



# Florida Association of School Psychologists

## 2017 Legislative Platform

### Increase Mental Health Services in Schools

#### Background/Rationale

Academic achievement must rest upon a foundation of positive mental health, and students as well as school personnel must feel safe and welcome in schools in order to make progress. The prevention of and intervention for mental health problems must be a priority if our state expects to meet educational goals, to close the achievement gap, and to prevent the disastrous consequences of mental illness, chronic behavioral problems, and breaches in school safety, both in fiscal and humanitarian terms. Ensuring comprehensive school psychology service provision demonstrably improves school safety, student behavior, and academic outcomes in a cost effective manner.

#### Action Needed

- Provide technical and financial assistance to districts and schools in order to improve mental health services for students
- Support a plan to increase gradually the number of school psychologists in Florida schools so that each elementary and middle school has at least one full-time school psychologist.
- Enact legislation to reduce the ratio of school psychologists to students in Florida from the current 1:2000 (approximately) toward the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommended ratio of 1:500-700, depending upon the needs of the setting.
- Provide funding to districts for 1200-2000 hour internships for school psychology trainees.

### Reduce Suspensions and Expulsions

#### Background/Rationale

The state of Florida removes more children from school for disciplinary reasons than any other state and is a national leader in the school-to-prison pipeline. Florida has the highest overall suspension rates for both elementary and secondary education students in the country and is third in the country in terms of school-based arrests. Florida is one of only seven states where the number of elementary schools with high rates of suspension far outnumber the schools with rates of suspension closer to the national average. When examining suspensions of those with disability status, over 37% of students who are suspended in Florida have a disability, although Florida's rate of students with disabilities (SWD) is currently 13%. These harsh disciplinary practices which are not evidence-based disproportionately impact African-Americans, who comprise 44% of out-of-school suspensions in Florida despite being only 22% of the student population.

#### Action Needed

- Ban the use of out-of-school suspension for minor violations and infractions, including minor behavioral problems and defiance/noncompliance.
- Ban the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion for ALL behavioral incidents involving our youngest and most vulnerable students in preschool and elementary school.
- Enact legislation mandating that a specified proportion of in-service training teachers and other school professionals receive each year be specific to behavioral interventions and classroom management.
- Enact legislation to require that all School Resource Officers (SROs) be trained in differentiating criminal misconduct from misbehavior as well as in developing a broader understanding of adolescent development and crisis management.

### Promote Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

#### Background/Rationale

Thirty-one of the fifty states in the U.S. ban the practice of corporal punishment in the schools entirely, and in three-fourths of the states, the majority of the school districts forbid the practice. However, Florida has one of the highest percentages of students paddled annually. Many of the 67 school districts in Florida still allow corporal punishment. Corporal punishment procedures are often inconsistent, both within and across school districts, inviting litigation. Corporal punishment is discriminatory, with minority students being paddled at a rate more than twice their prevalence in the general population. Research indicates that instead of reducing behavior problems, corporal punishment actually increases antisocial behavior, reduces self-esteem, and teaches students that violence is an acceptable response to problems. There are numerous effective, evidence-based alternatives to corporal punishment that decrease unacceptable behavior and improve other student outcomes. One should not be allowed to do to a child what is criminal to do to an adult!

#### Action Needed

- Enact legislation banning corporal punishment in all school districts in the state and encouraging the use of evidence-based alternatives to improve student behavior.

### Use High Stakes Testing More Effectively

#### Background/Rationale

When used properly, testing programs can be a means of fostering growth toward high expectations, increasing graduation rates, and improving links among curricular areas. However, grade retention is not a proper use. There are numerous alternatives to grade retention and to social promotion that are more effective and less costly. Retention is leaving children behind!

#### Actions Needed

- Instruments used in high stakes decision-making should be legislatively mandated to be clearly validated for each separate intended use.
- Effective, evidenced-based interventions should be mandated instead of grade retention or social promotion.
- Student achievement progress should be monitored throughout the year using empirically sound assessment strategies.

