

Lesson n 05: Making Optimal Use of School Psychological Services

Although school psychology is not currently listed as a shortage area in Connecticut, longstanding shortages of school psychologists nationally has continued to threaten students' access to school psychological services. 15 16 School district leaders should think strategically on how best to maximize the use of this valuable resource. While school psychologists will continue to fulfill the critical need for evaluation, greater emphasis should be placed on prevention, consultation, collaboration, and indirect services to proactively support students in an effort to prevent students from failing and obviate the need for more costly, more intrusive interventions.

For a greater understanding of the comprehensive nature of school psychological services, school district leaders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the domains of practice outlined within this document. School district leaders and school psychologists are encouraged to work together to pilot innovative deployment of school psychologists in their districts. To ensure that resources are being used effectively and efficiently, school district leaders can make use of school psychologists' skills in databased decision-making and program evaluation, and their knowledge of empirically supported interventions. Examples of strategies to optimize use of school psychological services include but are not limited to:

- Providing support for clerical or paperwork activities that do not require professional skills or oversight.
- Using timesaving technology (e.g., laptop computers, test-scoring software).

- Enabling school psychologists to expand, and make full use of, expertise in specialized areas (e.g., neuropsychology, positive behavioral supports, and autism).
- Reviewing district requirements and practices that yield relatively little value per time invested.
- Prioritizing staff assignments strategically to support and protect mandated services and/or large impact projects and activities.

Staffing Ratios

The ratio of School Psychologist to Students should be informed by consideration of both workload and caseload. NASP recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist to 500-700 students (1:500-700) for a comprehensive service delivery model depending upon the level of need within the student population. 1

Caseload vs. Workload

Unlike the regular education program in which staffing needs are predicated on projected student enrollment, class size limits, and/or budgetary constraints, assigning school psychologists is based not only on the number of children attending a school or program, but also on the intensity and duration of the individual services prescribed for those students needing special education and related services. Federal law does not specify requirements for caseload with regard to students requiring special education and related services. Likewise, state statute does not prescribe staffing ratios but specifies only that “the number and age range of children requiring special education and related services assigned to a class shall be such that the specifications of each child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be met.” 2

When making decisions regarding the work of the school psychologist, it is important to distinguish between caseload and workload (Feinberg, Nuijens, & Canter, 2005). Caseload refers to the number of students who are provided direct services. School psychologists typically define their caseload by the number of students assigned to them and/or the number of evaluations they complete in an academic year. This is different from the ratio of enrolled students per school psychologist, which could be viewed as a school psychologist's potential caseload. Workload, on the other hand, includes all activities required and performed by the school psychologist. This includes the caseload (e.g., number of individual students served) as well as all other activities that are necessary and important to support students' educational programs, implement best practices for school psychological services, ensure compliance with educational mandates, and fulfill the responsibilities that are associated with working in a school setting.

Factors that affect workload include IEP mandates, service to nondisabled students who need support from the school psychologist, state and local regulations, state certification requirements, student factors, unfunded mandates, and state and local budgets. 19 In addition, many schoolpsychologists are actively involved with individual and group counseling, staff and parent consultation, in-service training and development, community liaison work, and a host of other activities that help serve the needs of the identified "client," which can be the student, the school or the school district.

REFERENCES:

1. Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies (RCSA) Section 10-76 d-5
2. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, school psychologists continue to report that a substantial percentage of their time is dedicated to special education activities at an average of 47% for evaluations and 11% towards participation in a Planning and Placement Team (PPT).
3. https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Talent_Office/Talent-Office-home-page/Shortage-Areas
4. <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-psychology/shortages-in-schoolpsychology-resource-guide>
5. <https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/nasp-practice-model-implementationguide/section-i-nasp-practice-model-overview/nasp-practice-model-organizational-principles>