



# ***Understanding the Role of School Psychologists***

*Best Practice Guidance for West Virginia Schools*  
**August 2024**



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# Introduction

This document provides educators and administrators with updated guidance on the roles of school psychologists in West Virginia schools, including certification, licensure, and professional development requirements. It also offers resources to help schools advance the work of school psychologists and outlines practical strategies for creating supportive school environments to promote their retention.

## Background

The role of school psychologists has evolved over time and continues to be shaped by federal laws such as the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* and *Every Student Succeeds Act*, as well as state-level frameworks such as the West Virginia Tiered Systems of Support and legislation such the *Third Grade Success Act*. These laws and frameworks require school psychologists to provide services necessary to meet various requirements, including assessing the impact of disabilities on students' educational performance and identifying students in need of special education and related services. In West Virginia, environmental factors shape the school psychologist profession, including high poverty rates, substance use disorders, and rising rates of foster care for children. Consequently, the role of a school psychologist can vary considerably based on the context in which they work. Although the state does not require districts to adopt a comprehensive school psychology program, the roles and training of school psychologists are broad, often extending beyond evaluations for special education services<sup>1</sup>. Programs in other states describe a comprehensive continuum of services and activities based on psychological principles aimed at preventing or addressing educational, emotional, or behavioral issues. This involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting psychoeducational needs through consultation, observation, or psychological/educational assessments and reports.

## Recent Trends

While the roles of school psychologists have broadened in response to changing needs in the educational community, a 2013 needs assessment survey conducted by Marshall University<sup>2</sup> found school psychologists in West Virginia spend most of their time engaged in psychoeducational assessment rather than distributing their time across an array of roles recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). By 2021, a survey of 47 of West Virginia's 55 county school districts revealed 33 of those districts had a ratio of students to school psychologists much higher than the nation's average ratio<sup>3</sup>. More recently, the supply of school psychologists within West Virginia and across the nation has declined significantly. On average, there is just one school psychologist for every 1,127 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. This is far below the goal of one school psychologist for every 500 students set by the NASP<sup>4</sup>. In West Virginia, the ratio is even higher, with

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<sup>1</sup>W. Va. Code §30-21-2 delineates services that can be provided by a school psychologist and W. Va. Code §18-20-4 indicates that each student, prior to receiving a special education program, must be evaluated by a qualified professional, including but not limited to a school psychologist or education specialist who reports to an local education agency's (LEA) superintendent of schools.

<sup>2</sup>Sheltraw, K. (2013). West Virginia school psychologists' roles in contrast to the NASP practice model. *Marshall Digital Scholar*. <https://mds.marshall.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1484&context=etd>.

<sup>3</sup>Sutfin, A. (2021). School psychology shortages in West Virginia. *Marshall Digital Scholar*. <https://mds.marshall.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2352&context=etd>.

<sup>4</sup>Sohn, E. (2024). There's a strong push for more school psychologists. *American Psychological Association*. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/01/trends-more-school-psychologists-needed>.

one school psychologist for every 1,800 students<sup>5</sup>. This shortage of school psychologists, some of whom evaluate students ranging from birth through 12th grade, leads to fewer available mental health and behavior services. When school psychologists have lower ratios, they can provide these critical services, which could decrease the amount of direct mental health, behavior, and special education services needed. Results from a NASP membership survey showed that school psychologists who reported ratios lower than 1:1,100 reported significantly less engagement in special education evaluations and increased time participating in schoolwide strategies to promote safe and supportive learning environments<sup>6</sup>.

## What is a School Psychologist?

School psychologists are defined by the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (Section 4102) as school-based mental health professionals who “provide mental health services to children and adolescents.” W. Va. Code §30-21-2 defines a school psychologist by specifying where they can practice, who must employ them, and the approved services they can provide. Also, the NASP outlines that school psychologists have specialized advanced graduate degrees, including coursework and practical experiences in both psychology and education.

