



# READY TO LEARN, EMPOWERED TO TEACH



## Guiding Principles for Effective Schools and Successful Students

**NASP** 

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
School Psychologists

*Helping Children Thrive • In School • At Home • In Life*

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# Executive Summary

All children and youth must be ready to learn in order to achieve their best in school and graduate prepared for college or their career. This requires establishing a public education infrastructure that empowers teachers to teach and prioritizes the academic, social–emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of students. Additionally, we must make systemic efforts to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all students to thrive. Such efforts necessitate sustained access to comprehensive and robust curricula, high-quality instruction, social–emotional learning, academic and behavioral supports, and mental health services within safe, respectful, supportive, and inclusive learning environments.

Comprehensive learning supports that integrate academics, behavior, mental health, and social–emotional learning are most effective when provided through a multitiered system of supports (MTSS). Essential to this system are school-employed mental health professionals and other specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) who collaborate with educators, administrators, families, and community providers to identify needs and provide appropriate services at individual, classroom, building, and district-wide levels.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

1. Review, evaluate, and reconstruct or replace existing school structures, policies, and procedures that lead to inequitable outcomes.
2. Combine high expectations for all students with high-quality instruction across a well-rounded and culturally responsive curriculum for general and special education students.
3. Create positive school climates that balance physical and psychological safety for all students.
4. Provide access to comprehensive school-based mental and behavioral health services and ensure adequate staffing levels of appropriately trained school employed mental health professionals.
5. Increase family and community engagement to support student success.
6. Create systems that support the recruitment and retention of properly trained and prepared professionals that reflect the diversity of the school community.
7. Create accountability systems that use a broad set of measures to inform specific actions that improve school quality and provide an understanding of how specific outcomes were achieved.

At its core, education is a civil right, and the federal government can, and should, play a critical role in ensuring equity in access and shaping the national education landscape. Local and state governments must be also empowered to construct educational systems that prepare all students for postsecondary education and/or the workforce. Indeed, providing equitable access to a high-quality public education system is one of America’s greatest responsibilities and wisest investments in the nation’s future. NASP believes that education policies addressing the whole child and grounded in evidence-based practices will empower teachers to teach and ensure that every child is ready and able to learn.

# Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach

## Guiding Principles for Effective Schools and Successful Students

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is the world’s largest professional association representing school psychologists who work with families, teachers, school administrators, other education professionals, and community stakeholders to support the academic achievement, positive behavior, and social, emotional, and mental wellness of all students. We believe that all children and youth are entitled to a high-quality public education, delivered in a safe, supportive, antiracist learning environment free of harassment and discrimination, that provides them with the comprehensive skills necessary to thrive in school, at home, and throughout life. Providing a high-quality and effective public education system is the most important investment we can make in our nation’s future, and NASP urges policy makers at all levels to prioritize education policies that meet the needs of the whole child. School environments

***Schools must have the capacity to provide comprehensive learning supports through a multitiered system of support (MTSS), which requires having adequate staffing of school-employed mental health professionals and specialized instructional support personnel.***

barriers, but only when we as a society commit to providing sustained access to services that support the academic achievement, positive behavior,

must enable students and staff alike to feel included, supported, and valued. It is only possible to serve all students when policies, procedures, systems, and structures ensure equity and fairness.

The educational environment presents unique opportunities to promote success and wellness, as well as to address learning

### Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP)

SISP include school-employed mental health professionals (school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers), school nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, art therapists, dance/movement therapists, music therapists, speech–language pathologists, and audiologists. These specialized personnel help guide prevention and intervention services, problem solving, instructional planning, progress monitoring, and accountability measures to inform better instruction and systems-level decision-making. School-employed mental health professionals have specialized training in meeting the mental and behavioral health needs as well as the learning needs of students.

and social, emotional, and mental wellness of all students. Teachers cannot do this alone. Schools must have the capacity to provide comprehensive learning supports through an MTSS, which includes having adequate numbers of school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers) and other SISP. These professionals are specially trained to help teachers, administrators, and families ensure that students are ready and able to learn. Importantly, there is a significant shortage of school psychologists and other SISP, and progress toward a robust MTSS framework will require making a sustained investment in remedying the shortages of these professionals.

