

2023 – 2024 Legislative Platform

The mission of the California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) is to provide high quality educational and leadership programs that maintain high standards of practice for school psychologists through legislative advocacy, professional development, communications, publications, ethics guidelines, and direct services to members, to enable the growth and development of the profession, and to ensure safe, healthy, and successful outcomes for the children, schools and communities we serve.

The following legislative priorities have been established to further the CASP mission in the 2023 – 2024 legislative session.

Reduce the shortage of school psychologists by increasing school psychology graduate programs and reducing barriers to Out of State School Psychology Interns.

There is a critical shortage of school psychologists in California. While NASP recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 – 750 students, California’s average continues to hover around 1 per 1,000 students – with some schools as low as 1 school psychologist for 3,000 students. CASP will engage key stakeholders in the Governor’s Office, state legislature, Department of Education, Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), and the public to ensure that there is awareness of the School Psychologist shortage and the barriers that exist. Additionally, CASP will work with institutions of higher education to expand training for school psychology and other service credentials, including addressing faculty shortages. CASP will advocate for programs that ensure that school psychology students receive the highest quality training possible. California school psychology programs should strive to meet all professional standards and obtain accreditation by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) in addition to the CTC. CASP will also work with the CTC and Legislature to break down the barriers that currently exist when an out of state trained School Psychology Intern would like to complete their Internship or obtain a credential in California.

To build capacity and address the demand for school-based mental health providers, CASP recommends that policymakers 1) Provide additional fellowships and stipends to support master’s, specialist, and doctoral students in school psychology programs to grow the capacity and infrastructure of credential programs. Such fellowships are especially important to our efforts to diversify the field so that it reflects California’s diverse student population; and 2) Provide funding for paid school psychology internships at the school district level, particularly in disadvantaged and rural school districts. Paid internships are also important to our efforts to attract and retain a more diverse workforce.

Ensure appropriate psychological, social-emotional, and mental health services in the school setting, including universal school-wide prevention and education such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) for students in need of academic, behavioral, and social- emotional interventions and that these supports are provided by appropriately qualified school-based mental health practitioners.

Twenty percent of school-age youth experience a mental health disorder during their K-12 education. And a 2019 report on America’s Health Rankings found that teen suicides among California youth between the ages of 15 and 19 had increased 34% over the past three years, significantly higher than the national increase of 25%. The Covid-19

pandemic, racial injustice, and economic uncertainty have only exacerbated this trend. In contrast, less than one percent of pupils are identified to receive special education and related services under the classification of Emotional Disturbance. These numbers expose a need for school-based prevention and intervention for behavioral health services. Policymakers must continue to provide resources to develop and strengthen programs that emphasize prevention and early intervention, within a multi-tiered framework of student support that includes school-wide positive behavioral interventions and support, restorative justice, social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practice, and cultural competency. In addition, local districts must have the resources and personnel to provide crisis intervention and counseling should a violent or tragic event occur on or off campus. School psychologists are the frontline mental health professionals for the students of California. Students learn best in a safe, responsive, and predictable school environment where they feel that adults care about them. Factors such as poverty, family and community violence, substance abuse, and lack of access to wellness promotion and health/mental health treatment can increase stresses on children, families, and teachers. When students think of harming themselves or others, school psychologists are there to work with administrators, other support staff, parents, and community members to provide assessment, early intervention, crisis counseling, and referral to necessary treatment.

Legislation should reflect the provision of appropriate social-emotional and mental health services in schools by trained professionals including school psychologists. It should also ensure adequate funding and administrative support for school psychologists to engage in school-psychologist specific professional development activities relating to student mental and behavioral health. “It is now becoming widely recognized that social and emotional learning in schools can be as important as or even more important than cognitive gains in explaining important developmental and life outcomes” (Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand and Zander. February 2015. *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning*. p. 3). Students need both academic and social-emotional-behavioral education and supports.

