



What makes a school psychologist - training, supervised experience, professional roles? YES!

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The NEED: “The struggle is real,” said the school psychologist (SP) who is fighting for her professional identity in a state where both SPs and other professionals conduct psychoeducational evaluations and other typically SP tasks.

No, we aren’t referring to the historical struggle between doctoral-level psychologists and practitioner-oriented SPs (Bardon, 1994). Our current identity struggle is against a group of Masters-level professionals, with less formal training and fewer supervised experiences, who are often mistakenly viewed as interchangeable with SPs. These professionals are known by a variety of titles (See table).

Little is known about how these groups compare to each other or SPs in their professional roles and responsibilities (Guerra, 2017). We do know these groups often lack many of the defining characteristics of a professional field, such as specific knowledge and skills, ethical code, professional association, and regulated training requirements (Abadi et al., 2020). Furthermore, their many different titles can be confusing to administrators, parents, and fellow professionals alike.

Given the shortage of SPs nationally (Castillo et al., 2016), we do need to find ways to meet not only evaluation needs of schools, but also mental health and related needs. A closer examination of the training and professional skills of these MS-level groups could help us find ways to meet such needs in schools.

States with MS-level Credential		
State(s)	Certificate	Credits required for sample programs
AL	School Psychometrist	UA - Birmingham - 34 hrs
AR	Educational Examiner	UA - 24 hrs
ID, MO	School Psychology Examiner	ID State U - 31 hrs MO State U - 26 hrs
LA, NC, NM, TX, VA	Educational Diagnostician	SE LA U ~ 30 hrs
MD, MS, OK	Psychometrist	SWOSU - 33 hrs MS State ~ 33 hrs

Arkansas PLAN: The Arkansas Division of Elementary & Secondary Education has created a task force to understand the similarities and differences in training and professional roles of SPs and the MS-level Educational Examiners (EEs). The task force aims to develop a model of service delivery that appropriately uses the knowledge and skills of both SPs and EEs in order to serve the states’ children/youth. This task force includes DESE personnel, higher ed trainers, and both SP and EE practitioners.

A statewide survey is being used to better understand the current and desired professional tasks of SPs and EEs. The QR code above is a link to this survey. Another step in this process will include the promotion of the above mentioned model of service delivery to stakeholders across the state.

A comprehensive framework including both groups of professionals will have numerous benefits. First, more assessment personnel are needed in our field, so EEs can assist with evaluations (Castillo et al., 2016). Second, with a lightened assessment load, SPs would have more time to provide mental health and other needed services (Eklund et al., 2020). Third, administrators would learn the differences in professional training between these groups and how they can work most effectively to meet a district’s needs. See OK State Dept of Education for an example of a similar framework for professionals who provide counseling services in schools. In conclusion, school psychologists need to remain vigilant about threats to their professional identity and proactively collaborate with relevant stakeholders to address them.

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