### Benefits of School Psychologists

School psychologists are uniquely skilled to function within school teams as specially trained mental health professionals. This contrasts with clinical psychologists who typically do not have specialized training in PK-12 educational settings. School psychologists collaborate with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to establish safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments. Using their knowledge of mental health, learning, and behavior, they promote academic, social, behavioral, and emotional success for children and youth in the following ways:

1. **Boost academic success**
  - Provide psychological and academic evaluations
  - Consult with teachers to tailor interventions to students’ needs and help track students’ progress
2. **Promote positive behavior and mental health**
  - Offer individual and group therapy on a variety of topics such as problem solving, conflict resolution, anger management, and social skills
  - Teach and foster coping skills and healthy peer relationships
  - Identify behavioral interventions to manage student and classroom behaviors
3. **Support diverse learners**
  - Provide culturally sensitive services
  - Develop personalized plans for students with disabilities
  - Assist with adjusting teaching methods and environments as necessary
  - Ensure parents are informed and involved in their student’s progress

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<sup>5</sup> Walters, N. (2023). A closer look: Schools struggle to fill positions aimed at improving student mental health. <https://www.wowktv.com/news/west-virginia/a-closer-look-schools-struggle-to-fill-positions-aimed-at-improving-student-mental-health/>

<sup>6</sup> McNamara, K. M. , Walcott, C. M. , & Hyson, D. (2019). Results from the NASP 2015 membership survey, Part 2: Professional practices in school psychology. National Association of School Psychologists. <https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/nasp-research-center/member-surveys> [Google Scholar]

4. **Create safe and positive schools**

- Prevent bullying and identify at-risk students to provide early intervention
- Teach social skills and conflict resolution
- Encourage discipline that keeps kids in school and learning
- Offer crisis support when needed for events like natural disasters, student or staff deaths, medical emergencies, or school violence

5. **Strengthen family-school partnerships**

- Help families understand their child's needs and various school processes to ensure their child gets appropriate support
- Connect families with community services
- Ensure open lines of communication between families and school staff

6. **Improve assessment and accountability for individual students and schools**

- Track academic and behavioral progress of individual students
- Analyze school-wide data to improve outcomes
- Use data to identify risk factors and protective factors
- Conduct psychological and academic assessments

## Common Needs Addressed by School Psychologists

School psychologists assist with various issues and challenges that impact student well-being. Some of the most common are described below.

**Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** is a common neurodivergence, as well as a complex disorder of executive functioning. It can make organization, planning, memory, and task completion incredibly difficult, greatly impacting student performance and behavior in the school setting. School psychologists can evaluate ADHD to determine if a student needs special education services. They can also provide interventions to help students manage the challenges of ADHD.

**Specific learning disabilities (SLD)** includes conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. In recent years, research has provided more information on how these disabilities affect not only academics but also the mental health of students. School psychologists are trained to evaluate students for these disabilities and can provide recommendations and interventions that help students both academically and emotionally.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** is a multi-faceted and nuanced neurodivergence that affects many areas of a person's life in a variety of ways. New research and advocacy from individuals with autism reveal how the disorder can present differently among various groups. Evaluating and determining if a student has ASD requires a special set of qualifications. Not only do school psychologists possess these qualifications, they can also collaborate with other specialized professionals to build a program that ensures a student's needs are met in school.

**Behavioral issues** can greatly impact a student's ability to learn and, at times, the learning of their peers. Most often, behavior is a symptom of a larger problem such as a mental health issue, problems at home, trauma, or academic difficulties. School psychologists can identify the root causes of behavioral problems to help support the student in the school setting. This can be done through Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), individual or group counseling, or consulting with teams to provide support specific to the student.

**Emotional issues** such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and grief are typically more "silent" issues that can greatly impact a student's ability to thrive in school. In extreme cases, these issues can lead to students wanting to harm themselves. School psychologists help students with these issues through individual and group counseling, connecting students to outside resources, or providing school-based interventions to help students cope both at school and at home. When there are concerns about suicide, school psychologists are trained to assess how severe the ideation is and what immediate interventions are needed to help the student.

**Gifted and talented students** need a unique set of supports to thrive in school. School psychologists formally identify gifted students and support them by collaborating with educators to build enrichment opportunities and advocating for appropriate educational programming.