## What Does It Mean to Be Antiracist

According to Kendi (2019), antiracism is defined as “to think nothing is behaviorally wrong or right— inferior or superior—with any of the racial groups. Whenever the antiracist sees individuals behaving positively or negatively, the antiracist sees exactly that: Individuals behaving positively or negatively, not representatives of whole races. To be antiracist is to deracialize behavior, to remove the tattooed stereotype from every racialized body. Behavior is something humans do, not races do.”

Schools play a critical role in helping to mitigate barriers to learning, but they cannot do it alone. In addition to schools being appropriately resourced, public policy must resolve the broader social problems that undermine children’s wellness, safety, and ability to thrive. This includes collective action to address the rising toll inflicted on communities across the country as a result of systemic racism (e.g., police violence, housing inequity, bias in healthcare) and structural inequity. Meeting the comprehensive needs of our students will be impossible without addressing these core issues. We are at a critical time in which we can create real change if we invest in a robust and equitable public education system that serves all students.

### Purpose of Ready to Learn

This document details seven guiding principles and recommends actions designed to advance equity and lower or remove individual and structural barriers to learning by creating school environments that (a) promote wellness and (b) effectively address the learning, behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health needs of students. These recommendations reflect decades of research and the growing number of schools around the country that are improving students’ outcomes using these approaches. NASP firmly believes that addressing these issues is not ancillary to education but rather necessary to prepare all of America’s children and youth for academic success, healthy development, and responsible citizenship. NASP believes that school psychologists, educators, and policy makers, both individually and collectively, have a responsibility for actively advocating for the policies and practices outlined in this document.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### 1. Review, evaluate, and reconstruct or replace existing school structures, policies, and procedures that lead to inequitable outcomes.

#### Key Policy Objectives:

- Provide culturally responsive learning experiences for all students by ensuring equitable access to education resources.
- Eliminate disparities caused by factors including, but not limited to, low income economic marginalization (LIEM), zip code, disability status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, race, or ethnicity.
- Assess and remediate disproportionality in special education identification, eligibility for gifted education, access to advanced/AP courses, disciplinary measures, and academic outcomes.
- Prioritize the recruitment and retention of school staff with minoritized identities or backgrounds (e.g., LGBTQI2-S; Black, Indigenous, and people of color [BIPOC]), especially in leadership positions.
- Provide ongoing professional development on culturally responsive and antiracist practices within the school context.
- Ensure that instruction, assessment, and interventions are culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate to students’ individual backgrounds and circumstances while not attempting to erase or diminish diversity.
- Collaborate with community and government agencies to reduce systemic and structural barriers that contribute to gaps in achievement that are the result of systematic denial of equal educational opportunities and can negatively affect student learning and well-being.
- Advance efforts to expand access to high-quality early childhood education.

For all students to have full access to a high-quality public education, school systems must routinely analyze existing structures, policies, and procedures to determine those that create barriers and disparate access and outcomes for some students. This includes identifying and dismantling the racist, homophobic, and discriminatory structures that perpetuate inequity both in terms of access to resources and outcomes for children of minoritized and low income and economically

marginalized backgrounds. This also involves school staff and leaders critically examining and discussing implicit bias and its impact on students. In addition, schools must also seek support from community and government agencies that can effectively address factors that drive inequity outside of school, such as: food insecurity, LIEM, inadequate housing, and insufficient healthcare. While educators are not necessarily experts in housing policy, physical health, or nutrition, serving the whole child requires that children have their basic needs met, both in and out of school. Moreover, schools and communities must work together to create antiracist, nondiscriminatory, safe, and healthy environments for children to thrive.

Equitable practices need to begin in early childhood because learning begins at birth, not the first day of kindergarten. Disparate early educational experiences set up children to succeed or fail, and providing high-quality early education can prevent later education needs (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2015). Research and government reports consistently demonstrate disproportionality in special education referrals and discipline. For example, English learners and children of color are disproportionately placed in special education and in more restrictive settings. Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended than students without disabilities. Compared to their White peers, Indigenous, Latinx, and Black students are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline like suspension and expulsion. Despite efforts to move away from exclusionary discipline practices, disparities in out-of-school suspensions between

***Adopting an antiracist framework includes disrupting and dismantling policies and practices that have marginalized minoritized students and then replacing them with policies and practices that are socially just and will lead to equitable outcomes.***

Black and White students across the United States have nearly quadrupled in the past 50 years and are often evident beginning in preschool. (See Gilliam, 2005; Losen et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016; U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018; Whitford et al., 2019.) Relatedly, although achievement and opportunity gaps between White children and children of color have narrowed over

the past 50 years, they remain large and have expanded over the past 2 decades. Additionally, disparities continue to exist in access to AP and other advanced coursework and access to fully certified teachers (See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019; Theokas & Saaris, 2013; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Addressing and remedying these disparities must be a priority in order to achieve equity for all students.

