

Scope of Practice and Role Statement for School Psychologists

Students in the School Psychology specialization in the Counseling Department at Saint Mary's College (SMC) earn a master's degree in Counseling and a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential in School Psychology. Our program emphasizes the role of the school psychologist as a catalyst for systems change and social justice in preK-12 schools, especially as we consider institutionalized forms of oppression in educational settings. The PPS credential is given by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), and allows the individual to provide services in public schools (K-12), early childhood and pre-K settings, and private and charter schools in California as a school psychologist.

Our program is aligned with the National Association of School Psychologists' Model for Comprehensive and Integrated Psychological Services, which emphasizes the following 10 domains of practice:

- ❖ *Data-based decision making and accountability*, including knowledge of varied methods of psychological and educational assessment, data collection strategies, and evaluation of response to services and programs;
- ❖ *Consultation and collaboration*, including the facilitation of changes to instructional approaches and mental health supports at individual, classroom, and systems levels in consultation with teachers, administrators, and families;
- ❖ *Interventions and instructional supports to develop academic skills*, including the application of knowledge of biological, cultural, and social influences on academic skills, cognition, and development;
- ❖ *Interventions and mental health services to develop social, emotional, and life skills*, including knowledge of evidence-based strategies that promote social-emotional functioning and mental health;
- ❖ *School-wide practices to promote learning*, including knowledge of school systems, structures, and organization to promote positive academic and mental health outcomes school-wide;
- ❖ *Preventive and responsive services*, including knowledge of research and principles related to resiliency in mental health and learning and response to crises;
- ❖ *Family-school collaboration services*, including knowledge of principles and research related to family systems, strengths, needs, culture and methods to develop effective partnerships between families, schools, and community agencies;
- ❖ *Diversity and development in learning*, including knowledge of individual differences, abilities, disabilities, and other diverse characteristics;
- ❖ *Research and program evaluation*, including knowledge of research design, statistics, measurement, varied data collection and analysis techniques, and program evaluation methods;
- ❖ *Legal, ethical and professional practice* relevant to the field of school psychology, including the federal law and regulations, case law, and state statutes and regulations that delineate the principles for meeting the educational needs of all children (Armistead & Smallwood, 2014; NASP, 2010).

School psychologists provide direct counseling support and interventions to students, consult with teachers, administrators, families, and other school-based mental health professions (i.e., school counselors, school social workers) to improve academic achievement, promote positive behavior and mental health, create safe, positive school climates, strengthen family-school partnerships, and improve school-wide assessment and accountability (Armistead & Smallwood, 2014). School psychologists also receive specialized training in developmental psychopathology within cultural contexts, psychoeducational assessment, and diagnosis of neurodevelopmental disorders in children, as well as the provision of special education services to children with disabilities. Although school psychologists are familiar with and trained in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – V (DSM-V)*, school psychologists conduct psychoeducational assessments and make recommendations for eligibility

of disabilities as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and state education codes; therefore, the diagnoses that school psychologists make are educational, not medical (Jacob, Decker, & Lugg, 2016). However, school psychologists must be trained in DSM-V diagnoses in order to integrate diagnostic information from other professionals and conduct diagnostic assessments that inform educational decisions regarding the need for and delivery of special education services (Harrison & Thomas, 2014). Some examples of common childhood disorders that school psychologists are trained to diagnose in relation to their impact on the child in the school setting include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and impulse control disorders (Harrison & Thomas, 2014). School psychologists generally, and at SMC specifically, are trained in the impacts of trauma on child development, over- and misdiagnosis of children of color, and the relationship between exclusionary school discipline practices to the school-to-prison pipeline as they consider their roles in creating trauma-informed schools (Hess, Pejic, & Castejon, 2014; NASP, 2016).

The vast majority of school psychologists work in preK-12 schools, but they also provide services in a variety of other settings, such as private schools, preschools, health centers, school-based health and mental health centers, community-based day treatment or residential clinics and hospitals, and juvenile justice programs (NASP, 2014). The PPS credential allows one to provide contract services in schools; however, to practice outside of schools, one must apply through the California Board of Behavioral Sciences or the California Board of Psychology (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2001). School psychologists are eligible to become Licensed Education Psychologists (LEPs) through the California Board of Behavioral Sciences after completing 2 years of full-time work as a credentialed school psychologist. LEPs' scope of practice includes providing diagnoses of psychological disorders related to academic learning processes; providing psychological counseling for individuals, groups and families; developing treatment programs and strategies to address problems of adjustment; coordinating intervention strategies for management of individual crises; and consulting with other educators and parents on issues of social development and behavioral and academic difficulties (California Board of Behavioral Sciences, 2011). School Psychologists can have master's level, specialist-level, and doctoral-level degrees, which increase in required semester hours and accrued internship hours depending on the degree level (NASP, 2017). SMC offers a specialist-level degree (Master of Arts) that requires 450 practicum hours, and 1200 internship hours.

Historically, school psychologists have been stereotyped as only providing psychoeducational assessment. However, school psychologists' roles have been expanding for decades, reflecting a paradigm shift from an emphasis on assessment, diagnosis, and prescriptions for classifications to one based on outcomes and benefits to all children and families within a multi-tiered system of support that emphasizes prevention, early identification and treatment, and intensive evidence-based interventions (Ysseldyke & Reschly, 2014). This shift is a reflection of the current political climate, public concern regarding the effectiveness of schools, and educational policies that emphasize outcomes and evidence-based practice (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Representative national organizations, including NASP and the American Psychological Association (APA), have supported this paradigm shift, resulting in the development of the *NASP Blueprints* for training and practice in school psychology in the 1990s and the NASP practice model in 2010 (NASP, 2010). As a result, school psychologists have grown in number by 220% over the past 30 years, increasing the national ratio of students to school psychologists from 4,000:1 to 1,500:1 (Ysseldyke & Reschly, 2014). There remains, however, a shortage of school psychologists nationwide, and in California especially, and NASP actually recommends a ratio of 500-700:1 students to school psychologists (NASP, 2010). Nonetheless, the expansion of the role of the school psychologist and corresponding paradigm shift in service delivery has made this an exciting time for school psychologists to apply their knowledge in psychology and education to positively impact children, families, and schools.

References

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