



# Comparison Between Rural and Urban School Psychologists' Actual and Preferred Roles: Examining the Reasons for Change



Krystle Kaifesh M.S.E. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

## Introduction

- Field of school psychology is shifting towards response to intervention, prevention, and evidence-based problem solving. Changes stem from federal and state policies (i.e. NCLB, IDEA, SLD criteria) and emphasize accountability, high-stakes testing, evidence-based practice, and integration and consistency between general and special education.
- Graduate training and workshops use *Blueprint III* to guide practice and school psychologists are being expected to go beyond psychometric testing for special education including using direct intervention, indirect consultation, analyzing data, and evaluating programs.
- School psychologists have expressed a desire to move into roles beyond assessment since the 1980s and research has shown that practitioners spend the majority of their time conducting assessments. Practitioners report a interest in decreasing the amount of time spent in assessment to below 50% and increasing their time spent in other roles such as intervention, prevention services, and team collaboration.
- School psychologists estimated they spent 16% of their time engaged in consultative roles and would like to spend more time consulting with teachers, parents, and principals.
- Research has found that practitioners who complete fewer assessments were more likely to be asked to develop prevention programs for school violence and behavioral issues.
- School psychologists want to increase the amount of time spent in counseling students, and studies have shown students who attend counseling perform better on academic tests.
- Assessing motivation and internalizing disorders is linked to academic and behavioral performance in schools and practitioners in middle and high schools are receiving more referrals related to motivation.
- A national sample of school psychologists in various school settings (rural, urban, suburban) engaged in similar roles and spent similar amounts of time in evaluations, staffing, placements, and reevaluations in the 1990s. A similar study in 2002 found school psychologists in rural schools performing more special education evaluations and fewer consultations compared to practitioners working in urban and suburban schools.
- School psychologists generally report high rates of job satisfaction on the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), but are dissatisfied with opportunities for advancement and school system policies and practices.
- Wisconsin public schools are attempting to make a December 1, 2013 deadline for implementing a response to intervention system for identifying specific learning disability mandated by Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This mandate is dramatically changing the face of Wisconsin schools and school psychologists' roles are evolving regardless of school setting (rural, urban, or suburban).
- First, this study attempts to examine the amount of time Wisconsin school psychologists spend in 7 roles associated with school psychology and the amount of time the practitioners believe they should be spending in those roles.
- Second, this study will compare the amount of time spent in each role across school settings (rural, urban, and suburban).
- Third, this study is the first to attempt to identify the reasons for practitioners beliefs that the amount of time spent in their roles should increase or decrease.
- Finally, this study will compare job satisfaction ratings across school settings.

## Methods

- Sample from a population of 1,552 Wisconsin school psychologists selected from 2011-2012 directory provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website.
- Electronic survey created by Qualtrics, an online survey program.
- Seven roles defined similar to NASP-funded national survey of school psychologists (Reschly et al., 1987):
  1. Psychoeducational Assessment
  2. Direct Intervention
  3. Consultation
  4. Counseling
  5. Systems/Organizational
  6. Preventative Services
  7. Research/Evaluation
- Estimate the of hours per typical week spent in specific roles, and estimate the hours per typical week *believed should be* spent in specific roles.
- Respondents endorse specific reasons for the change in hours (i.e. case load, graduate training, professional affiliation, evidence-based practice, number of referrals, school district policy, federal policies, personal interest, and/or other).
- Modified Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) short form to obtain information about level of satisfaction with school psychology profession.
- Respondents complete 20 questions with a 4-point rating scale (i.e. very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied) with a higher score indicating higher level of job satisfaction.
- Postcards will be mailed out with information about the study and will provide the link to the electronic survey.
- Reminder postcards will be sent out 2 weeks later and survey will be open for 6 weeks.

## Results (Anticipated)

Table 1. Comparison of Actual and Preferred Hours by Role

	Psychoeducational Assessment	Direct Intervention	Consultation
<b>Actual</b>	↑	↓	↓
<b>Preferred</b>	↓	↑	↑
	Counseling	Systems/Organization	
<b>Actual</b>	↓	↓	
<b>Preferred</b>	↑	↑	
	Prevention	Research/Evaluation	
<b>Actual</b>	↓	↓	
<b>Preferred</b>	↑	↑	

Table 2. School Setting and General Job Satisfaction

1. Rural
2. Suburban
3. Urban

Table 3. Roles Ranked by Amount of Time

1. Psychoeducational Assessment	5. Prevention
2. Direct Intervention	6. Systems/Organization
3. Consultation	7. Research/Evaluation

Table 4. School Setting and Amount of Time in Psychoeducational Assessment

1. Urban
2. Rural
3. Suburban

Table 5. Reasons for Change

1. Number of Referrals	5. Graduate Training
2. Case Load	6. Personal Interest
3. School District Policy	7. Evidence-Based Practice
4. Federal Policy	8. Professional Affiliation

## Implications

- Wisconsin mandates requiring a response to intervention system by December 1, 2013 are expected to change the role of school psychologists to include more data analysis, intervention implementation, and program evaluation. This data may be used as a reference for the type of roles Wisconsin practitioners are engaged in before the mandate deadline.
- Additional studies may examine the role of Wisconsin practitioners after the mandate deadline.
- Results about reasons for change may provide awareness about progress in Wisconsin and can help understand mechanisms for change.
- Potential findings about general job satisfaction are expected to add to the current research describing school psychologists as mostly satisfied with their job and job related factors.

## Acknowledgement

Thank you to UWEC ORSP for approving this prospective study and to Dr. Jeff Goodman for his consultation and advice regarding this project.