## **2. Combine high expectations for all students with high-quality instruction across a well-rounded curriculum for general and special education students.**

### ***Key Policy Objectives:***

- Ensure that all students have access to content that is culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and academically engaging.
- Routinely assess students' needs and monitor individual student progress to make data-based decisions about appropriate interventions and student learning using an MTSS approach.
- Promote the development of social and emotional learning (SEL), problem solving, self-advocacy, and conflict resolution skills using a culturally responsive and antiracist lens.
- Provide ongoing professional development to staff on identifying and mitigating their own implicit bias.
- Have appropriately credentialed educators delivering supports and services to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Comprehensive, well-rounded curricula must be matched with high expectations and instruction and learning supports, embedded within an MTSS framework, to meet individual student learning needs. Educators need access to the wide body of knowledge available on how to make content more readily accessible to an increasingly diverse student population, including those with disabilities. Research demonstrates that high expectations correlate with high achievement (Peterson et al., 2016), and a commitment to high expectations should extend throughout comprehensive and well-rounded curricula, including early childhood education. Research indicates that differences in teachers' expectations of students are often grounded in implicit bias

***Students with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) that meets their needs. A robust universal curriculum, highly qualified instructors, credentialed SISP, evidence-based interventions, and well-developed Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) are critical in supporting students with disabilities. This is only possible through full IDEA funding and the consideration of a child's circumstances when determining appropriate goals and services for their IEPs.***

and can result in teachers having lower expectations for groups of students, particularly Black students (Gershenson et al., 2016). It is imperative that teachers receive ongoing professional development to help them identify and mitigate their own implicit bias in and out of the classroom. Schools should also make a sustained commitment to teach and hold students accountable for critical life skills such as social-emotional competency, self-advocacy, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Strengthening students' social, emotional, and decision-making skills positively affects their academic achievement, both in terms of higher standardized test scores and better grades (Bierman et al., 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). These skills are also essential for maintaining positive relationships, responsible citizenship, and success in the workplace.

### **Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS)**

MTSS is a comprehensive system of differentiated services and supports. Instruction and interventions are provided in increasing levels of intensity based on data-driven determination of student need. An effective MTSS approach includes four essential components:

- A school-wide, multilevel instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure
- Screenings to identify students who are at risk for academic or behavioral difficulties
- Ongoing progress monitoring and evaluation
- Data-based decisions about instruction, movement within the multitiered system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law)

and can result in teachers having lower expectations for groups of students, particularly Black students (Gershenson et al., 2016). It is imperative that teachers receive ongoing professional development to help them identify and mitigate their own implicit bias in and out of the classroom. Schools should also make a sustained commitment to teach and hold students accountable

### **3. Create positive school climates that balance physical and psychological safety for all students.**

#### **Key Policy Objectives:**

- Establish policies and practices that ensure all students and families feel welcome, respected, supported, and connected to and engaged with the school community.
- Designate resources to implement evidence-based, school-wide policies and practices (e.g., positive behavior interventions and supports) that reduce bullying, harassment, violence, and discrimination for all students, with a focus on historically marginalized populations (e.g., students with disabilities, BIPOC, and LGBTQI2-S youth).
- Eliminate zero tolerance policies and replace them with positive approaches that teach and reinforce desired behavior, support student needs, and incorporate restorative practices and other methods of teaching students effective conflict resolution skills.
- Maintain disaggregated data collection systems that allow for the review and report of disciplinary data and school climate/safety initiatives by race/ethnicity, gender, and disability status and the intersection of these identities. Refine, replace, and discontinue specific practices based on these data.
- Establish clear guidelines for the activities of any school resource officers (SROs) or other law enforcement, and clearly prohibit their involvement in discipline matters.
- Support continuous and sustainable school safety and crisis prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery capacity that balances physical and psychological safety.