## Scope of Services

School psychologists can provide a broad range of services to all students and families. Their roles and responsibilities vary based on need, as well as staffing ratios. W. Va. Code §30-21-2 identifies eight approved services of a school psychologist:

- » Consultation
- » Psychological and psychoeducational assessment
- » Intervention (e.g., counseling and social-skills guidance)
- » Education
- » Facilitation
- » Research
- » Program planning and evaluation
- » Supervision

### ***The NASP Practice Model***

In 2020, the NASP adopted the [\*NASP Practice Model\*](#) to fully illustrate the research- and evidence-based professional practices school psychologists are encouraged to provide, laying out the range of knowledge and skills that school psychologists possess across 10 domains of comprehensive practice that are organized in three areas.

#### **Practices that permeate all aspects of service delivery:**

- » Domain 1: Data-Based Decision Making
- » Domain 2: Consultation and Collaboration



## **Direct and indirect services for children, families, and schools:**

- » Domain 3: Academic Interventions and Instructional Supports
- » Domain 4: Mental and Behavioral Health and Services and Interventions
- » Domain 5: School-Wide Practices to Promote Learning
- » Domain 6: Services to Promote Safe and Supportive Schools
- » Domain 7: Family, School, and Community Collaboration

## **Foundations of service delivery:**

- » Domain 8: Equitable Practices for Diverse Student Populations
- » Domain 9: Research and Evidence-Based Practice
- » Domain 10: Legal, Ethical, and Professional Practice

## ***NASP Alignment to West Virginia Standards for Effective Schools***

The [\*West Virginia Standards for Effective Schools\*](#) describe seven standards expected of schools to ensure high-quality education in engaging learning environments. These standards are based on seven correlates, or enabling conditions, that effective schools consistently enact so that students regardless of family background, race, or socioeconomic status can master the curriculum. In lieu of a comprehensive school psychology program requirement for districts, the crosswalk below may be helpful for schools to think more expansively about the role school psychologists play in their educational setting. School psychologists' key knowledge and skills from each NASP Practice Model domain have been aligned to appropriate standards to demonstrate how the work of school psychologists contributes to all students receiving a high-quality education in West Virginia<sup>7</sup>.

### **Standard 1: Clear and Focused Mission**

- » Learn how to find out what students are good at and what they need help with. Make plans to help them and see if the plans are working (Domain 1).
- » Regularly gather information from different places to make good decisions for each student, groups of students, and the whole school. Think about where students are learning (like in the classroom, at home, or in the community) when choosing the best ways to help them (Domain 1).
- » Understand how schools work, how different types of classes help students learn, and how to use the best methods to help all students learn and behave well (Domain 5).

### **Standard 2: Instructional Leadership**

- » Understand different ways to work together with people, families, groups, and systems to make services work well (Domain 2).
- » Show that you can work well with others, make good decisions, and solve problems (Domain 2).

### **Standard 3: High Expectations for Success**

- » Understand how things like biology, culture, and society affect how students learn. Know how people learn and grow and guide others to use the best teaching strategies (Domain 3).
- » Work well with others to make plans, carry them out, and see if they work. These plans should help students be strong, behave well, get along with others, and stay healthy (Domain 4).

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<sup>7</sup> The language of the domains has been simplified to clearly demonstrate the connections between what school psychologists do and how effective schools operate.

#### **Standard 4: Positive and Safe Environment**

- » Cooperate with others to make and carry out plans that make school a safe and supportive place for students and staff (Domain 5).
- » Understand how to help students feel good, be strong, and avoid risks. Know how to make schools safe and supportive (Domain 6).
- » Work with others to prevent problems and respond well when problems happen. This helps students learn, stay healthy, and be safe (Domain 6).

#### **Standard 5: Equitable Opportunities to Learn and Effective Instruction**

- » Know how differences in things like abilities and backgrounds affect how students learn and grow (Domain 8).
- » Understand how things like child development, religion, culture, race, and other factors affect children, families, schools, and communities (Domain 8).
- » Use the best strategies to help all students, no matter how different they are (Domain 8).
- » Know that treating all students fairly, respecting differences, and standing up for justice are important for helping students (Domain 8).
- » Know how to do research, understand data, and evaluate programs (Domain 9).

#### **Standard 6: Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress**

- » Work with others to use tests and collect data to help students learn better (Domain 3).
- » Use research to help students and use different tools and technology to collect and understand data (Domain 9).

