

## Supervision in School Psychology

Supervision has been called the “signature pedagogy” of psychology (Barnett, Cornish, Goodyear, & Lichtenberg, 2007) and presents significant opportunities for learning and skill enhancement. NASP recognizes supervision as a distinct professional competency area consisting of a specific set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Harvey & Struzziero, 2008; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2014). Supervisors should be knowledgeable about the science of supervision and skillful in its practice, as well as competent and experienced in the delivery of school psychological services, in order to: (a) promote adherence to high professional and ethical standards, (b) ensure the delivery of appropriate, evidence-based services to children and youth, and (c) provide opportunities for constructive reflection and evaluation.

NASP strongly promotes the supervision of school psychologists by school psychologists at all levels of practice (i.e., trainee, early career, and expert) as a means of ensuring effective practices to support the educational attainment of all children. School psychologists should have access to clinical supervision throughout their careers, particularly when engaging in new areas and modalities of practice. Although requiring less frequent, more indirect supervision, school psychologists at the proficient and expert levels continue to engage in the supervision process in order to help maintain objectivity, to better choose appropriate methods of child support and advocacy, and to continually develop and enhance skills. Additionally, expert and proficient school psychologists are likely to supervise interns or other school psychologists, which requires the development of their clinical supervisory skills.

Specifically, the NASP *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services* (NASP Practice Model; 2010a), which includes a unified set of national principles to guide professional practice and services, delineates that supervision be provided through an ongoing, positive, systematic, collaborative process between the school psychologist and a school psychology supervisor or another designated school psychologist colleague. Unfortunately, by some reports (Curtis, Castillo, & Gelley, 2012), only 29% of credentialed school psychologists receive the type of supervision described in the NASP Practice Model. This position statement reflects supervision in school-based settings and the principles included in the NASP Practice Model—that supervisors have valid credentials, supervision methods match the developmental level of the supervisee, time is allowed for supervision and mentoring, a coordinated plan to evaluate school psychological services is implemented, and practica and internship experiences occur under conditions of appropriate supervision.

### DEFINITION AND GOALS OF SUPERVISION

McIntosh and Phelps (2000) defined supervision in school psychology as follows:

Supervision is an interpersonal interaction between two or more individuals for the purposes of sharing knowledge, assessing professional competencies, and providing objective feedback with the

terminal goals of developing new competencies, facilitating effective delivery of psychological services, and maintaining professional competencies. (pp. 33–34)

Supervision can take many forms. Supervision in school psychology includes both *administrative* and *clinical* supervision. Clinical supervision can be distinguished from administrative supervision with the former focused on developing the professional skills of the supervisee and ensuring the welfare of their clients. Administrative supervision centers on the functioning of the service unit. This includes personnel issues and legal, contractual, and organizational practices. However, the primary focus of this position statement and the burgeoning literature on supervisory competencies centers on clinical supervision. Clinical supervision involves preprofessional preparation, professional development of credentialed school psychologists, guidance for professional activities, and oversight to ensure client welfare and the integrity of the profession.

The central goals of clinical supervision include: (a) promoting effective growth and exemplary professional practice across all the roles and functions of school psychologists, (b) protecting the welfare of all clients, (c) safeguarding the profession through monitoring and gatekeeping, (d) empowering supervisees to develop self-monitoring skills, (e) promoting self-care, and (f) preparing for the supervisee’s future role as a supervisor (Simon & Swerdlik, 2017).

Clinical supervision requires specific training, knowledge, and competencies in the practice of supervision, in addition to strong professional skills across the practice domains. School psychology supervisors are responsible for supporting practices consistent with professional standards (NASP, 2010a) and ethical codes (NASP, 2010b). Supervisors promote professional development to improve and update skills (NASP, 2010d) and to ensure that systems of personnel evaluation are consistent with professional standards (NASP 2010a).

## **PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

NASP has adopted standards of service delivery including standards for supervision of trainees (NASP, 2014), new school psychologists, and experienced practitioners. These standards should guide service units in their supervision of school psychologists (see Skalski et al., 2015). As delineated in NASP Organizational Principle 5, Supervision and Mentoring (NASP, 2010a, p.11), school psychological service units should ensure supervision of all levels of personnel in order to “ensure the provision of effective and accountable services.”