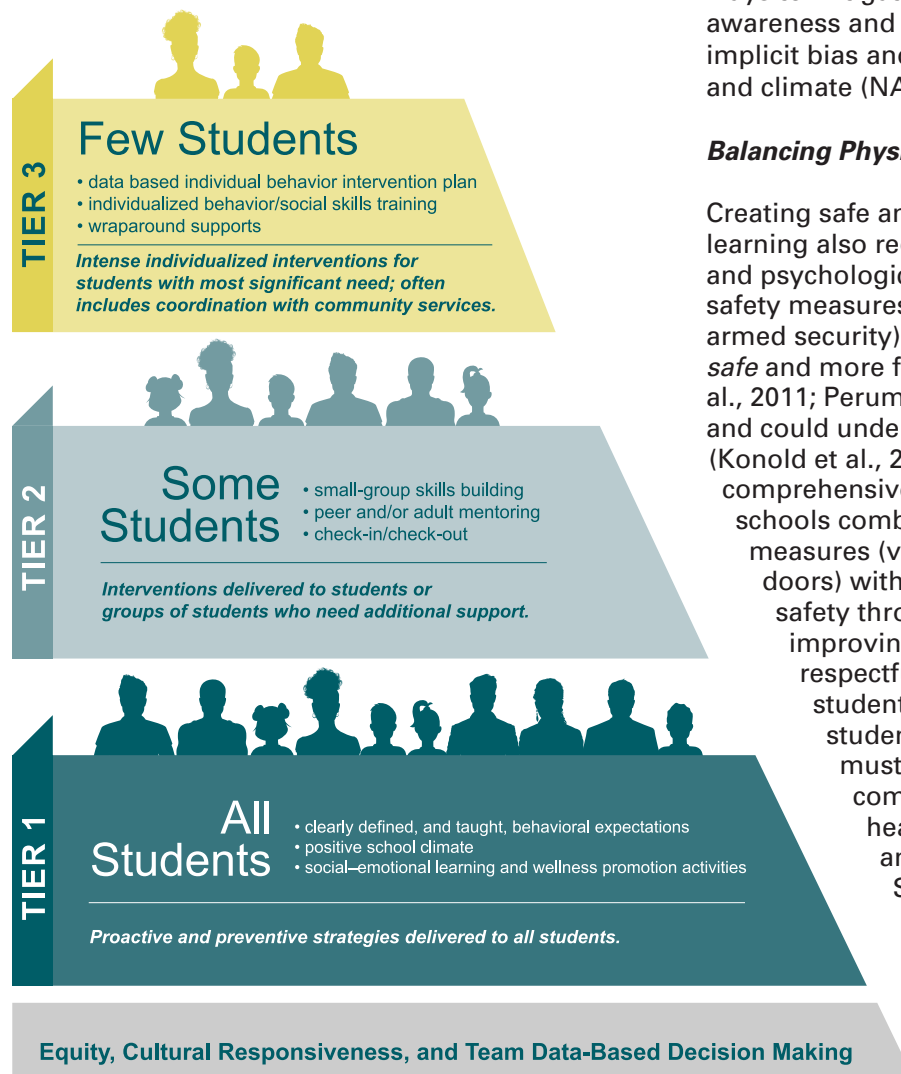
#### **Importance of Positive School Climate and Effective Discipline**

Creating safe and supportive learning environments is essential to student achievement. Positive conditions for learning are shaped by the attitudes, expectations, policies, and practices of school personnel and must be intentionally established, measured, and maintained. These conditions cannot be created overnight or by singular actions like hiring a school resource officer, purchasing a designated program, or

installing a piece of equipment, such as a metal detector (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). Schools and districts must engage in consistent and proactive efforts that ensure safety, promote student well-being, prevent negative behaviors, and engage students in the classroom and broader school community. We can enable teachers' ability to teach and students' ability to learn when we ensure that all students: (a) come to school feeling safe, welcomed, included, and respected; (b) have a trusting relationship with at least one adult in the school; (c) understand clear academic and behavioral expectations; and (d) see themselves as positive members of the school community. Effective discipline policies and practices are a cornerstone of a safe and supportive learning

environment. Effective discipline requires a collaborative, school-wide, multitiered approach that prioritizes teaching and reinforcing positive behaviors. This approach focuses on effectively intervening, addressing the cause of unwanted behavior, and teaching alternatives for negative and harmful behavior as opposed to focusing on punishment. Positive discipline incorporates positive behavioral interventions and supports, social-emotional learning, restorative justice practices, and other evidence-based interventions to help resolve conflict and teach alternatives to negative behavior, violence, and aggression. Successful implementation of effective discipline requires ongoing professional development for school staff that promotes the use of effective school-wide and classroom discipline practices; ways to mitigate bias in discipline practices; awareness and knowledge of privilege, racism, and implicit bias and their impact on school discipline and climate (NASP, 2020a; see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Effective Discipline Framework**



**Balancing Physical and Psychological Safety**

Creating safe and supportive conditions for learning also requires schools to balance physical and psychological safety. Highly restrictive physical safety measures alone (e.g., metal detectors, armed security) may cause students to feel *less safe* and more fearful at school (Bachman et al., 2011; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013), and could undermine the learning environment (Konold et al., 2017; Milam et al., 2010). In contrast, comprehensive school safety is supported when schools combine reasonable physical security measures (visitor check in procedures, locked doors) with efforts to enhance psychological safety through positive school climate, improving student engagement, fostering respectful and trusting relationships among students and staff, and supporting overall student success. Safety programming must be appropriately integrated with comprehensive mental and behavioral health services that promote wellness and address specific students' needs. School safety and crisis teams should be multidisciplinary and trained to address the continuum of prevention, planning, response, and recovery with response and recovery building on ongoing positive behavior, risk assessment, safety, and mental health services.

*Note.* From Framework for Effective School Discipline (p. 4), by the National Association of School Psychologists, 2020 (<https://www.nasponline.org/disciplineframework>). Copyright 2020 by the National Association of School Psychologists.

#### 4. Provide access to comprehensive school-based mental and behavioral health services and ensure adequate staffing levels of school-employed mental health professionals.

##### **Key Policy Objectives:**

- Make a long-term and sustained commitment to align staffing ratios with recommendations generated from national professional organizations; this will allow for the delivery of a necessary full range of comprehensive school mental health services.
- Expand the development and implementation of a cohesive and coordinated multitiered system of supports that facilitates data-based decision making and a full range of evidence-based interventions.
- Coordinate services across a continuum of care that promotes effective collaboration among families, educators, school-employed mental health providers, and community providers.
- Establish trauma-informed policies and practices that include ongoing staff professional development.
- Provide ongoing, high-quality professional development to staff and families about how to recognize student concerns and seek help from the appropriate professionals.
- Establish mechanisms, including efforts to make graduate education financially accessible, to recruit and retain school-employed mental health professionals, especially those from historically marginalized backgrounds.

Mental and behavioral health and wellness are critical to children’s and youth’s success in school and life. Schools are a natural and logical setting to provide mental health services, and they provide the ideal context for wellness promotion, prevention, and intervention, all of which directly affect learning and well-being. Research shows that access to school-based mental health services is linked to improved physical and psychological safety, academic performance, and social-emotional learning for students, and it reduces costly negative outcomes such as risky behaviors, disciplinary incidents, delinquency, dropout, substance abuse, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Ballard et al., 2014; Morgan-Lopez et al., 2020; Powers et al., 2016; Valdebenito et al., 2018; Suldo et al., 2014; Wang & Degol, 2016). Comprehensive

school mental and behavioral health services are most effective when embedded within an MTSS framework (see Figure 2).

One in five children will experience a significant mental health issue in a given year. Only about 20% of those students who need care will receive it, and of those who do receive assistance, the vast majority receive mental health services in schools. Importantly, students are more likely to seek help if these services are available in schools.

##### **Adequate Staffing Ratios**

Most professional associations have recommended staffing ratios. NASP recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students. This ratio allows for delivery of comprehensive wellness promotion, prevention, early identification, and intervention services at the student, classroom, and school-wide levels. Inadequate staffing ratios limit professionals to focusing only on students with the most severe needs or to providing a restricted range of services that leaves little opportunity for

