

Addressing Workforce Capacity through Training and Advocacy

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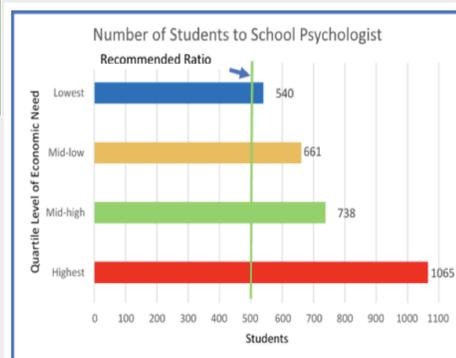
Why Focus on Workforce Capacity in Central/Western MA?

- Critical shortage of school psychologists nationwide (NASP, 2017).
- 6 school psychology training programs in Massachusetts, and yet there are still shortages of school psychologists.
 - Regionally, 4 programs in Eastern Massachusetts, 1 in Central Massachusetts, 1 in Western Massachusetts
- Interest in learning more about shortages in Central and Western Massachusetts which contain more rural parts of Commonwealth.
 - Recognize that much conversation at the state level often revolves around shortages in urban and high poverty areas.
 - Limited data on the impact of shortages in Central and Western part of the state.
- Interest in understanding how to connect workforce needs to training priorities (e.g. practicum, internship placements)
- Support for advocacy efforts that consider workforce capacity development.
 - Current bill in MA proposes ratio of 1 “mental health provider” for every 250 students.

What does the current research say?

Statewide School Psychology (SP) to Student Ratios

- Research in MA suggests school districts *across the state* with the highest economic need have the poorest staffing ratios (BIRCh, 2020)

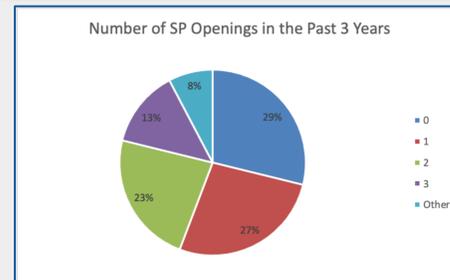


Examining Ratio Disparities by Location

- 26 districts had the highest level of need and poorest ratios
- 10 districts are located in Western MA



Survey Findings



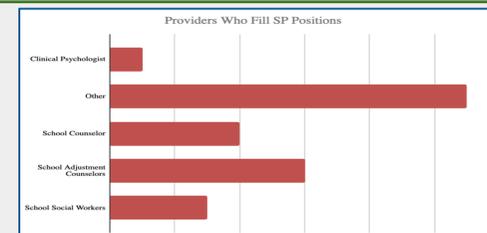
*Other: Variance in Responses between Multiple Respondents in a district

School Psychology (SP) Position Vacancies

A total of 63% of surveyed districts have had 1-3 school psychologist position openings in the past three years.

When openings exist, which providers fill school psychology positions?

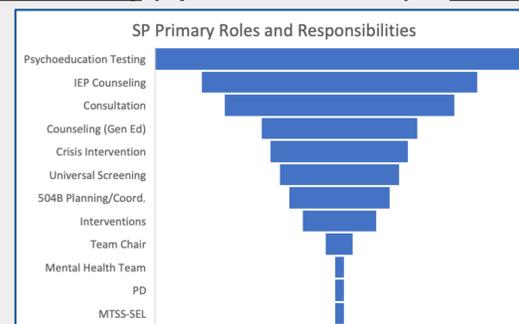
- **A concern is that 31% of districts surveyed reported that they have had to fill SP position openings with other behavioral health providers who lack training in school psychology.**



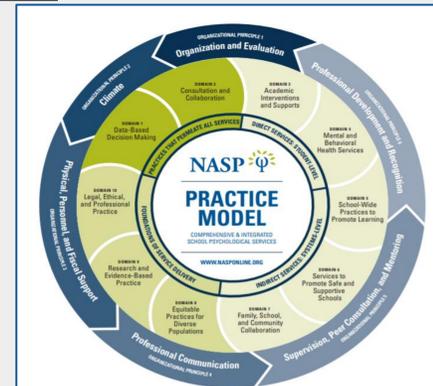
*Other: Outside providers, Non-school-based providers & contracted service providers from various organizations

Challenges with SP Recruitment & Retention

- Districts reported the following primary reason SP positions are declined by candidates as **Salary**. Additional reasons included: **Responsibilities & Caseload**.
- Districts reported the following primary roles & responsibilities for school psychologists in their district: **Psychoeducational Assessment, IEP Counseling (Special Education) & Consultation**.



*Graph is estimated depiction of the weighted roles and responsibilities



Leveraging Collaboration & Partnerships to Sustain SP Workforce

- **85% of districts reported having a BCBA within their district & BCBA collaboration primarily occurred through IEP/504 Consultation.**
- **87% of districts reported having ongoing, sustainable partnerships with community-based providers/agencies, etc.**

Survey Development & Recruitment

- Survey consisted of 17 questions reflecting school psychologists' workforce capacity
- Questions were developed by school psychology graduate program trainers from WSU and UMA/BIRCh team
- Distributed on QualtricsXM and sent out to 99 district administrators across 7 counties through two email blasts and followed up with 30 individual emails

Survey Participants

- 52 out of 99 Western/Central Massachusetts School Districts contacted completed or partially completed the workforce capacity survey.
- 1-3 district administrators completed the survey per district
- Respondents included administrative staff such as: Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Directors of Curriculum & Instruction, Human Resource Administrators, Directors of Pupil Personnel/Student Services, Directors of Special Education, School Psychologists, Principals, Assistant Principals, and Executive Secretaries.

Implications & Next steps

- Most districts have openings for school psychologists, and about one third of openings are filled by professionals other than school psychologists
- Primary responsibilities of school psychologists include assessment and IEP counseling
- Primary reason for declining job offers relate to salary, caseload, and job responsibilities of school psychologists in certain districts
- Consider how to better communicate unique competencies of school psychologists to district administrators and work to ensure school psychologists utilize these competencies.
- Consider how to work with current students to advocate for practice in competencies aligned with the NASP Practice Model and how to shape existing roles
- Mentor early career professionals with school psychologists so that they have agency in shaping their positions
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration