



# Policy Platform

## Colorado Society of School Psychologists (CSSP) Public Policy and Legislative Platform

### Introduction

The mission of CSSP is to strengthen the effectiveness of school psychologists in addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of children and youth in Colorado. We believe that school psychologists have a unique niche in the educational process. We are grounded in research-based educational and psychological practice and collaboration skills that allow us to provide the leadership necessary for the educational change process. CSSP endorses the comprehensive role of a school psychologist as outlined within the [National Association of School Psychologists \(NASP\) Practice Model](#).

CSSP is a non-partisan, statewide organization committed to advocating for research-based policies and practices that ensure children's safety, well-being, and ability at home, at school, and throughout life. The CSSP Government and Professional Relations (GPR) committee, in collaboration with the CSSP board, actively monitors legislation in alignment with our mission and belief statement. The purpose of this document is to guide CSSP's legislative agenda. Based on the priorities listed below, CSSP will monitor, support, or oppose relevant legislation as is deemed necessary by the GPR committee and board when appropriate. Current identified priorities, as outlined below, include: Student and School Safety, School Psychologist Shortages, Universal Prevention and Tiered Intervention Services, and Expanding Comprehensive Mental Health Services.

### I. Promote Student and School Safety, Increase Crisis Response Efforts, and Reduce School Violence

School safety is a complex issue that requires comprehensive prevention, intervention, and postvention planning. To ensure our students experience positive and safe learning environments, it is essential that they feel accepted and included, supported socially, emotionally, and behaviorally, and are treated using equitable practices that are not overly punitive. To achieve this, schools must have well-trained staff that are prepared to prevent and respond to crisis using research-based practices, policies, and procedures.

- Advance state legislation, regulation, and other policy platforms that promote the use of effective, positive school discipline that:
  - (a) function in concert with efforts to address school safety and climate;
  - (b) are not overly punitive (e.g., zero tolerance);
  - (c) are clear, consistent, and equitable;

- (d) teach and reinforce positive behaviors;
- (e) are not discriminatory nor result in the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline with certain populations; and
- (f) do not contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Support policies that prohibit school resource officers (SROs) and other school-based law enforcement from having any role in student discipline.
- Support blended, flexible use of funding streams in education and mental health services at the state and local levels to support effective school safety.
- Promote comprehensive school safety efforts that emphasize both physical and psychological safety.
- Reject efforts to overly harden schools or require physical security measures that do not increase actual or perceived safety.
- Support efforts that promote a comprehensive, whole-school approach to effective school safety through integration of school climate, effective discipline, social–emotional learning, positive behavior, mental health, and academics through a Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) and problem-solving model.
- Ensure school mental health services, including social–emotional learning, mental wellness, resilience, and positive connections between students and adults, are an essential component of any comprehensive school safety effort.
- Support investments in response and recovery plans in the event the unpreventable occurs.
- Prohibit the use of seclusion, chemical restraints, and mechanical restraints in the school environment and support efforts to restrict the use of physical restraint to instances when there is a threat of imminent danger to students and/or staff.
- Work with relevant state agencies and community organizations to promote policy and best practices that support evidence-based threat assessment policy and practice; mental health evaluations and re-entry plans, including ongoing mental and behavioral health support for students identified as being of imminent threat to themselves or others; and enhanced student access to mental health supports in schools and communities.
- Support legislation (e.g., Red Flag Laws) that seeks to prevent people who are of an immediate threat or danger to themselves or others from having access to firearms.
- Support continued funding for programs that promote student and school safety and crisis response, such as Safe 2 Tell, the School Safety Resource Center, etc.
- CSSP is aligned with the NASP in aspiring to protect children from gun violence by encouraging and supporting solutions that create safer, healthier schools, homes and communities by supporting efforts that:
  - Reject efforts to abolish Gun Free School Zones.
  - Support efforts to rigorously enforce existing gun laws.
  - Advance legislation that requires comprehensive background checks for all gun purchases and ban weapons that can cause mass destruction in a short time period.

- Reject legislation that seek to allow anyone other than a commissioned school resource officer (SRO) or other sworn law enforcement official to be armed on school grounds.
- Support efforts and investments to expand the availability of scientific research about gun violence.
- Support efforts that require evidence-based suicide prevention training for school staff and evidence-based, developmentally appropriate suicide prevention programming for students.
- Support increased investment in early intervention and prevention programming that will reduce the number of students experiencing psychological and social risk factors for suicide.
- Support funding for research and development of evidence-based suicide prevention programming for diverse populations.

## **II. Address Statewide School Psychology Shortages**

School Psychologists are uniquely trained educational professionals that support school systems, communities, staff, families, and students through a whole-child lens. As more and more policies require this unique set of skills (e.g. evidence of MTSS interventions before considering a child eligible for special education services), school psychologists play a vital role in providing the expertise needed to best serve the whole child as well as ensure fidelity in compliance with state and federal laws. Currently, there are shortages of school psychologists across the state of Colorado, both due to insufficient training opportunities as well as insufficient funding, specifically for school psychologists in districts and schools. CSSP will support legislative action that:

- Encourages the development of high quality NASP and/or APA-approved graduate preparation programs in Colorado.
- Promotes awareness of the school psychology profession and make the choice to apply for programs more attractive.
- Implements incentive programs to promote supervision of school psychologists throughout all phases of their career.
- Provides incentives and funding for working in high vacancy areas (particularly in rural areas of Colorado).
- Increases statewide retention efforts.
- Includes school psychologists in state proposed retention and/or recruitment efforts for educators and/or mental health providers.
- Increases the number of approved internships and qualified internship supervisors (particularly for doctoral candidates).
- Increases racial-ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the field.