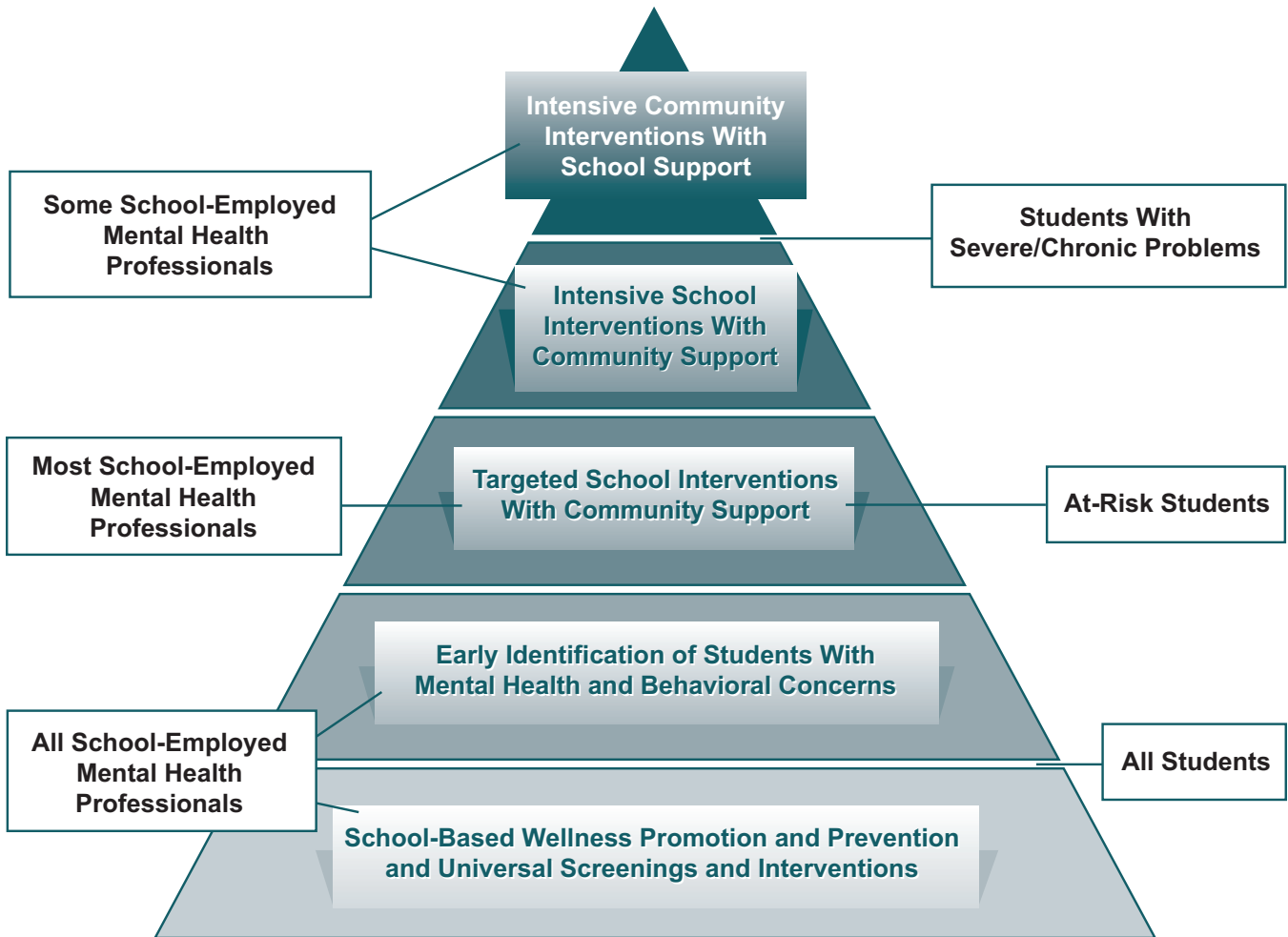
***School-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors) are trained to do this work in the school context and support the learning process in addition to mental and behavioral health.***

critical prevention and early intervention services. Importantly, school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors) are trained to do this work in the school

context and to support the learning process in addition to mental and behavioral health. NASP also recommends appropriate staffing ratios of school-employed professionals be coupled with effective and collaborative community partnerships to provide supplemental services and promote access to community supports beyond the school day. One must not be viewed as a substitute for the other. Simply having contracted community providers to work with high need students is not sufficient. There must be a full complement of school-employed mental health professionals who are embedded in the school community, are knowledgeable of school culture and learning, and are available in a sustained capacity to work with all students, families, and staff and to coordinate and collaborate with community partners.



Figure 2. The Continuum of School Mental Health Services



## The Continuum of School Mental Health Services

Note. Adapted from “Communication Planning and Message Development: Promoting School-Based Mental Health Services,” by the National Association of School Psychologists, 2006, *Communiqué*, 35(1), p. 27. Copyright 2006 by the National Association of School Psychologists. Adapted with permission.

