

COVID-19 Policy Guidance for School Psychology Supervised Field Experiences for 2020–2021: Practica and Internship

The COVID-19 global pandemic and associated alterations in school schedules and educational methodologies continue to impact school psychology programs, and especially supervised school psychology field experiences. Many programs and field sites are considering ways in which school psychology students can attain needed competencies within the framework of altered school schedules and activities. The following guidance is offered regarding policies and procedures for practica and internship experiences for the 2020–2021 academic year, taking into account the NASP *Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* (NASP, 2010, 2020). Note that standards for 2010 and 2020 are used as a guide, and pertinent information from each is provided below. The rationale for providing both is because the 2010 standards are in effect for current NASP program reviews, whereas the 2020 standards will be in effect for NASP program reviews in spring 2022 and thereafter. Multiple programs are appropriately already in the process of adapting their programs based on the 2020 standards.

The policy below is separated into four sections: (a) information guiding practicum experiences and expectations; (b) information guiding internship experiences and expectations at both the specialist and doctoral levels; (c) resources that interns, field-supervisors, and university supervisors might access if the intern needs additional experiences; and (d) other considerations.

I. PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES

NASP, consistent for the 2010 and 2020 standards, allows flexibility for programs to establish the experiences candidates need to be successful. It is important to note that while NASP does require practicum experiences, NASP does not have an established minimum number of hours required for practica. Instead, programs have the flexibility to determine the number of required practicum hours. In this context, NASP continues to have the following requirements for practica:

- Courses are completed for academic credit.
- Courses are distinct from, precede, and prepare candidates for the school psychology internship.
- Courses include required activities and systematic development and evaluation of skills consistent with goals of the program, emphasize human diversity, and are completed in settings relevant to program objectives for development of candidate skills.
- Practica include direct oversight by the program to ensure appropriateness of the placement, activities, supervision, and collaboration with the placement sites and practicum supervisors.
- Practica include close supervision of candidates by program faculty and qualified practicum supervisors, including appropriate performance-based evaluation, to ensure that candidates are developing professional work characteristics and designated competencies.

The 2020 standards (NASP, 2020) are consistent with the 2010 standards regarding the requirements listed directly above. In addition, the 2020 standards provide more specificity as to what needs to be included in practica. At a minimum, practica must include opportunities to build:

- structured, specific activities that are consistent with the goals and objectives of the school psychology program and that foster the development of competence in advocating for understanding of human diversity and social justice;
- data-based decision making, including psychoeducational assessment with recommendations;
- the design, implementation, and evaluation of services that support cognitive and academic skills; and
- the design, implementation, and evaluation of services that support socialization, behavioral and mental health, and emotional well-being (e.g., counseling, behavior analysis and intervention, social-emotional learning).

Such services may be implemented at the individual, class-wide, or systems level. Few states have requirements specifically for practica, and those that do tend to mirror NASP standards.

Thus, school psychology programs, in collaboration with field sites, have considerable discretion to alter practicum requirements in response to changing conditions and needs. In making alterations, faculty should consider whether (a) practicum activities are consistent with program goals and NASP domains; (b) students are prepared to perform required activities under supervision; (c) students will receive appropriate supervision, especially for activities for which they might be less prepared (e.g., telehealth); and (d) whether the practica will prepare students for internships.

It is also important for the practicum evaluation to match practicum activities and associated knowledge and skills. Thus, programs that alter practicum requirements should give serious consideration to altering practicum evaluation forms. Communication and collaboration with field sites is especially critical during times when frequent changes might need to be made in response to changing conditions. Such collaboration is also important to long term relationships with field sites.

II. INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES: GENERAL GUIDELINES

The following information highlights core components of the NASP standards for both specialist and doctoral internships that remain in effect for the coming year.

- A minimum of 1 academic year for internship, completed on a full-time basis over 1 year or at least a half-time basis over 2 consecutive years.
- Completion in settings relevant to the program objectives for candidates' competencies and direct oversight by the program to ensure appropriateness of the placement, activities, and field supervision.
- A culminating experience in the program's course of study that is completed for academic credit or otherwise documented by the institution.
- A primary emphasis on providing breadth and quality of experiences, attainment of comprehensive school psychology competencies, and integration and application of the full range of domains of school psychology.
- Completion of activities and attainment of school psychology competencies consistent with the goals and objectives of the program, and delivery of professional school psychology services that result in direct, measurable, and positive effects on children, families, schools, and other consumers.
- Both formative and summative performance-based evaluations of interns that are completed by both program faculty and field-based supervisors, are systematic and comprehensive, and ensure that interns demonstrate professional work characteristics and attain designated competencies needed for effective school psychology practice.

- Provision of field supervision from a school psychologist holding the appropriate state school psychology credential for practice in the internship setting (or, if a portion of the internship is conducted in another setting, provision of field supervision from a psychologist holding the appropriate state psychology credential for practice in that internship setting).
- An average of at least 2 hours of field-based supervision per full-time week or the equivalent for part-time placements.
- Preponderance of field-based supervision provided on at least a weekly, individual, face-to-face basis, with structured mentoring and evaluation that focus on development of the intern's competencies.
 - Face-to-face for field-based supervision means being in the physical or electronic presence of the individuals involved in the supervisory relationship during either individual or group supervision. Face-to-face supervision may include secure video conferencing or real-time communication with both parties in each other's physical presence. Face-to-face supervision does not include mail, email, digital chat, or phone.

