

THE CERTIFIED SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST:
PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND FUNCTIONS FOR CAREER PRACTICE
WHITE PAPER DEVELOPER:
TASK FORCE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE
CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

The Certified School Psychologist faces many critical challenges in the public schools. Changes in family structure impacting home-school relationships, increasing rates of drug and alcohol abuse by children and youth, school-based violence, rising rates of suicide, depression, and aggression by youth, growing complexities in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of psychological and educational disorders, and refinements in our understanding of school-based interventions reflect a growing list of issues facing practitioners. Fortunately, graduate education and training programs, as well as national and regional associations have worked proactively to continuously develop education and practice standards with the goal of enhancing services for children and families. However, because of the complexity of issues confronting the schools, many school educators, as well as citizens, remain uninformed about contemporary education and training standards, and about roles and responsibilities able to be conducted by school psychologist practitioners. The intention of this paper is provide clarification regarding the training, credentialing, and scope of practice of school psychologists and to promote the quality and excellence of school psychological services.

Education and Training in the State Of Connecticut

As a profession, school psychology programs may hold multiple programmatic approvals. In addition to State Department of Education approval, this includes NASP Approval

(National Association of School Psychologists – Doctoral and Specialist Level) and APA Approval (American Psychological Association - Doctoral Level). Given that the majority of the nation’s practitioners are trained at the specialist level, NASP Approval is especially noteworthy as it provides a benchmark for curricular training standards which allows practitioners from all other states to demonstrate comparable levels of training. Specialist level training is considered nationally as the appropriate entry level for professional practice as a school psychologist.

The State of Connecticut is fortunate to have a complementary group of four training programs authorized by the Connecticut State Department of Education to educate, train, and grant graduate degrees to students who complete a planned program in school psychology. Three of the programs are fully approved at the Specialist Level by the National Association of School Psychologists while one program offering the doctorate is accredited by the American Psychological Association. From north to south these programs include:

The University of Connecticut at Storrs
A.P.A. And N.A.S.P. Approved (Full)
Director: Dr. Thomas Kehle

The University of Hartford
N.A.S.P. Approved (Full)
Director: Dr. Tony D. Crespi

Southern Connecticut State University
N.A.S.P. Approved (Full)
Director: Dr. Joy Fopiano

Fairfield University
Director: Dr. Paula Gill Lopez

From a curricular perspective, the State of Connecticut requires a minimum of a master's degree and, in addition, completion of a planned program of study in school psychology. While national standards require a minimum of 60 graduate credits, Connecticut state credentialing standards require 45 graduate credits beyond the Masters degree, program endorsement of the school psychologist, as well as a full-time school-based internship, with concurrent clinical supervision.

Credentialing Of Practitioners

School Psychologists who work in the public schools are appropriately required to hold state certification from the Connecticut State Department of Education. This includes an Initial Certificate, Provisional Certificate, and ultimately the Professional Certificate. As credentialing of practitioners represents an important safeguard intended to protect the public, State Department of Education certification is a highly valued credential. Just as a practitioner of medicine requires appropriate education, training, and state credentials, so the school psychologist must hold State Department of Education credentialing as a Certified School Psychologist within the public schools.

While not required for professional practice in the public schools, many practitioners also are eligible for and seek additional credentials. Most notably at the Specialist level these can include the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (N.C.S.P.) credential offered by the National Association of School Psychologists. Other credentials are also available, such as the Licensed Professional Counselor (L.P.C.) and National Certified Counselor (N.C.C.). At the doctoral level, those with appropriate training and the requisite post-doctoral residency can become a Licensed Psychologist through the Connecticut Department of Health Services and, ultimately, board certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology. To reemphasize, all practitioners are required to hold credentialing as a Certified School Psychologist from the State Department of Education.

Roles and Responsibilities

While the practice and profession of school psychology continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of families and schools, the profession remains largely invested in three major functions: 1) Assessment and Diagnosis, 2) Counseling and Psychotherapy, and 3) Consultation and Collaboration. Fortunately, leaders in the profession of school psychology have authored numerous authoritative references in these areas to guide practitioners and ethical standards continue to ensure that practitioners work only within areas of competence and confidence.