#### **Standard 7: Families and Community Partnership**

- » Understand how families work, what they're good at, what they need, and their cultures. Know how to help families support their children's learning and mental health (Domain 7).
- » Work with others to make and evaluate services that respect different cultures (Domain 7).
- » Help families and schools work together and work with community groups to help children do well in school and behave well (Domain 7).
- » Provide professional services that help individuals, families, and schools with different backgrounds work well in different situations (Domain 8).

# Barriers and Enablers to Effective Services

## Enablers

The NASP provides helpful tips for promoting effective school psychological services in schools. They include the following:

- » Ensure a representative of the school psychology team meets with district administrators and provides resources on best practices for evaluating school psychologists, especially in districts where school psychologists are evaluated with a teacher evaluation tool.
- » In settings where professional learning for school psychologists is scarce, ask a school psychologist or their supervisor to organize professional development opportunities to be delivered during team meetings (e.g., guest speaker or viewing and discussing as a group an online learning webinar).
- » Engage school psychologists to review school board policies, job descriptions, and performance evaluation tools to determine how the district's policies align with and reflect national standards for school psychology practice.

## Barriers

The NASP also provides a list of common practices that act as barriers to effective school psychology services. Such barriers, when effectively addressed, can become enablers.

- » School psychologist supervisors may not have knowledge or experience working as school psychologists. Consequently, they are not able to provide technical feedback about the quality of specific services.
- » School psychologist supervisors are supervising too many practitioners. As a result, they cannot provide the mentoring support and feedback needed to foster performance improvement.
- » School psychologists do not collect data. As a result, they cannot reflect how their services contributed to positive student outcomes or the district-wide improvement plan.
- » The overall effectiveness of the school psychology program is based on the annual test scores of the students who have received school psychological services. This means that people may only understand the impact of services based on the results of one measurement type and one set of students receiving direct services. Looking at other measures, such as overall well-being or improved school climate, could help people understand the effectiveness of indirect services provided by school psychologists as well.

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) recognizes that school psychologists can sometimes be assigned inappropriate activities that remove them from their focused work. The table below illustrates activities that are appropriate and inappropriate for school psychologists.

Appropriate Activities for School Psychologists	Inappropriate Activities for School Psychologists
Consult and collaborate with teachers to support classroom engagement, management, and academic factors important for student success	Maintain student records
Analyze disaggregated schoolwide data to support academic growth of all students	Cover classes when teachers are absent or to create teacher planning time
Provide short-term individual and small-group counseling/mental health supports to students	Supervise classrooms or common areas
Consult with the school principal to identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems	Assist with duties in the principal's office
Provide professional development to teachers and staff regarding student academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs	Coordinate school-wide individual education plans, student study teams, response to intervention plans, MTSS and school attendance review boards
Advocate for students at individualized education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards, as necessary	Student discipline

# Certification, Credentials, and Licensure

[W. Va. Code §30-21-2](#) prohibits psychologists from practicing without a license or certification in the state. To practice in West Virginia public schools, school psychologists must be appropriately certified. School psychologists in the state also have the unique option to obtain additional licensure that allows them to either contract with schools or create their own private practice to conduct psychological work. **As such, the terms “licensure” and “certification” cannot be used interchangeably as they have distinct meanings.**

## Certification

School psychologists must obtain WVDE certification to practice in West Virginia public schools, pre-K and early childhood settings, and public charter schools. The WVDE certification office issues Professional Student Support certificates based on minimum requirements set forth in [WVBE Policy 5202](#) and [W. Va. Code §30-21-7b](#):

- ✓ Master of Arts or Science degree in school psychology **OR** specialist degree in school psychology, such as Educational Specialist (Ed.S.), Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (CAGS), or Specialist in School Psychology (Psy.S.). Specialists must demonstrate at least 60 graduate semester hours in a school psychology program
- ✓ Year-long, 1200-hour supervised internship
- ✓ Passage of the School Psychologist Praxis exam

School psychologists may work to obtain additional certifications, such as the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential. While obtaining this credential indicates the school psychologist is obtaining additional professional development and training in best practice, it is not required. Once the NCSP is obtained, school psychologists must renew this certification every three years. To renew, they must complete at least 75 hours of professional development with a specific number of hours dedicated to ethical/legal practice, and equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## Credentials

Certification levels, known in West Virginia as State Education Agency (SEA) credentials, are progressive:

- » **Initial Professional Student Support Certificate:** Valid for 3 years and issued to an applicant who completes an approved master’s degree in school psychology from an accredited institution of higher education and meets the testing requirements established by the West Virginia Board of Education (147 on Praxis exam).
- » **Professional Student Support Certificate:** Valid for 5 years and issued to an applicant who has completed 6 semester hours of coursework from an accredited institution of higher education or who has a salary classification of MA+30 or higher and has completed 2 years of experience (one of which must have been completed in West Virginia), receives the recommendation of the county superintendent, and meets the testing requirements established by the WVDE. This credential expires on June 30 of the last year of its validity. To renew, one must submit a renewal application on January 1 of the year in which the license expires and must submit evidence of holding a minimum of an MA+30 salary classification based on the awarding of a master’s degree.

- » **Temporary Professional Student Support Certificate:** Issued to applicants who have completed a school psychologist program from a regionally accredited college or university outside of West Virginia with a minimum GPA of 3.0 and are eligible to be recommended by the college or university but have not met the testing requirements established by the WVDE.
- » **Permanent Professional Student Support Certificate:** Issued to an applicant who holds or is eligible to hold the Professional Student Support Certificate valid for 5 years, has completed 5 years of educational experience, received the recommendation of the county superintendent, and met the testing requirements established by the WVDE. This credential remains valid permanently unless surrendered, suspended, or revoked.

## Licensure

The West Virginia Board of Examiners of Psychologists has a two-level licensure system to allow greater flexibility for school psychologists to provide services. In each case, the license is valid for two years from the date issued and may be renewed for two years without examination. Licensure is not required for school psychologists to practice in schools. Each level of licensure, once obtained after required supervision and passing of the oral exam, is valid for three years. The two levels are overviewed below. More information regarding the specific requirements is available through the [WV Board of Examiners of Psychologists](#).

A **Level I School Psychologist License** allows for school psychologists to perform contractual work in a school setting, school system, or other educational state agency. This licensure also allows the school psychologist to work for more than one West Virginia district board of education as a contractor. To be eligible to work toward Level I licensure, a school psychologist must have completed the same minimum requirements for certification from the WVDE and must have two years of experience working for a district board of education. Additionally, they must be supervised by an approved licensed school psychologist for an additional six months, submit quarterly reports on their work, and pass an oral examination after completing their supervision hours. This optional license opens many opportunities for school psychologists and expands their knowledge base; however, Level 1 licensure does not allow school psychologists to work with other agencies or establish their own private practice.

A **Level II School Psychologist License** allows a school psychologist to provide school psychological services to an individual or the public both in and outside of schools. It also allows school psychologists to work for or open their own private practice. To be eligible to work toward Level II, one must already have a Level I license or a doctoral degree in school psychology and must have scored at least 147 on the Praxis exam. Level II licensure also requires a school psychologist to be supervised by a board-approved psychologist for two additional years, to file quarterly reports, and to pass an oral exam.

## Continuing Education Requirements

While WVDE-*certified* school psychologists are not required to complete continuing education (CE) as of this writing, it is highly encouraged they receive 12 hours per year directly related to the practice of school psychology. *Nationally Certified* School Psychologists must complete 75 hours of CE every three years. All *licensed* school psychologists in West Virginia must complete 30 hours of approved CE every three years<sup>8</sup>, which can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Each school psychologist is responsible for obtaining proof of continuing education (e.g., certificates or activity documentation forms) so that if/when there is an audit at the time of license or national certification renewal, appropriate documentation will be available.

- » For school psychologists with *national certification* through the NASP, **10** of their 75 total hours must be approved through the NASP or the American Psychological Association (APA).
- » At least **15** CE credits for *licensed* school psychologists must be provided through the APA's Office of Continuing Education in Psychology or NASP (or their approved providers).
- » At least **3** CE credits must be in equity, diversity, and inclusion for nationally certified school psychologists.
- » At least **3** CE credits must be in ethics for both licensed and nationally certified school psychologists.
- » In addition to NASP-approved sessions, CE offered by the APA, Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), West Virginia Association of Addiction and Prevention Professionals (WVAAPP), West Virginia State Board of Examiners of Psychologists, [West Virginia School Psychologists Association](#), or [West Virginia Psychological Association](#) will be automatically approved.
- » School psychologists can earn up to **10** hours of CE credits per renewal cycle for giving formal psychological presentations to professional groups in which each presentation hour earns one credit hour for the first time it is presented.
- » The full mandated number of CE credits (equal to 10 CE hours per year) may be acquired through graduate-level course work. This does not negate the mandated 3 hours of ethics training.

