



Florida Association of School Psychologists 2021 Legislative Platform

FASP 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.

Increase Mental Health Services in Schools

Background/Rationale

Academic achievement and school safety must rest upon a foundation of mental wellness, 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 stop breaches in school safety, to meet educational goals, and to prevent chronic behavioral problems. Ensuring comprehensive school psychological and other mental health service provision demonstrably improves school safety, student behavior, and academic outcomes in a cost-effective manner.

Actions Needed

- **Mandate universal screening for mental health problems to occur in all schools across the state. This screening can be implemented at no additional cost to school districts, and it would allow schools to identify students struggling with mental or behavioral health concerns BEFORE their needs are intense and severe (and, therefore, likely require costlier interventions). Support a plan to increase gradually the number of school psychologists in Florida schools so that each public school has at least one full-time school psychologist.**
- **Support a plan to increase gradually the number of school psychologists in Florida schools so that each public 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 (the exact ratio depends upon the needs of the setting).**
- **Provide funding to districts for 1200- to 2000-hour internships for school psychology trainees.**
- **Reduce regulatory barriers to recognizing school psychology as a critical shortage area. More specifically, create separate support personnel and instructional personnel critical shortage lists by eliminating regulations that prevent the recognition of school psychology as a critical shortage area.**
- **Promote effective, reasonable, and fair practices in the administration of salary, benefits, and retirement programs for student services personnel. Florida is 48th among US states in average school salaries.**
- **Ensure the continuation of the title of School Psychologist and maintain high standards for all individuals holding State Department of Education certification in school psychology.**

Reduce Overreliance on Harmful and Ineffective Exclusionary Discipline Practices (e.g., Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions)

Background/Rationale

The state of Florida removes more children from school for disciplinary reasons than any other state and is, unfortunately, 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 exceeds those schools with rates of suspension closer to the national average. When examining suspensions of students with disability status, over 37% of students who are suspended in Florida have a disability, although Florida's rate of students with disabilities (SWDs) 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, classroom management, and evidence-based alternatives to suspensions and expulsions.**
- **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.**

Utilize Evidence-Based Strategies to Promote Safe Schools and Safe Communities

Background/Rationale

While schools remain one of the safest places' individuals can work and learn, there are increasing concerns about bullying and violence in schools. The best solutions for ensuring that schools remain safe is to create a culture and climate in which students feel connected enough to responsible adults in the building to report any concerns that may arise.

Actions Needed

- **Mandate measurement of school climates in order to increase understanding and identification of students who are not connected to their school, who do not feel safe, or who do not have an adult in the school to whom they would feel comfortable reporting concerns.**



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- Increase funding for additional qualified, school-based mental health personnel (school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers) to implement violence prevention, restorative justice, and school safety programs in every public school.
- Increase access for all students to certified/licensed school psychologists, who have specialized training and skills in suicide and violence prevention, threat assessment, consultation and comprehensive problem-solving, prevention and intervention services, and de-escalation strategies.

FASP Supports Legislation that Promotes:

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 diversity 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 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 all mental health and substance dependence 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 services provided by licensed school psychologists
- Provide for licensed school psychologists to become Medicaid providers to reduce costs and to 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

FASP Outstanding Legislator Awardees:

2020: Representative Jennifer Necole Webb

2019: Senator Kelli Stargel

2017: Representative Gayle Harrell

2014: Senator “Bill” Montford

2013: Senator Dwight Bullard

2013: Representative Reggie Fullwood

2010: Representative Bill Heller

2009: Senator Stephen Wise

2008: Representative Nick Thompson

2007: Representative Joe Pickens

2007: Senator Carey Baker

2006: Representative Joe Pickens

Legacy Award for Distinguished Service to Children

2009 – Senator Eleanor Sobel

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