## **III. Identify At-Risk Youth and Increase Access to Universal and Tiered Prevention Programs**

Prevention programs include screening procedures, universal prevention, and tiered intervention, such as MTSS. When implemented with fidelity, such programs are evidence-based and can be implemented at the universal, targeted, and individualized levels of intervention. School psychologists receive comprehensive training in both academic and

behavioral prevention programming and interventions, making them particularly well suited for supporting in the identification of at-risk youth through tiered intervention systems. Prevention programs and tiered intervention practices allow school psychologists to identify at risk youth and intervene as early as possible so that barriers to learning and social emotional development are not overlooked. CSSP supports legislation that:

- Continues the existing efforts of the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and other relevant agencies to designate resources to help implement evidence-based, school-wide policies and practices that reduce bullying, harassment, violence, and discrimination for all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender (including identification and expression), sexual orientation, disability status, language proficiency or immigration status.
- Promotes legislation/regulation that improves access to a comprehensive, rigorous, high-quality, and well-rounded curriculum that includes evidence-based literacy and mathematics instruction.
- Ensures that school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel are explicitly mentioned in legislation and other specific grant programs intended to address literacy, social–emotional learning, school climate, and other factors that promote student learning.
- Advances legislation that increases access to comprehensive school and community mental health services and reduces disparities in mental health service delivery, especially among underserved populations.
- Supports investments to help schools and school districts implement evidence-based universal screening for mental and behavioral health concerns.
- Promotes efforts to implement Mental Health First Aid and other relevant professional development for educators to identify students with potential mental health concerns and refer them to appropriate school-employed mental health service providers and facilitate referrals to appropriate community-based service providers to support a comprehensive continuum of care.
- Supports legislation that fosters coordination and collaboration between school and community mental health professionals.
- Advances efforts to increase funding to support evidence-based, trauma-informed practices in schools.
- Supports investments in training, planning, and professional development to encompass ongoing prevention and early intervention efforts.
- Advances efforts to provide evidence-based training that improves outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse populations within universal and tiered intervention services.
- Directs the CDE and other relevant state agencies to provide incentives, guidance, and technical assistance for school districts to prioritize an MTSS framework that includes both academic and mental and behavioral health services (including trauma-informed practices). This guidance should emphasize the importance of access to school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors) who can provide a comprehensive range of services within the school context, ranging from direct individual-level services to systems-level prevention and intervention services

- Supports efforts to ensure that students with disabilities are educated within the least restrictive environment as is appropriate for their specific needs.
- Ensures that any legislation/regulation intended to improve student outcomes promotes the use of evidence-based methods for the early identification of students with disabilities, including response to intervention within a multitiered system of support, while discouraging or not allowing methods that may produce biased or inaccurate results (e.g., ability–achievement discrepancy method of identifying students with a learning disability).

#### **IV. Expand Access to Comprehensive Mental Health Support Services**

Access to comprehensive mental health support services is essential to meeting the objectives above. Yet many students still do not have equitable access to adequate mental health services, particularly preschool-aged children, students of color, and students attending school in rural areas. Issues tied to funding, discipline practices, and the absence of publicly funded preschool limit students' access to comprehensive mental health supports. To address this issue, CSSP will advocate for policies that:

- Promote Comprehensive Medicaid Billing that:
  - Advocates for the inclusion of all state licensed school psychologists to have the ability to bill Medicaid.
  - Protects the existing structure of Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program to ensure that low income children have access to comprehensive healthcare that includes mental and behavioral health.
- Increase Access to Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services that:
  - Support the transition between Part C and Part B services.
  - Expand the presence of school psychologists within early childhood settings and ensure comprehensive service delivery.
  - Improve developmentally appropriate discipline practices, and reduce inequities in exclusionary discipline practices within early childhood settings.
  - Expand the role of school psychologists within Child Find teams.
  - Ensure school psychologists are properly recognized as qualified providers of mental and behavioral health within early childhood settings.
  - Support increased investment in early intervention and prevention programming that will reduce the number of students identified with disabilities, thus saving later resources and optimizing student outcomes.
- Promote Inclusive, Safe, and Equitable Access for all Children by:
  - Advancing legislation that increases access to comprehensive school and community mental health services and reducing disparities in mental health service delivery, especially among underserved populations.
  - Opposing efforts that seek to systematically discriminate against children or youth on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identification, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability status, language proficiency, or immigration status.

- o Supporting efforts to ensure a stable education for homeless youth and children in foster care.
- o Supporting evidence-based efforts to prevent child abuse and human trafficking and provide trauma-informed and gender-responsive care to victims.
- o Supporting funding for high-quality, evidence-based, and job-embedded professional development for educators, specialized instructional support personnel, and other relevant staff that reduce inequities in access to high quality education including but not limited to positive discipline strategies and culturally responsive teaching practices.
- o Rejecting efforts that seek to increase zero tolerance policies and the use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions and expulsions).