The Coordinator of School Psychology at the WVDE assists districts in developing the skills of school psychologists across the state through technical support and consultation. Contact the Division of Federal Programs and Support at 304-558-7805.

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<sup>8</sup> The West Virginia Board of Examiners of Psychologists provide guidelines for continuing education, which can be found here: <https://psychbd.wv.gov/cont-ed/Documents/CE%20Guidelines.pdf>.

# Tools and Resources

- » **West Virginia School Psychologists Association:** This professional organization encourages advocacy and leadership to enrich the competencies of school psychologists in West Virginia. WVSPA focuses on ensuring that school psychologists are provided with information specific to the issues facing students in West Virginia. <https://wvspa27.wildapricot.org/>
- » **West Virginia Board of Examiners of Psychologists:** This board informs and assists the public and those in the field of psychology. The board oversees the *licensure* of clinical and school psychologists. <https://psychbd.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx>
- » **West Virginia Department of Education:** The WVDE's Office of Safety & Tiered Support Systems and Office of Special Education provide best practice guidance, technical assistance, and training to school psychologists. The Office of Safety & Tiered Support Systems coordinates several initiatives and school-based professionals ensure that each student has at least one caring adult that keeps them connected to the school system. The Office of Special Education is responsible for improving the lives of students with disabilities and exceptionalities. <https://wvde.us/>
- » **The Cook Center for Human Connection:** The Cook Center for Human Connection works to bring together programs to prevent suicide, provide mental health support, and enhance human connections. Their program, [ParentGuidance.org](https://parentguidance.org), focuses on helping parents connect with their child by parenting with a purpose through one-on-one coaching and on-demand mental health courses. Their series, [My Life is Worth Living](https://mylifewisorthliving.com), is an animated series that tells five powerful stories focusing on mental health issues common to teenagers. <https://cookcenter.org/>
- » **Evaluating the effectiveness and quality of school psychological services:** This resource is helpful for evaluating school psychological services delivered by a department or group of school psychologists. <https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/nasp-practice-model-implementation-guide/section-iv-evaluating-school-psychological-services-utilizing-the-nasp-practice-model/part-2-systems-level-evaluating-school-psychological-services-delivery-programs>.
- » **A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools:** This joint statement provides a framework supported by educators for improving school safety and increasing access to mental health supports for children and youth. A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools ([nasponline.org](https://www.nasponline.org))
- » **IRIS Center resource locator:** The IRIS Center is a national center dedicated to improving education outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities birth through age 21, through the use of effective evidence-based practices and interventions. Its resource locator allows searches by topic, resource type, and more. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources/iris-resource-locator/>.
- » **Rubric for Evaluating Colorado Special Services Providers - School Psychologists:** Provides quality standards and a descriptive rubric to evaluate school psychologist performance. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/sspppsychologistrubric>
- » **Mental Health and Schools - Best Practices to Support Our Students:** This report, developed by the Baker Center for Children and Families, draws upon existing quantitative data and best practice literature, as well as qualitative strategies engaging multiple stakeholder information to expand on topics based on their areas of focus and expertise. [https://www.bakercenter.org/application/files/5616/8235/2328/Baker\\_Center\\_-\\_Mental\\_Health\\_and\\_Schools\\_Report\\_-\\_April\\_2023.pdf](https://www.bakercenter.org/application/files/5616/8235/2328/Baker_Center_-_Mental_Health_and_Schools_Report_-_April_2023.pdf).
- » **PREPaRE Model:** This website provides information on the PREPaRE model for crisis prevention, response, and intervention. <https://www.nasponline.org/professional-development/prepare-training-curriculum/about-prepare>



# Frequently Asked Questions

This section addresses common questions and concerns that educators and parents have about school psychology and the services provided.

1. **How can I get in contact with a school psychologist in my local school district?**

School psychologists in West Virginia are often itinerant, meaning they work within multiple schools in a single district. The easiest way would be to contact your district's board of education central office and speak to their special education or student support services department. They will get you in touch with a school psychologist assigned to your local school.

