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# The School Psychologist: Researcher, Practitioner, Leader

## *What is a School Psychologist?*

### **What Does a School Psychologists Do?**

School psychologists work in schools and other settings to address the academic, emotional, behavioral, and social needs of children. They provide a wide variety of services, including counseling, assessment, consultation, direct intervention, program evaluation, and training (to name just a few). School psychology is an interactive practice: school psychologists work with teachers, counselors, principals, administrators, therapists, and parents to ensure children's success in school and other educational settings.

School psychologists are active, busy professionals, who serve in a variety of roles. A typical day of a school psychologist may include consulting with teachers about individual student concerns, working on a team to design a school-wide intervention program, assessing a child's academic performance or intellectual abilities, providing individual or group counseling, and working with families and other community organizations and members to enhance the educational experiences and quality of life of children.

### **What Does it Take to Be a School Psychologist?**

School psychologists are creative, exhibit good communication skills, and collaborate effectively with others. They rely on their comprehensive training in both psychology and education to address student needs. When solutions to children's needs aren't readily available, school psychologists can "think outside the box" to identify alternative options. Most importantly, school psychologists are committed to ensuring the success of every child in school and in life!

## *How Do You Become a School Psychologist?*

**As an undergraduate, gain experience in Psychology and/or Education.** Volunteer as a research assistant or find job opportunities that allow you to learn about and gain experience working with children of all ages, especially youth with exceptional needs (e.g., learning or developmental disabilities). To be a competitive applicant, you'll need to show that you have some knowledge of, initial experience with, and a strong desire to work with such youth.

**Choose the degree that you are interested in obtaining.** Consider if you're interested in pursuing a Master's/ Specialist, Psy.D., or Ph.D. level degree. Understand the opportunities that each will afford you and the different requirements for each level of training. Also, consider the time commitment you are willing to make (e.g., full or part-time and for how many years).

**Choose programs that fit your needs.** Master's and Specialist level programs can be accredited by the National Association of School Psychologists, and doctoral programs can be accredited by the American Psychological Association. Although attending a program that has such accreditation is highly recommended, there are also programs that are not accredited but may offer better financial aid or part-time (night/weekend) enrollment and training.

**Pay attention to program deadlines.** Different programs have different application deadlines. Most deadlines are January through March, but some are as early as November.

**Apply, enroll, and complete your degree.** Applying to several programs (e.g., 7-10) will increase your chances of being accepted. After you enroll in the program and complete your degree requirements, you'll be an official school psychologist!

# How are School Psychologists Different From Other Professionals?

## School Psychologists

- Work in K-12 schools, alternative education settings, private practice, universities, clinics, and hospitals
- Trained in psychological and educational assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies
- Evaluate students for specialized education-related services
- Collaborate with families, school staff, and community members to create goals and provide prevention and intervention services for promoting students' academic, behavioral, social, and emotional functioning
- Provide counseling to individuals and groups of students experiencing school-based difficulties
- Work with students at individual, family, group, classroom, and school-wide levels
- Involved in research (at the Ph.D. level)

## School Counselors

- Work in K-12 schools and alternative education settings
- Provide brief counseling to individuals and groups of students regarding academic, career, college readiness, and personal/social competencies
- Provide structured planning with individuals regarding academic, college, and career goals
- Collaborate with families and school staff to design academic programs that promote the success of students
- Often assist school psychologists with crisis management and intervention implementation and monitoring

## Clinical Psychologists

- Work in private practice, universities, community mental health centers, hospitals, and alternative schools
- May be contracted (part-time) by K-12 public schools
- Trained in psychological assessment, prevention, and intervention
- Little training in educational strategies
- May specialize in child/adolescent, family/relationships, forensic, school, health, neuropsychology, or specific disorders (e.g. anxiety or depression)
- Provide brief and long-term counseling/psychotherapy for a range of psychological disorders and problems
- Typically work with individuals, but may also work with families, groups, communities, and organizations
- Involved in research (at the Ph.D level)

## What is the Employment Outlook for School Psychologists?

**There has never been a better time to consider a career in school psychology! Here are 5 reasons why:**

1. Overall, the demand for school psychologists is high and has continued to rise during the past several decades.
2. The role of school psychologists is expanding and the presence of school psychologists is becoming increasingly recognized as a necessity by school administrators, which will only lead to an increased demand in the future.
3. Many school psychologists in both practice and research settings are currently retiring, resulting in an increased need for trainers and trained personnel.
4. Working within school systems or university settings provides a stable career, advancement opportunities, and health and retirement benefits.
5. There is high demand for part-time school psychologists, making it a career that can be pursued amidst other major life obligations.

## Where Can I Find More Information About School Psychology?

### Organizations' Websites

**National Association of School Psychologists**  
<http://nasponline.org/>

**American Psychological Association: School Psychology Division**  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~div16/index.html>

**Student Affiliates in School Psychology**  
<http://sasweb.info/>

**University of California, Berkeley**  
<http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/program/SP/html/profession.html>

### Other Helpful Resources

**School Psychology Brochure**  
[http://www.nasponline.org/about\\_sp/careerbrochure.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/about_sp/careerbrochure.pdf)

**Listing of School Psychology Graduate Programs**  
[http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/program/sp/html/sp\\_gradprograms.html](http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/program/sp/html/sp_gradprograms.html)

**Description of the Profession of School Psychology**  
[http://www.nasponline.org/about\\_sp/whatis.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/about_sp/whatis.aspx)

**Mental Health Services Provided by School Psychologists**  
<http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/mhbrochure.aspx>