2008)
- School psychologists work with teachers and administrators to **create classroom environments and school climates that are conducive to learning**^{17,18}, and research has shown that improving school climate is associated with increases in student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics, both in low- and high-performing schools (Hanson, Austin, & Lee-Bayha, 2004; Spier, Cai, & Osher, 2007; Spier, Cai, Osher, & Kendziora, 2007).
- School psychologists work with administrators to **promote school policies and practices that ensure the safety of all students by reducing school violence, bullying, and harassment**^{19,20}, and services provided by school psychologists



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support virtually every area of the lives of students, including school safety (Bear & Minke, 2006; Brock, Lazarus, & Jimerson, 2002).

- School psychologists work with administrators to **respond to crises by providing leadership, direct services, and coordination with needed community services**^{21,22}, and research has revealed that school staff rate the crisis intervention services provided by school psychologists as very important (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2007).
- School psychologists **work with students and their families to enhance home–school collaboration**^{23,24}, and research has demonstrated the power of family–school partnerships to positively impact children’s school success (Christenson, 2004) and their general well-being into adulthood (Reynolds et al., 2007).
- School psychologists **work with students and their families to identify and address learning and behavior problems that interfere with school success**^{25,26}, and school-based behavioral consultation has been shown to yield positive results such as remediating academic and behavior problems for children and reducing referrals for psychoeducational assessments (MacLeod, Jones, Somer, & Havey, 2001).
- School psychologists **participate in early intervention programs designed to provide parents with knowledge of child development and how to keep children healthy and safe**^{27,28}, and early intervention programs targeting at-risk students have been shown to reduce special education referrals and placement, suspension, grade retention, and disciplinary referrals (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).
- School psychologists work to **enhance understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures** and backgrounds and to promote culturally competent practice^{29,30}, and there is considerable evidence that failing to address cultural and linguistic differences can negatively impact assessment activities and students’ performance on achievement tests (Ortiz, 2008).
- School psychologists **work with administrators to collect and analyze data related to school improvement, student outcomes, and accountability requirements**^{31,32}, thus helping schools meet legal requirements established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.
- School psychologists **work with teachers to design and implement student progress monitoring systems**^{33,34}, and school staff rate as very important the assessment, consultation, counseling, and behavior management services provided by school psychologists (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2007).
- School psychologists work with teachers and administrators to collect and analyze data on risk and protective factors related to student outcomes^{35,36}, and there is evidence that addressing these factors in schools **promotes children’s well-being and resilience** (Baker, 2008).

School Psychologist and School Guidance Counselors

*****Be prepared to talk about the differences between School Counselors and Schools Psychologists! The most common questions and misunderstandings come from legislators believing that school psychologist only do special education evaluations and that school counselors are the ones who provide counseling/therapy services.** We must work with school counselors and support what they do. However, it is very important for legislators to understand that school counselors do not see themselves as mental health service providers. WV school counselors did not want to be part of Medicaid expansion and therefore are not eligible Medicaid service provider in WV. The national association of school counselors position paper on mental health confirms this notion indicating that school guidance counselors seek to provide lower level intervention and act a referral source for student that need more intensive mental health services. School Counselors are often the first to identify the needs for mental health services. They need school psychologist to refer student to when more intensive services are needed. We must work together! One cannot provide the appropriate mental health services without the other!

* If you need more information about this specific topic please contact Bryan Wilson or Karen Cummings.



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