Providing a continuum of school mental health services is critical to effectively supporting students’ learning and development. MTSS encompasses the continuum of need, enabling schools to promote mental wellness for all students, identify and address problems before they escalate or become chronic, and provide increasingly intensive, data-driven services for individual students as needed. Access to adequate staffing of school-employed mental health professionals is essential to the effectiveness and sustainability of these services, as is close collaboration with community providers to help meet students’ most intensive needs.

## 5. Increase family and community engagement to support student success.

### *Key Policy Objectives:*

- Foster relationships among students, teachers, staff, and families to promote healthy development and address student needs.
- Provide resources to develop and sustain effective partnerships between schools, families, and community agencies/organizations to enhance and coordinate existing school-based services with needs of the larger school community.
- Involve families and community stakeholders in student and school improvement efforts.
- Provide mechanisms for students and families to easily engage and participate in school and community activities before or after school.
- Engage in deliberate outreach to all families, with particular attention paid to those that are typically left out of engagement opportunities including families of students with disabilities, those of minoritized backgrounds, and non-English speaking families to ensure the perspectives of all families are considered and students' needs are met.

Educating our children and youth should be viewed as a shared responsibility. Improving school and student success is dependent on collaboration among schools, community agencies/organizations, and families. When done well, the beneficial effects are seen both within and outside school walls. Genuine, sustained collaboration requires intentionality, shared commitment and accountability, mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities, and an equal voice for all parties. Opportunities for family engagement must be culturally and linguistically responsive and must account for family life realities that might impede engagement such as work schedules, childcare, and transportation. Thoughtful school–community collaboration should encompass both supplementary services provided during the school day and before- and after-school programs that provide academic support, more long-term intensive mental health services, and enrichment opportunities, such as sports or creative arts programs, job skills programs, peer mentoring, and service learning. Partnerships are most effective with clear

memoranda of understanding and an appreciation for the unique contribution each group makes to creating more seamless and comprehensive service delivery. This not only reduces gaps, redundancy, and conflict, it also reduces stress on families and supports their roles as primary caregivers and decision-makers regarding their children's development.

## 6. Create systems that support the recruitment and retention of properly trained and prepared professionals that reflect the diversity of the school community.

### *Key Policy Objectives:*

- Develop plans that seek to intentionally recruit and retain educators and other school leaders from historically underrepresented backgrounds (e.g., BIPOC, LGBTQI2-S).
- Provide funding and professional development opportunities (on and off campus) for all personnel.
- Provide discipline-specific professional development rather than one-size-fits-all training for staff at large.
- Promote efforts to improve staff wellness, prevent stress and burnout, build a strong sense of community and peer support among school staff, and encourage retention.
- Align state credentialing requirements with standards and best practices outlined by professional associations and organizations.
- Develop mentoring and induction programs for new and seasoned teachers, principals, and other school staff.
- Advance policies that create affordable pathways to graduate education, including respecialization efforts.
- Prioritize investments in graduate education programs to increase training opportunities for general and special education teachers, school psychologists, and other specialized instructional support personnel in which significant shortages exist.

School systems must ensure that (a) an adequate recruitment and retention plan for employees exists to ensure adequate personnel to meet the needs of the system; (b) all sources of funding, both public and private, are used and maximized to ensure the fiscal support necessary to provide

adequate services; (c) all employees have adequate technology, resources, and work space; and (d) employees have adequate personnel benefits necessary to support their work, including discipline-specific professional development (NASP, 2020b). Importantly, we must work toward increasing the diversity of our workforce to better align with the demographics of the students, families, and communities we serve. Partnerships with colleges of education and other discipline specific graduate education programs can help create a pipeline of properly trained educators to high needs districts. Importantly, minority serving institutions are an important pipeline for expanding and diversifying the educator workforce (Gasman et al., 2017).

## 7. Create accountability systems that use a broad set of measures to inform specific actions that improve school quality and provide an understanding of how specific outcomes were achieved.

### *Key Policy Objectives:*

- Ensure that accountability systems support equitable education opportunities by creating a system that identifies and corrects systemic reasons for chronic low performance among particular groups of students.
- Accountability systems should be oriented towards a culture of continuous improvement rather than the identification of deficits.
- Require the use of a broad set of measures for student and school success, district level accountability, improvements for teacher training and support, and accountability for how resources are allocated.
- Ensure that students in special education have appropriately challenging and ambitious IEP goals that address their specific needs and allow for inclusion in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible.

