

APA – Model Licensure Act – The Impact on California School Psychologists BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE August 2007

School psychologists provide critical services that support the mental health and academic achievement of all children. Mental health is integral to success in school and life. School psychologists are specially trained to implement prevention activities and to provide interventions for mental health and learning issues at the individual, group, and school-wide levels. This can include academic and behavioral interventions, resilience and wellness promotion, counseling, consultation with parents and teachers, case management, assessment, progress monitoring, as well as crisis prevention and intervention. Today there is significant recognition within the education and health communities of the importance of having school-employed professionals like school psychologists to provide these services in order to meet the growing needs of students.

The current APA model act serves the public interest by recognizing a title exemption for school psychologists. School psychologists have been credentialed in California for nearly 60 years, long before the establishment of licensure for psychologists. The exemption within APA's model act is a recognition of school psychologists' long history of contributing to schools and the field of education, and as a specialty area within psychology. Many recognizable benefits have resulted from the title exemption for school psychologists. Over the years, the number of highly trained school psychologists has increased to nearly 5,000 in California; 35,000 in the United States. This has directly improved the ability of schools to support academic and social-emotional success for all students, and has increased access to desperately needed services for children and families.

Removing the exemption could undermine services to children and families at a time of growing need. There is no benefit to the public, to students and families, schools, or to the profession of psychology to change this exemption for school psychologists credentialed by state education agencies, particularly at a time when there are shortages of school psychologists nationally. Shortages are severe in some under-resourced urban and rural school settings. The shortages are even more critical given a significant unmet need for individuals of minority and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to serve in school settings. Adding barriers to these already challenging situations would not serve the public interest and could result in further shortages of school psychologists in school settings. The potential consequences would have a negative impact on important services for children and families.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) has stringent standards for the graduate education and state credentialing of school psychologists. State standards promote effective services by requiring well-trained school psychologists in schools. Credentialing practices by the CTC ensures that highly qualified school psychologists are employed by schools and provide needed services to children. These credentialing practices are used for all school personnel, which leads to an alignment of standards.

Proposed language changes could cause unnecessary confusion and conflict with well-established state laws and state department of education codes. Maintaining the current exemption within the APA model act would prevent potential conflicts between the California Department of Education, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the Board of Behavioral Sciences and the State Board of Psychology. For example, California's unique system allows for Licensed Educational Psychologists to establish private practices. These are school psychologists who are licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences. Clinical psychologists – practicing psychologists with doctoral degrees, however, are licensed by the Board of Psychology, an entirely different agency. And that is just one conflict that would have to be resolved by state law if the Legislature decides to endorse the proposed changes to the model act. The public is well protected and services to children and families in schools are strengthened by current California state laws and codes that regulate the practice and credentialing of school psychologists. The potential conflict with state school code provisions for services provided within public schools has no benefit and could distract public officials, policymakers and professional leaders from other, more important matters related to providing needed services and resources to children, families, and schools.