Assessment and Diagnosis

The assessment/diagnosis area includes training in the use of psychological assessment tools and methodologies and requires that practitioners complete appropriate training in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of psychological and educational disorders. Just as a Speech and Language Pathologist is trained to assess, diagnose, and provide recommendations for stuttering, so the Certified School Psychologist may assess, diagnose, and offer recommendations for a wide array of psychological and educational disorders encountered in the schools. Most notably this can include, but is not necessarily limited to, learning disabilities, autistic disorders, learning and adjustment problems, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, and other emotional disorders often encountered in the schools.

Counseling and Psychotherapy

The counseling/psychotherapy area includes training in counseling and psychotherapeutic techniques applied to individuals, groups, classrooms, and families. School psychologists typically use their counseling and psychotherapeutic skills to address the full gamut of psychological and behavioral problems that are encountered in educational settings. Developmental counseling may be employed in a preventive way, or more focused counseling or psychotherapy may be used to address identified psychological, social, or behavioral problems.

Consultation and Collaboration

School psychologists often perform important collaboration, coordination, and consultation roles when clients are recipients of services from other providers. The consultation/collaboration area includes training in systemic assessment and intervention, collaboration with other professionals, and indirect models of service delivery. Prevention and crisis intervention activities are important facets of this area of practice.

Curiously, while the tripartite roles involving assessment and diagnosis, counseling and psychotherapy, and consultation and collaboration remain the traditional cornerstones of school psychologists' professional practice, questions arise from time to time regarding these roles. This is understandable as school psychologists work with diverse issues ranging from Birth-To-Three to Adolescent Psychology and Home-School Transitions, and for this reason not all practitioners are expert or confident in all areas. By necessity, schools must employ school psychologists with diverse competencies to meet the needs of a Pre-K through grade 12 population. At the same time, it is important to note that as a profession school psychologists are deemed eligible to work in all these areas.

Specifically, school psychologists in contemporary practice often work in eleven major domains outlined by the National Association of School Psychologists as reflected in the Connecticut State Department of Education *Guidelines for the Practice of School Psychology*:

- 1) Data-Based Decision Making And Accountability
- 2) Interpersonal Communication, Collaboration, And Consultation
- 3) Effective Instruction And Development of Cognitive/Academic Skills
- 4) Socialization And Development of Life Competencies
- 5) Student Diversity In Development And Learning
- 6) School Structure, Organization, And Climate
- 7) Prevention, Wellness Promotion, And Crisis Intervention
- 8) Home-School Community Collaboration
- 9) Research And Program Evaluation
- 10) Legal, Ethical Practice, And Professional Development
- 11) Information Technology

Contemporary school psychology is encountering multiple challenges. With specialized training in psychology and education, practitioners encounter a multitude of professional, legal, and ethical demands in their daily practice. It is clear that as society struggles with rising challenges, from adolescent pregnancy to innovations in the neuropsychology and diagnosis of learning disabilities and equally challenging educational and psychological disorders, the challenges facing the Certified School Psychologist will not diminish. As advances in assessment methodology continue to be made, for example, assessment expertise requires continuing education for both practitioners and stakeholders in the schools. The late Jack Bardon, Ph.D. characterized the challenge eloquently: "School psychology differs from other psychological specialties in that it brings psychological knowledge, skills, and techniques to bear on the problems presented by the school as a total, unique place in which people live and work and on the problems of the people living in the school." (Bardon And Bennett, 1974) At the same time, the reader can feel encouraged that the State of Connecticut has four training programs dedicated to training high quality practitioners, and a large cadre of practitioners striving daily to meet the needs of the children and families of the State of Connecticut.

Task Force Membership

Dr. Tony D. Crespi, Chair
The University of Hartford

Dr. Cherie Tyler Balkcom
President, Connecticut Association of School Psychologists

Dr. John E. Desrochers
Delegate, National Association of School Psychologists

Dr. Barbara A. Fischetti
Coordinator, Psychological Services, Westport Public Schools

Task Force membership represents practicing school psychologists, a university trainer, and state and national school psychology association representatives. Further, all hold credentialing as Certified School Psychologists, with additional credentials including Nationally Certified School Psychologist, Board Certified School Psychologist, Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Certified School Counselor, Certified Intermediate Administrator, and Registered Play Therapist. As such, the Task Force brings a diverse body of professional training and depth of experience to this white paper.