

School Psychologists' Involvement in Assessment

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) asserts that school psychologists are uniquely suited to promote best practices in assessment¹ and evaluation² and to determine, in collaboration with others, when assessment is warranted. School psychologists have completed in-depth and advanced preparation in conducting interviews, completing systematic observations, and selecting and administering tests and other assessment instruments supporting evidence-based³ and culturally sensitive⁴ practices. They are also well prepared to interpret and evaluate information obtained from assessments to guide educationally relevant decisions. Because of their expertise and training in these areas, school psychologists should (a) plan and conduct assessments of individuals, groups, and systems; (b) interpret assessment results; and (c) engage in data-driven decision-making as part of school-based services supporting students.

School psychologists are familiar with the central principles of measurement (Hixson, Christ, & Bruni, 2014; Reynolds & Livingston, 2014), the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014), and print and Web-based sources of test reviews (such as the Buros Institute for Mental Measurements, the National Center on Intensive Intervention, and the National Center on Response to Intervention; see Floyd & Norfolk, 2014), and they adhere to legal and ethical standards of practice (NASP, 2010a, 2010b). They employ a multimethod, multisource, and multisetting approach to assessment that is sensitive to contextual influences. They select and use the most appropriate assessment instruments and techniques, for the purpose for which they were designed, and for which there is supporting evidence. They engage in culturally competent practices to promote fair, reliable, and valid outcomes and modify assessments to address all aspects of diversity that might impact results (Carvalho, Dennison, & Estrella, 2014; Ortiz, 2014). School psychologists are aware of the limitations of assessment information, and they collect, interpret, report, and use assessment information in a manner that minimizes the potential for misunderstanding and misuse. They acknowledge conscious and unconscious biases and employ interpretive and decision-making processes designed to reduce bias and inequitable outcomes (NASP, 2010b). When reporting assessment results, they make relevant limitations explicit, especially as those limitations relate to the reliability and validity of decisions. Throughout their careers, they engage in professional development to ensure they understand the unique needs of the school leaders, teachers, specialists, parents, and students to whom they provide assessment and evaluation services.

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

School psychologists have very important roles to play during the provision of assessment and evaluation services in schools and related settings. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) references

school psychologists, along with other specialized instructional support personnel, as providing assessment and evaluation services as part of a comprehensive program for students with disabilities. Furthermore, the ESSA recommends the involvement of school psychologists to support students at risk of academic and behavior problems, address school climate and safety, and promote the mental and behavioral health of all students. Within a well-designed, multitiered system of supports, school psychologists should provide expertise in assessment that informs educational decisions at the universal, targeted, and intensive levels of support. The NASP Practice Model (2010a) and *NASP Practice Model Implementation Guide* (Skalski et al., 2015) outline an expanded role for school psychologists that emphasizes participation in and evaluation of prevention and early intervention programs to promote the development of all students across academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural domains.

NASP asserts that school psychologists should contribute to assessment and evaluation practices conducted within a multitiered system of supports. Decisions stemming from such practices can be classified as low stakes, moderate stakes, or high stakes. *Low-stakes* decisions are routine, frequent, and reversible, and they include the allocation of services and resources for brief periods of time (e.g., assigning students in small groups to complete a science project). They are often guided by information from informal assessment practices. *Moderate-stakes* decisions are less routine, less frequent, and less reversible than low-stakes decisions and include the allocation of early intervention and prevention services and resources for moderate periods of time (e.g., adding targeted small group support using the reciprocal teaching strategy on top of universal core instruction). *High-stakes* decisions are not routine, frequent, or reversible. They impact large groups and groups with special needs, and they include decisions associated with threat assessments to individuals (e.g., suicide threats) or groups (e.g., youth violence), diagnosis, and special education eligibility. High-stakes decisions must incorporate assessment practices with demonstrated technical adequacy to support the decisions being made.

School psychologists should play a substantial role in data-driven decision-making in each of the following areas (sequenced here from low stakes to high stakes).

- *Routine decisions.* School psychologists sometimes make routine decisions based on information from assessment practices that have unknown or modest technical adequacy. Such information is routinely recorded in grade books, teacher logs and notes, attendance records, office referrals, and notes between home and school. Information from these less formal assessment practices often guides the provision of services to students who are typically functioning and meeting grade level school expectations.
- *Screening, progress monitoring, and problem identification.* School psychologists contribute to the screening of all students to identify those who are not meeting grade-level expectations for academic achievement and mental and behavioral health. Effective screening occurs at least annually and often three to four times per year. School psychologists also collect information to ensure that all students make adequate progress in academic achievement and mental and behavioral health. Information from screening and progress monitoring is used to identify and define needs at the individual, group, and system levels.
- *School-wide decisions.* School psychologists collaborate with other school and district leaders in order to improve the universal academic and mental health supports that should be available to all students in the general education classroom. When large numbers of students are not achieving academically or behaviorally at the universal level of supports, school psychologists

collaborate purposefully with teachers, administrators, and other instructional specialists to change or adjust programming in order to improve outcomes and reduce the numbers of students needing additional supports.

- *Problem analysis for instruction and intervention planning.* School psychologists engage in assessment to identify the variables that contribute to and maintain educational problems at the individual, group, and system levels. This problem analysis occurs to isolate student needs and provide recommendations for instruction and intervention. Based on this assessment, decisions should optimize the match between student needs and the interventions that are provided.
- *Program evaluation and accountability.* School psychologists consult with teachers and school leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and intervention services. In doing so, they promote and review information related to implementation integrity. They also use summative, interim progress monitoring, and other forms of formative assessment information to evaluate outcomes and inform changes.
- *Eligibility and diagnostic decisions.* School psychologists collect, integrate, and synthesize information for each of the previously described decision areas to make eligibility and diagnostic decisions. These decisions substantially impact the lives of students and their families. As such, when students do not respond adequately to the targeted supports and interventions provided to them, school psychologists assist in the design, delivery, and monitoring of intensive supports.

SUMMARY

NASP recognizes that school psychologists have strong preparation and substantial expertise in both assessment and evaluation. Thus, school psychologists should play important roles in the provision of assessment and evaluation practices conducted within a multitiered system of supports in school and related settings. In particular, school psychologists should contribute to the collection and use of information to guide service delivery and improve outcomes for all students in need of individual, group, and school-wide services.

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ENDNOTES

¹*Assessment* is the collection of information, which might be in narrative or numeric form, for the purpose of making a decision. Assessment contributes to defining problems, identifying student assets and needs, determining current levels of the student functioning, estimating the rate of progress toward well-defined goals, and evaluating program outcomes.

²*Evaluation* is the interpretation of information collected during an assessment and its use to guide a decision.

³*Evidence-based practices* are those supported by substantial scientific evidence.

⁴*Culturally sensitive practices* in assessment and evaluation are those that confer equivalent advantage to individuals and groups across diverse communities, cultures, genders, races, ethnicities, (dis)abilities, lifestyles, and contexts.

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