### FASP Supports Legislation that promotes...

#### Safe Schools and Safe Communities

*Promote programs which encourage legislators, teachers, parents, and school administrators to create welcoming schools free of bullying and harassment*

- Increase funding for additional student services personnel to implement violence prevention, restorative justice practices, and school safety programs in every public school
- Provide interventions to increase school attendance, improve school climate, and to improve graduation rates
- Provide certified school psychologists with professional development activities in critical areas such as suicide and violence prevention, threat assessment, consultation and comprehensive problem-solving, and prevention and intervention services for all students



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### Access to a Full Continuum of School Psychological Services as Described in the Standards of the National Association of School Psychologists

- Provide paid, 1200-2000 hour internships for school psychology graduate students statewide
- Increased access to school psychological services for all children, not just those in special education or those in public schools
- Provide funding for school districts to hire additional school psychologists in order to ensure an integrated continuum of school psychological services, including consultation, comprehensive assessment, prevention and intervention services, and evaluation of outcomes for all students; *to ensure compliance with the 60 calendar day timeline for evaluations*; and to move toward the nationally recommended school psychologist-to-student ratio of 1:500-700 (depending on the make-up of the assigned schools)
- Encourage districts to include school psychologists on all school problem-solving teams
- Provide academic and mental health screening and counseling for children with educational and social/emotional needs
- Maintain current high standards of training and experience for school psychologists
- Ensure that all those who provide and/or supervise school psychological services are appropriately credentialed as school psychologists
- Promote increased access to Medicaid funding for behavioral health services
- Strengthen the state retirement program to facilitate recruitment and retention of school psychology personnel

### Prevention and Intervention Services

*Promote and fund the well-being and education of all of our children in Florida as the highest priority*

- Mandate suicide prevention programs in every Florida public and charter school
- Increase early identification of and treatment for students' mental health problems
- Provide support for families and community initiatives to promote readiness for kindergarten
- Promote the use of evidence-based intervention programs for academic and behavioral problems in Florida schools
- Promote universal screening programs that provide for the early identification of and intervention for children with educational or developmental disabilities or handicapping conditions
- Give priority in funding to programs which are researched-based, will improve the academic and/or behavioral functioning of students, and demonstrably foster collaboration between parents and schools

### Efforts to Ensure that Every Student Succeeds

*Promote policies which ensure the dignity, safety, and access to opportunity of all children, regardless of their race; ethnicity; color; religion; ancestry; national origin; immigration status; socioeconomic status; primary language; gender; sexual orientation; gender identity; mental, physical, or sensory disability; or any other distinguishing characteristics.*

- Provide resources, professional development, and support services to teachers to improve reading, writing, and math levels of all students, especially those who are achieving poorly
- Ensure that every school district complies fully with Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972
- Promote evidence-based interventions to increase overall academic success resulting in grade promotion
- Require schools to develop integrated, school-wide plans to address the challenges affecting the academic and behavioral functioning of students based on their community, needed support mechanisms, and rate of growth

- Replace external suspensions with more effective and evidence-based alternatives such as a restorative justice approach which involves repairing damage done by inappropriate behavior

### Access to School Psychological Services in the Private Sector

*Promote parity in insurance coverage for mental health services*

- Maintain rigorous quality standards of legislative regulation of school psychologists under Chapter 490, F.S. to ensure a high degree of professionalism, safety, and cost effectiveness for the public
- Promote insurance laws which provide third party payments for school psychological services
- Provide for licensed school psychologists to become Medicaid providers to reduce costs and increase provider options
- Provide for licensed school psychologists to become qualified evaluators for the Department of Children and Families
- Provide for licensed school psychologists to be eligible to initiate the Baker Act
- Clarify that licensed school psychologists who have requisite training are qualified to be court appointed as child custody evaluators

### Accountability, Evaluation, and Employment

*Promote effective, reasonable, and fair methods of accountability and evaluation for school psychologists*

- Promote effective, reasonable, and fair practices in the administration of salary, benefits, and retirement programs for school psychologists
- Ensure the continuation of the title of *school psychologist* for all individuals holding State Department of Education certification in school psychology

### History and Mission

First organized in 1957, the Florida Association of School Psychologists (FASP) is one of the largest state school psychology associations in the nation.

The mission of the Florida Association of School Psychologists is to promote and to advocate for the mental health and educational development of Florida's children, youth, and families and to advance school psychology in the state of Florida for the benefit of all students.

FASP Web Site: [www.fasp.org](http://www.fasp.org)

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