



# Position Statement

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## NECESSARY USE OF THE TITLE “SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST”

The purpose of this position paper is (a) to summarize existing National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) policy, state and federal mandates, and approved federal graduate education standards as it applies to the necessary use of the title “school psychologist” by specialist- and doctoral-level school psychologists; and (b) to summarize the critical need for continued use of the title “school psychologist” among specialist- and doctoral-level school psychologists as they meet the daily behavioral, academic, and social–emotional needs of the students they support.

NASP advocates that all school psychologists practicing in schools under a credential awarded by their state education agencies or other entities that have credentialing authority, whether trained at the doctoral or specialist levels<sup>1</sup>, use the established title “school psychologist” as their professional designation. Specialist-level graduate education consists of 3 years of full-time graduate study in a recognized school psychology program, the accrual of 60 or more graduate credits, and the completion of a minimum of 1 academic year of supervised internship experience (NASP Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists; NASP, 2010a). As highly qualified professionals with advanced graduate education at the specialist or doctoral level, school psychologists deliver a continuum of needed research-based academic and school mental health services to children, families, schools, and community agencies. After receiving advanced graduate education through recognized school psychology programs, school psychologists are typically credentialed through state departments of education, with more than 90% of states explicitly credentialing school psychologists by title (NASP, 2010b). The historical, legal (federal and state), and publicly accepted understanding of what school psychologists, at the specialist and doctoral levels, do in everyday practice is inextricably tied to the use of the title “school psychologist.”

## HISTORICAL USE OF THE TITLE “SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST”

- The earliest use of the term, “school psychologist” dates back to the late 19th Century (Munsterburg, 1898). The term’s use as an official practitioner’s title dates to the professional work of Dr. Arnold Gesell, a psychologist and pediatrician in Connecticut, who used the professional title “school psychologist” in his professional work during the years 1915–1919 (Fagan, 1987).

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<sup>1</sup> “Specialist-level” graduate preparation for a school psychologist is defined as 60 graduate semester hours or the equivalent in school psychology, resulting in institutional documentation of various types. The following are examples of specialist-level documentation: 60+ Master’s degree; Master’s degree plus Certificate of Advanced Study totaling 60 hours (e.g., CAS, CAGS); or an Educational Specialist (EdS) degree or Psychology Specialist (PsyS) degree.

- The title “school psychologist” gained greater recognition with the founding of a graduate education program in the School of Education at New York University in 1929, which included the BS, AM, and PhD degrees in school psychology.
- Although practitioners of school psychology provided school psychological services under several different titles, and increasingly as full-time school district employees, the concept and title of “school psychologist” was clearly discernible by the late 1930s.
- State recognition of the title “school psychologist” was augmented by the certification standards adopted in New York and Pennsylvania during the mid-1930s (Cornell, 1941).
- National recognition of the title was conferred by the reorganized American Psychological Association (APA) that established the first national organization with this title, the Division of School Psychologists (Division 16) in 1945.
- School psychologists (at the doctoral and specialist levels) have long been specifically designated as qualified users of psychological and educational assessments. For example, the 1949 Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) manual (Wechsler, 1949) identified school psychologists as qualified users of the instrument at a time when very few practitioners held doctoral degrees.
- The Thayer Conference, convened in 1954 to clarify the role, function, and credentialing of school psychologists, gave further recognition to the title (Cutts, 1955; Fagan, 2003). Although recommending that the title “school psychologist” be reserved for those credentialed at the doctoral level, the Thayer recommendations were not widely adopted. More and more states credentialed school psychologists at the specialist level in the decades following the conference.
- NASP was founded in 1969 to promote the work of school psychologists as they promote educational and psychological healthy environments for all children and students. At the time of NASP’s founding, there were numerous titles, but that of school psychologist was increasingly prominent (Farling & Hoedt, 1971). By the late 1970s, NASP and affiliated state associations had brought the title “school psychologist,” at both the doctoral and specialist levels, to national prominence and respect.
- NASP developed and approved *Guidelines for Training Programs in School Psychology* in 1972, *Principles for Professional Ethics* in 1974, and *Credentialing Standards and Practice Guidelines* in 1978. NASP revised these professional standards in 1984, 1994, and 2000. NASP’s current standards, approved in March 2010, include the *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services* (NASP, 2010c), *Principles for Professional Ethics* (NASP, 2010d), *Standards for the Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* (NASP, 2010a), and *Standards for the Credentialing of School Psychologists* (NASP, 2010b).
- NASP developed the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSPP) credential in 1989 to recognize school psychologists who meet national standards for professional preparation in school psychology (Batsche & Curtis, 2003). The creation of the NCSPP represented a significant milestone for school psychology as a field and for NASP as a professional association. As of 2010, 31 states recognize the NCSPP as one alternative to demonstrate eligibility for the state credential in school psychology. As of March 2010, 11,728 school psychologists held the NCSPP.

## **FEDERAL AND STATE USE OF THE TITLE “SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST”**

- The most recently reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) mandates the use of scientifically based instruction for all students. The advanced training of school psychologists at both the specialist and doctoral levels includes skills and a

specialized knowledge base consistent with the implementation and evaluation of scientifically based practices.