Specialist-Level Internships

The following applies for specialist-level internships for the 2020–2021 school year.

- Interns are expected to obtain a minimum 1,200 hours during their internship experience.
 - This is critical, because many states base their credentials on completing a 1,200 internship; it is risky to assume that states will waive this requirement.
 - Graduate programs may employ flexibility for the remainder of hours for interns that have difficulty acquiring 1,200 hours. This includes having discretion as to how many nonschool hours spent on such internship tasks—such as writing reports, making phone calls, researching and creating service delivery plans, planning inservices—may be counted toward the 1,200-hour minimum. See the Resources section for additional activities for programs to consider.
- Interns are expected to complete at least 600 hours of their internship in a school setting, which may include in-person or remote services.
 - A *school setting* is one in which the primary goal is the education of students of diverse backgrounds, characteristics, abilities, disabilities, and needs. Generally, a school setting includes students who are enrolled in grades pre-K–12 and has both general education and special education services. The school setting has available an internal or external pupil services unit that includes at least one state credentialed school psychologist and provides a full range of school psychology services.
- *Important note:* While NASP will provide flexibility, state licensing agencies maintain authority over setting requirements for state licenses and certifications to practice. NASP will work with state associations to support advocacy for similar flexibility, though programs are encouraged to do their best to ensure graduates meet state-level credentialing requirements.

Doctoral-Level Internships

In addition to the requirements noted above, the following requirements apply for doctoral-level internships for the 2020–2021 school year.

- A minimum of 1,500 clock hours for doctoral-level interns, including a minimum of 600 hours of the internship completed in a school setting.
 - Programs may allow up to half of the required 1,500 doctoral internship hours to be used from a prior, appropriately supervised specialist-level internship or equivalent experience in school

psychology if (a) the program determines that the specialist-level internship or equivalent experience meets program objectives and NASP standards for the school psychology internship, (b) candidates have met program objectives and criteria for school psychology specialist-level internship competencies, and (c) any field experiences considered equivalent to a formal specialist-level internship in school psychology are clearly articulated and systematically evaluated by the program.

- *Important note:* Program faculty and doctoral interns should also consider licensing requirements of other agencies when planning their internship experience. They may reference APPIC or APA requirements, CDSPP, etc.

III. RESOURCES

Although there is much variability in the United States regarding the educational format offered (e.g., online, hybrid, in person) and the arrangement might change throughout the school year, interns and their field and university supervisors should attempt to create as many opportunities to interact with pre-K–12 students and engage in school psychological services as possible, even if in a nontraditional capacity. For those in districts without such opportunities, we encourage graduate programs to identify other ways to ensure their interns develop the required knowledge and skills that align with program goals and objectives.

These activities may include book studies, structured utilization of various NASP resources (e.g., *Communiqué*, Online Learning Center sessions, NASP podcasts), case study reviews, school-wide prevention planning, district-wide data analysis and program evaluation, and more.

For suggestions regarding some specific, alternative activities and services, see report by Monahan et al. (2020) as well as other resources posted in the Training/Practicum/Internship [Resources section of the Trainers of School Psychologists \(TSP\) website](#). In addition, the “Expanded Description of Domains of School Psychology Graduate Education and Practice Within a Model of Comprehensive and Integrated Services by School Psychologists” in Appendix B of NASP’s *Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* (NASP, 2010) may give programs additional ideas for specific activities to consider.

IV. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Programs should plan for the possibility of conflicts if practicum and internship placements may require in-person, face-to-face services when the practicum or internship student has medical fears or concerns about providing such services. Again, coordination among the program, student, and field supervisor can help reduce and prevent such conflicts before they occur.

In challenging times and situations, resiliency and flexibility are important qualities for all school psychologists and school psychology students. Thus, it is useful for programs, field sites, and students to consider how they might better serve students, families, and school staff during challenging times. They can begin by considering ways to better serve the needs of low income and disenfranchised youth, who are disproportionately negatively impacted by not being in school full-time. Instead of focusing mostly on testing, as might be the case in some practicum and internship settings, programs and field sites should give serious thought to having the candidates work with teachers on alternative means of assessment most relevant to their current activities and functioning, and on providing mental health services to students and consultative services to parents and teachers. Such services are more relevant to the needs of students and will continue to be so after the pandemic ends. So, programs are encouraged to take advantage of an opportunity to promote enhanced, not reduced, school psychology services that positively impact children, families, and schools.

REFERENCES

- Monahan, K., Newman, D., Kostelnik, C., Thies, L., & Wilson, M. (2020). *Innovations in Practicum and Internship: Field Experiences During Distance Learning*. National Association of School Psychologists. Available at <https://tsp.wildapricot.org/COVID-Resources>
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