Ensure adequate funding for K-12 education, special education and related services, and evidence-based interventions that prepare students for their own path in life including college and career readiness.

High expectations, academic rigor, and safe, supportive school environments require adequate funding of public school programs and personnel to meet students’ diverse needs, especially those with special needs and those who face greater challenges. School environments and interventions that foster students’ engagement in learning contribute to more positive classroom environments, increase the time students are engaged in learning, and increase school attendance and graduation rates. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) are based upon comprehensive approaches that recognize the need to address the range of factors that promote students’ learning and development. Funding for high-quality and engaging Pre-K-12 academic programs with caring teachers and staff should be part of the effort to ensure that students have access to a variety of pathways for learning and career and college readiness opportunities.

CASP is committed to supporting the State Content Standards which will aid students as they prepare for college, career, and life. CASP supports adequate funding for both general and special education programs run by school districts and County Offices of Education. Additionally, CASP supports improving coordination and expansion of access to available federal funds through the Medi-Cal Local Educational Agency Billing Option Program, the School-based Medi-Cal Administrative Activities Program, and the federal Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefits, and the soon-to-be-implemented All-Payer fee schedule. CASP believes there is a need to maintain separate special education funding, and that special education dollars should not be rolled into the Local Control Funding Formula. CASP further believes that funding for new behavioral health professions, such as wellness coaches and promotores, must not detract from funding for existing positions.

Achieve equity and access to high quality educational programs for all students; reduce disproportionality in discipline practices and special education identification and placement.

CASP is committed to providing equity in education and opportunity for all students. As such, CASP is a strong advocate for fair and equitable discipline practices in schools to reduce the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of minority youth. Multi-tiered systems of support, including school-wide practices like Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices have been shown to improve student conduct, reduce discipline events, and increase respectful treatment of all students. “Improving student academic and behavior outcomes is about ensuring all students have access to the most effective and accurately implemented instructional and behavioral practices and interventions possible” (www.pbis.org). School-Wide PBIS and restorative practices each provide an operational framework and a set of sustainable school-wide practices for achieving positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students. CASP actively advocates for equity and social justice in educating all students.

Another of the most persistent and controversial issues in education is the over-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education programs. Unfortunately, geographic and economic factors are barriers for some students, especially students of color and English Learners, in accessing the best-trained teachers and schools with high academic achievement, due to inequitable resource allocation. CASP encourages the State to fund measures to improve access to an academically rigorous education and social-emotional supports for students in high-poverty schools. School psychologists in California are also concerned about the inequitable access to comprehensive and research-based assessment processes for African American students referred for special education evaluation. CASP supports culturally competent education and training for school psychologists, and the use of appropriately normed and researched assessment methods for all students.

Ensure equitable school safety and crisis management practices that are informed by action research, federal guidance, and rooted in psychological safety.

Threats to student and staff safety in schools across the nation point to the continued need for policies and actions that promote positive and safe school climates and social emotional wellbeing for all students. Every student deserves a safe school in which to learn. School district personnel are more aware than ever of the need to maintain a safe environment that is conducive to learning.

School psychologists play a critical role in creating safe and supportive learning environments that promote student learning and are critical members of school crisis prevention and response teams. They understand how comprehensive school safety is established when schools combine reasonable physical security measures (visitor check in procedures, locked doors) with efforts to enhance school climate, improve student engagement, foster respectful and trusting relationships among students and staff, and support overall student success.

CASP supports expanding access to school-based mental health supports by ensuring adequate staffing levels in terms of school-employed mental health professionals who are trained to infuse prevention and intervention services into the learning process and to help integrate services provided through school-community partnerships into existing school programs.

Policymakers must continue to provide resources to develop and strengthen programs that emphasize ongoing positive school climate and safety efforts with crisis prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery to ensure that school safety planning engages all stakeholders, is relevant to the school context, and incorporates equitable procedures including multidisciplinary threat assessment and intervention teams who are highly trained.