- IDEA (2004) Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) specifically uses the title “school psychologist” in Section 300. 308(b) when describing the professional designation of individuals who are allowed to conduct evaluations as, “At least one person qualified to conduct individual diagnostic examinations of children, such as a school psychologist, speech–language pathologist, or remedial reading teacher.”
- The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) frequently uses the title “school psychologist” throughout the Act. For example, school districts can document needs for school funding related to expanded counseling services by reporting student to school psychologist ratios, defined as adequate when there is 1 school psychologist for every 1000 students (NCLB, 2001, Title V, Part D, subpart 2).
- NCLB specifically lists school psychologists as school-based mental health service providers who are credentialed through a state agency, noting specifically that “school-based mental health service provider includes a state licensed or state certified school counselor, school psychologist...” (NCLB, 2001, subpart 4, Section 4151). Additionally, school psychologists are included in the NCLB definition of pupil service personnel.
- When defining the term “school psychologist,” language in the NCLB describes the graduate training of such professionals as completion of 60 credit hours of graduate training, and an appropriate practicum and internship, consistent with the advanced graduate education at the specialist level recommended by NASP.
- The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), authorized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit schools, colleges, and departments of education who meet rigorous national standards, has adopted the NASP *Standards for Training and Field Placement Programs in School Psychology* (NASP, 2000) as its national graduate education accreditation standards. As such, NCATE specifically endorses the graduate education of school psychologists at the specialist level (e.g., 60 graduate semester hours, academic year internship).
- The U.S. Department of Labor (2009), in its most recent publication on occupational outlook, describes school psychologists by title as “collaborating with teachers, parents, and school personnel to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students.” Additionally, the specialist degree, consistent with NASP’s (2010a) description as 3 full years of graduate study, a minimum of 60 graduate credits in psychology and education, and 1 year full-time internship, is described as what is required in most states for one to work as a school psychologist. Additionally, the job outlook for psychologists in the next several years is predicted to be among the best for school psychologists trained at either the doctoral or specialist levels.
- The Social Security Administration specifically designates school psychologists by title as “acceptable medical sources” whose opinions can be considered when making disability claims (Federal Register, 2006, 20 CFR 404.1502).
- The most current data available indicate that there are approximately 250 graduate education programs which offer degrees in school psychology across the United States (Miller, 2008). These programs specifically prepare school psychologists and can be identified as distinct from graduate education programs in other specialties of professional psychology, such as clinical or counseling psychology practice.

## **PUBLIC USE OF THE TITLE “SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST”**

- Further evidence for the strong job outlook and critical functions played by school psychologists can be found in widely disseminated national news reports about top future careers. For example, in the most recent *U.S. News and World Report* summary of occupational outlooks, school psychologists are described as key professionals to helping students stay in school and achieve long-term success (*U.S. News and World Report*, 2009). While the publication predicts a promising outlook for all applied psychology disciplines, the growth area is particularly anticipated in schools, where most school psychologists are employed.
- Eleven professional groups, including the National Educational Association (NEA) and the National Alliance for Pupil Service Organization (NAPSO), have adopted formal positions recognizing the significant work that school psychologists do in meeting the learning and mental health needs of all children and students, and continue to advocate for advanced graduate education at the specialist level (NASP, 2010a).

## **ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST**

NASP supports the critical role that school psychologists have in meeting the learning and mental health needs of all children and students. School psychologists need to represent themselves under the title “school psychologist” in order to accurately represent their credentials to the public and to meet their varied responsibilities, in the following ways:

- Supporting schools and related agencies to comply with federal, state, and local mandates in serving all children and students in inclusive environments to the maximum degree possible
- Facilitating the delivery of scientifically based practices to meet the myriad of learning, behavior, and mental health needs experienced by an increasingly diverse population of students and families
- Working in a collegial fashion with other mental health service personnel (school social workers, school counselors, and other school psychologists) to assure that all students receive an appropriate education, regardless of race, culture, language and background, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or educational needs (NASP, 2009b)
- Serving as leaders in providing consultation, assessment, and intervention along a multitiered continuum, ranging from application of such supports on a prevention-oriented, population-level basis to delivery of more intensive supports on a small group or individual basis (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005)
- Drawing from a knowledge base in both psychology and education, school psychologists are in a unique position to promote educationally and psychologically healthy environments for all children and students (NASP, 2010c). It is through the unique title and role of school psychologists in schools that an optimal learning environment can be realized for all children and students.

## **SUMMARY**

NASP supports the significant work that school psychologists do to meet the many learning and mental health needs of students in U.S. schools. School psychologists, with their highly specialized advanced graduate training, are better able to serve students, schools, and families *because* they use the title “school psychologist” as they work to ensure an appropriate educational experience for all

students. Over the last 100 years, a clear historical, legal, and larger public precedent has been established for the use of the title “school psychologist,” resulting in clearly documented public good. The use of the title “school psychologist” currently supports the daily work of practicing school psychologists, whose numbers are minimally estimated at more than 35,000 (Charvat, 2008). The continued use of the title “school psychologist” will also facilitate the work of future practitioners, who will fill current and expected future shortages in the field. NASP continues to advocate for the outstanding work that school psychologists do, and use of the title “school psychologist” is essential in the continuation of such work. It is the position of NASP that doctoral- and specialist-level school psychologists who practice in schools under credentials awarded by their state education agencies (or other entities that have credentialing authority) should use the title “school psychologist” as their professional designation.

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