### **Qualification and responsibilities of supervisors**

Clinical supervision is only provided by a licensed/certified school psychologist or by an individual holding an equivalent title (e.g., Nationally Certified School Psychologist [NCSP], school psychology specialist). Individuals who do not hold a school psychologist credential (i.e., principals, special education directors who are not school psychologists) should only provide administrative supervision. Supervisors must have a valid state school psychologist credential for the setting in which they are employed and have a minimum of 3 years of full-time experience as practicing school psychologists. Education and experience in the supervision of school personnel are essential (American Psychological Association, 2015; NASP, 2014). Consistent with the intent of the NASP *Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* (III.3.4), when supervision takes place in a setting other than public

schools, provision of supervision could be delivered by an individual holding the appropriate state psychology credential for practice in that setting (e.g., licensed psychologist; NASP, 2010c).

Supervisors should also be knowledgeable about the various practice areas in which their supervisees are engaged. When supervisors are required to supervise areas outside their boundaries of competence, supervisors should access supervision, peer consultation, and professional development to develop their own competence, or should assign a secondary supervisor to oversee this portion of the supervisee's work.

NASP strongly recommends that supervisors of school psychologists receive formal training in supervision. Because only 15–20% of school psychologists receive such training (Cochrane, Salyers, & Ding, 2010; Flanagan & Grehan, 2011), it is recommended that beginning supervisors take coursework and participate in workshops in supervision and that all supervisors participate in professional development activities to acquire and maintain knowledge of contemporary best practices in supervision for school psychology. Participation in individual or group metasupervision supports implementation of best practice and provides a collegial consultation regarding supervisory challenges (Simon & Swerdlik, 2017).

### **Nature and frequency of supervision**

Supervision methods should match the developmental level of the supervisee (Simon & Swerdlik, 2017). Graduate trainees and early career school psychologists require more intensive and directive supervisory modalities and additional hours of weekly support (Silva et al., 2016). As indicated in the *Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* (NASP, 2010c), interns should receive an average of at least 2 hours of supervision from their on-site supervisor per full-time week, and additional time may be needed to review work products. Specifically, the 2 hours per week should be provided in an individual face-to-face manner, with structured mentoring and evaluation that focus on the intern's attainment of competencies. Some distance-based supervision (e.g., telesupervision), to supplement in-person supervision sessions, may be acceptable as part of an articulated program of supervision and as warranted by an individual's development of skills. When these methods are used, care should be taken to adhere to established best practices (see NASP Guidance for Post-Graduate Professional Support, 2016).

For at least their first postgraduate year of employment, school psychologists should participate in district-provided supervision or mentoring. These early mentoring experiences are intended to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and professional growth. For initially credentialed school psychologists, participation in district-provided supervision and/or mentoring conducted either directly or indirectly is recommended for a minimum average of 1 hour per week (NASP, 2010d). One year of supervision or mentoring is required for the initial renewal of the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential. More experienced school psychologists may utilize alternative methods, such as supervision groups, mentoring, or peer support to ensure continued professional growth and support for complex or difficult cases. For all school psychologists, school systems should allow time for school psychologists to participate in supervision and mentoring. In small or rural systems, in which a supervising school psychologist may not be available, the school system should ensure that school psychologists are given opportunities to seek supervision and peer support outside the district (e.g., through regional, state, or national school psychologist networks). Distance-based supervision (e.g., telesupervision) could also be utilized in more rural and remote areas.

## Evaluation

The school system should develop and implement a coordinated plan for the support, accountability, and evaluation of all school psychological services including supervision (Harvey & Struzziero, 2008; Simon & Swerdlik, 2017). Furthermore, the school psychologist should be evaluated based on their assigned responsibilities and not based on a rubric developed for classroom teachers. This plan should address evaluation of both implementation and outcomes of services and may include the availability of supervision support for supervisors. Supervisors of school psychology trainees and university supervisors should maintain ongoing communication and coordination regarding evaluation and feedback for supervisees.