2. **Can school psychologists provide long-term counseling?**

Yes. School psychologists are trained to do individual and group counseling with students and families. Each district utilizes their school psychologists in different ways, so some may do more counseling than others. It is highly recommended that each district moves towards a comprehensive service model that includes individual and group counseling.

3. **Can school psychologists in West Virginia diagnose students with a disorder or disability?**

West Virginia is unique in that school psychologists can diagnose students as well as provide information on how the symptoms of a diagnosis may or may not impact their eligibility for special education services. School psychologists are limited to what is considered within their scope of practice. Their scope of practice typically includes neurodevelopmental conditions that typically appear in childhood or adolescence and impact a student's education. Conditions like ASD, ADHD, SLD, intellectual disability, and types of anxiety disorders can be considered within their scope. Considering the lack of mental health providers in the state, school psychologists' ability to provide diagnoses helps families access services more easily than if they needed to find an outside provider. It must be noted that a diagnosis by a school psychologist does not automatically qualify a student for special education services. *Decisions regarding the educational impact of the diagnosis and the need for special education services must be made by a school-based eligibility committee.* Not every student with a disability has symptoms that impact their education enough to warrant special education. Many students with disabilities excel with general education services paired with accommodations.

4. **Are school psychologists the same as school counselors?**

These are two different professions although they are often confused. School psychologists conduct psychoeducational and academic assessments to determine eligibility for special education services, provide long-term counseling, conduct functional behavior assessments, and create behavior intervention plans. School psychologists also tend to work primarily with special education students, but this varies depending on the district. School counselors provide short-term counseling, assist in academic planning and goal setting for individual students, present school counseling curriculum lessons to entire classes, and consult with the school principal to identify student needs and problem-solve. Both professions do some type of counseling, analyze and interpret various types of data, and assist with individualizing interventions for students who need additional help.

5. **Do school psychologists prescribe medication?**

No. Psychologists generally do not prescribe medication as they are not medical doctors. While there are few states that allow clinical psychologists to prescribe medication with additional training, West Virginia is not one of them. To prescribe medication in West Virginia, the provider must be a medical doctor or advanced practice provider (e.g., nurse practitioner or physician assistant). This confusion often happens because the titles of the two professions are very similar. *Psychiatrists* are medical doctors with specialization in mental health disorders who can prescribe medication, while psychologists specialize in psychological assessment and therapy/counseling.

6. **What is the role of a school psychologist in a crisis?**

School psychologists receive specific training in their graduate programs on crisis prevention, response, and intervention. This is considered so crucial to the role of the school psychologist that NASP has adopted the PREPaRE model. This model trains school-employed mental health professionals and other educators on how to best fill the roles and responsibilities needed on a school crisis team. Specifically, school psychologists are trained on how to prepare emergency operations plans based on the type of crisis that may arise (e.g. a natural disaster vs. an act of school violence), integrate plans into community emergency response efforts (e.g. fire and police departments), plan for reunification, and assess and provide mental health interventions to students affected by a crisis.

7. **If I don't need to have Level I licensure to be a school psychologist, what are the advantages of pursuing it?**

Possessing a Level I license gives you the ability to contract with school districts as a 1099 instead of a W2. If you do not have a license, you have to work as a W2 employee. Some advantages would be if you would prefer to work part-time, want a more flexible schedule, only provide certain specialized services, or contract with multiple districts. School psychologists who currently work as a W2 employee could also contract with districts other than their own to provide services during their non-contract time. Contracting school psychologists is beneficial for districts because it speeds up the process from when a need for *additional* help is identified to when services can be provided. Creating new W2 positions in school districts is a lengthy process that involves adjusting funding formulas and seeking county board of education approval before the position can even be posted. Especially for temporary assistance, contracting can be much more beneficial to districts. It is always beneficial for school districts to have a full-time school psychologist that is directly hired through the board of education.

8. **Can an individual working on a permit provide school psychology services?**

Yes. WVBE Policy 5202 allows individuals who do not meet the full requirements for a professional certificate to work on a permit, provided a Superintendent has determined they are the most qualified candidate. This most frequently happens when there is a school psychologist intern operating independently in a district.





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