As stewards of our most important national resource, schools need to be accountable to the public—and especially to families—regarding the quality of instruction for all student groups and other services provided. The outcome measures used in accountability systems should move away

from measuring only academic outcomes and aim to reflect the range of services schools offer, as well as provide methods to understand the process towards school improvement (Bae, 2018). For example, measures of school quality, specifically school safety and climate, are essential parts of accountability systems. Outcomes should be valid and reliable for the entire student population, with consideration for those representing culturally and linguistically diverse groups, developmental level, geographic regions, and the communities in which the schools reside.

Efforts to broaden measures of school accountability are essential; yet these efforts need to consider the realities of resource disparities across contexts and the priorities from which systems are built. Accountability systems should address and mitigate bias in assessment measures and support voices and values from marginalized communities that have traditionally not been present during previous discussions on accountability.

Accountability systems must include goals and clear objectives aligned with each goal; failure to meet these goals should accompany specific action steps that will be taken to remedy the deficit based on where deficits lie and how those deficits came to be. School districts must move away from the use of student performance assessments on standardized tests to punish underperformance; rather, systems should identify and provide steps for intervention with low performing schools or groups of students using an orientation of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement requires coordination between schools, districts, and states to not only detail support actions available to individual schools but also understand the outcomes of that support. Use of comprehensive data in decision-making allows school leaders to channel resources into the most cost-effective and sustainable approaches that bolster student success in ways that are most appropriate for the school community.

## GOVERNMENT’S ROLE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

All children, regardless of where they live, should have access to a high-quality public education guided by the aforementioned policies. Local and state governments must construct educational systems that prepare all students for college or career while also meeting the unique needs of their schools and districts. However, at its core, education is a civil right, and the federal government can, and should, play a critical role in shaping the nation’s educational landscape by helping identify, evaluate, and promote promising and innovative practices; providing resources, guidance, and technical assistance for struggling schools and districts; and ensuring that a high-quality public education for all students remains a national priority. Specifically, all levels of government should make sufficient and consistent investments in public education. These investments should help states and districts implement or scale up effective school improvement initiatives, help underserved districts build capacity to implement evidence-based practices, and allow schools, districts, or states to implement and evaluate promising and innovative practices. Further, these investments should enable effective research and dissemination of best practices and emerging innovative practices. Federal and state governments are well positioned to provide leadership and guidance that supports the movement of federal, state, and local policies toward educational equity, evidence-based practices, and support for the development and promotion of exemplary and sustainable school improvement efforts.

## CONCLUSION

Maintaining a high-quality and equitable public education system in which the needs of all students are met is one of America’s greatest responsibilities and wisest investments in the nation’s future. NASP believes that education policy addressing the whole child using a collaborative systems approach, which is grounded in evidence-based and equitable practices, will empower teachers to teach and ensure that every child is ready and able to learn.

## ABOUT SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND NASP

The National Association of School Psychologists is the largest organization of school psychologists, representing more than 24,000 practitioners, university professors, researchers, and students in the United States and abroad. NASP promotes the healthy learning and development of children and youth through programs and services that prevent social, academic, and emotional problems.

The broad-based role of school psychologists, as well as the range of competencies they possess, is described in NASP’s *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services* (NASP, 2020b; see Figure 3). School psychologists have specialized training in school systems, learning, child development, and mental and behavioral health, as well as expertise in research-based strategies and outcomes evaluation. School psychologists work with parents and educators to:

- improve academic achievement;
- promote positive behavior and mental health;
- ensure equity and social justice for all students;
- support diverse learners;
- create safe, supportive school environments;
- strengthen family–school–community partnerships; and
- improve individual and school-wide assessment and accountability.

Services provided by school psychologists include assessment, prevention and intervention, individual and group counseling, crisis response, consultation, case management, progress monitoring, school-wide needs assessments, and program design and evaluation.

NASP programs and services include materials for families and professionals; advocacy on education and on mental and behavioral health issues; crisis response; and professional standards, development, and resources to promote best practices.

Figure 3. The NASP Practice Model



Comprised of 10 domains of practice and 6 organizational principles, the NASP Practice Model has a recommended ratio of 1 school psychologist to 500 students. Implementation of the model enables schools to make the most efficient, effective use of school psychologists' skills and expertise to ensure that teachers are empowered to teach and all children and youth are ready and able to learn.

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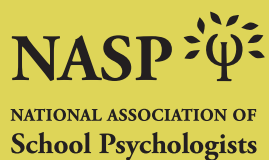
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