## SUPERVISION METHODS AND STRUCTURES

The structure and methods of supervision should be delineated in a written supervision contract that defines the roles, responsibilities, and parameters of supervision. Specifically, the contract should specify the evaluative functions of supervision including tools for monitoring supervision quality, the effectiveness of supervision, documentation of supervision sessions, the consideration of risk management in professional activities, the establishment and monitoring of goals during supervision, and how issues related to diversity and multicultural competencies as well as the cultural aspects of the supervisor, supervisee, and client during supervision should be addressed (American Psychological Association, 2015; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Harvey & Struzziero, 2008; Harvey, Struzziero, & Desai, 2014; Simon & Swerdlik, 2017).

Clinical supervision techniques vary based on the experience and skill levels of the supervisee, the needs of clients, and the case-specific expertise of the supervisor. Multiple methods should be employed by the supervisor that are appropriate for the developmental status of the supervisee in order to enhance supervisee learning, ensure accuracy of supervisee perceptions, and, above all else, safeguard client welfare. Supervisee self-report is likely to be a limited and insufficient strategy given potential distortions of information by the supervisee either in a deliberate (e.g., due to fear of evaluation) or accidental fashion. Self-report by supervisees should be supported by direct observations (i.e., in person observation or use of recorded audio/video). The provision of frequent formative feedback and scheduled, timely, and transparent summative evaluation is a central feature of quality supervision. Supervision encourages the application of empirically supported best practices to the unique circumstances of clients and settings. The professional processes of data-based assessment, goal setting, intervention, and progress monitoring are applicable to both the professional development of the supervisee as well as to clients in the context of the provision of support services.

Because proximity and knowledge of school district personnel and policies are substantial advantages in providing supervision, it is most desirable for a supervisor to be an employee of the same school district as a supervisee. However, not all service units have access to full-time school psychologist supervisors. Alternative models can provide satisfactory clinical supervision for credentialed school psychologists, including part-time supervisors, shared supervisors (collaboration among school districts or between districts and community agencies), peer supervision networks across and within districts, and online supervision. All supervisors must have a contract with the district that describes the scope of practice for the supervisor as well as supervision duties and responsibilities. For supervisors of practicum students and interns, a key provision of such responsibilities is supervisor authority to assign and review all work products. Other best practices for providing these alternative models, including

online supervision, are articulated in NASP's *Guidance for postgraduate mentorship and professional support* (NASP, 2016). However, these alternative models for clinical supervision would not meet NASP guidelines for supervision of interns (NASP, 2010c).

## THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

A critical role for many school psychologists includes their functioning as supervisors. Supervision represents a distinct professional competency area consisting of a specific set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. School psychologists functioning as supervisors should receive professional development and training on supervision. Credentialed school psychologists at all levels of practice should continue to seek supervision/mentoring as part of their ongoing professional development. Supervision is also one means of increasing accountability and enhancing professional satisfaction for school psychologists.

To this end, NASP recommends that all school psychological service units support the training of supervisors and supervision of school psychologists in the following ways.

- Assign one or more credentialed and experienced school psychologists the responsibility of clinically supervising all staff school psychologists and trainees.
- Provide opportunities for experienced school psychologists to gain initial and ongoing training in clinical supervision for school psychology. This training should be promoted locally, regionally, and nationally. Similar to other areas of professional practice, research on best practices will continue to evolve and thus professional development in supervision competencies will require periodic updating and ongoing participation in professional development.
- Ensure that all school psychologists have access to, and support in the form of, clinical supervision and mentoring at an appropriate level, dependent upon levels of experience and expertise.
- Provide multiple avenues and methods for obtaining supervision.
- Ensure the periodic evaluation of supervisors and the program of supervision.

In addition, NASP calls upon school psychology training programs to offer preservice training as well as continuing professional development in techniques and models of effective supervision. University training programs also have a responsibility to monitor the quality of supervision provided to their graduate students and to provide support and education for supervisors that reflects contemporary best practices in supervision.

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