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## Retaining School Psychologists: The Role of District Level Administrative Supervisors

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Retaining School Psychologists: The Role of District Level Administrative Supervisors

Rachel Ruth Butler

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Educational Specialist

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## ABSTRACT

### Retaining School Psychologists: The Role of District Level Administrative Supervisors

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The school psychologist shortage has been a persistent problem in education, and there is a lack of research on what current administrative supervisors are doing to address shortages. This study examined the perceptions of district leaders regarding the recruitment and retention of school psychologists. Participants included 19 administrative supervisors in public school districts in Colorado (CO), Utah (UT), Nevada (NV), and Wyoming (WY). Data for this qualitative study were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with administrative supervisors of school psychologists. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes.

A total of 10 themes were identified, and the first theme reflected concerns about school psychology graduate programs not producing enough school psychologists. Additionally, being farther away from a graduate program creates recruiting difficulties. Another related theme revealed that close relationships with graduate programs contributes to successful recruiting. Administrative supervisors noted the role that the surrounding community plays in retaining current school psychologists. They also expressed the importance of creating appealing workloads that matched salaries, being responsive, matching school psychologists' preferences, and offering job flexibility. Other key themes included the challenges of finding school psychologists to hire and competing with neighboring local education administration (LEAs). Finally, administrative supervisors believe that they are in a worker's market that favors the school psychologist. Overall, there appeared to be a theme of administrative supervisors feeling a lack of control over their current situation.

Limitations for the study include collecting data across several months that may have influenced participants responses due to the demands of hiring during certain times of year. The sample included participants from states in the western United States, which may reflect limited perspectives based on geographic needs and trends. Directions for future research may include a larger sample size that reflects national demographic characteristics. Further research could also investigate the effectiveness of current efforts to address shortages on a systemic level. This could include researching how state and national associations advocate for school psychologists and how graduate programs grow and adapt to match current needs.

Keywords: school psychologists, administrative supervisors, shortage, professional supervision, recruitment, retention

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

School psychologists are asked to provide a wide variety of services in schools to help students succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010). Most often, a school psychologist's workload includes giving cognitive, academic, and social-emotional assessments; consulting with teachers, other educators, and parents; providing crisis interventions, counseling and therapy, program evaluations, and in-service education (Perfect & Morris, 2011). Knowing this, it is no surprise that school psychologists have found it difficult to address these multifaceted student needs due to large workloads and persistent shortages (Tharinger & Palomares, 2004). Shortages in the field of school psychology have lasted for several decades and are predicted to continue in future years (Castillo, Curtis, & Tan, 2014). It is becoming increasingly crucial to understand and respond to shortages due to growing student needs and larger workloads being placed on the limited number of school psychologists available (Fagan, 2004).

Because researchers have suggested the possibility that we may be underestimating the potential shortage of school psychologists in the next 20 years, there is a need to examine the recruitment and retention of school psychologists (Castillo et al., 2014), and to understand the roles and perceptions of administrative supervisors as they address these shortages. To date, limited research has been done to look closely at the retention of school psychologists in the field (Fagan, 2004). We know supervisors can have an effect on job satisfaction and retention (Huhtala, Kinnunen, & Feldt, 2017; Kundu & Lata, 2017; McConnell, 2011; Rodriguez, 2008; Yamamoto, 2011), but we do not know specifically what current administrative supervisors are doing to address the shortage of school psychologists. The purpose of this study is to describe



how administrative supervisors are responding to widespread shortages and what methods they use to recruit and retain school psychologists. Specific research questions include the following:

1. How do administrative supervisors of school psychologists describe their current staffing needs?
2. How do administrative supervisors of school psychologists recruit and retain school psychologists?

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### History of School Psychology

The profession of school psychology has a long and varied history. According to Fagan (1992), the enforcement of compulsory schooling between 1890 and 1930 brought an increase of students with physical and mental health challenges who previously remained out of the school system. Very few school districts provided any type of special education and psychological services, and regulations varied among these districts (Murphy, 1981). As the need for services intensified during the 1950's and 1960's, most school psychologists learned their roles through experience in the schools (Murphy, 1981). The services provided by school psychologists varied, and psychometric testing was most commonly provided by practitioners with experience in assessment (Fagan, 2004).

In addition, the profession of school psychology began to develop in the early 20th century with an interest in the intelligence testing of children to determine eligibility for special education services (Farrell, 2010). The earliest school psychologists were initially trained in different professions such as teaching and clinical and counseling psychology (Murphy, 1981). The 1970's brought a strong push for the rights of individuals with disabilities with Federal court cases such as *Diana v. State Board of Education in California*, 1970, and *Mills v. The Board of Education in the District of Columbia*, 1972 (Melcher, 1976).

The passing of the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (1975), P.L. 94-142, led to increases nationwide in employment positions for school psychologists (Castillo et al., 2014). Consequently, there was also a push for regulation within the field of school psychology with stricter requirements for accreditation and credentialing. State and federal laws began to mandate

the provision of comprehensive social welfare and mental health services by districts (Sedlak, 1997). Despite these changes, it was not required for districts to hire school psychologists until the 1980's and 1990's when the public became increasingly aware of differences among services provided by school psychologists and other human service professions. As a result, there has been a continual progression in expectations for accountability and quality of school psychologists (Murphy, 1981).

Currently, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2010) recommends that school psychologists provide services designed to help students succeed “academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally” (p. 320). These services should include “interventions that focus on academic skills, learning, socialization, and mental health” (p. 320). Despite these guidelines, school psychologists often have competing demands, which include cognitive, academic, and social-emotional assessments, consultations, crisis interventions, counseling and therapy, program evaluations, and in-service education (Perfect & Morris, 2011). Although school psychologists are typically trained to provide all the NASP recommended services, they often report spending the majority of their time testing and assessing students for placement in special education (Suldo, Friedrich, & Michalowski, 2010). Many school psychologists lack the time to provide counseling services despite a need for more direct mental health services in schools (Hanchon & Fernald, 2013).

Farrell (2010) argued that school psychologists could facilitate positive change for an increased number of students if they spent less time on assessment and more time using their other skills to provide direct services to students, consultative services to teachers and parents, and collaborating to create systems change to ensure that preventative and early intervention strategies are implemented to meet the needs of all students. More recently, there has been a

move in the field to expand beyond the role of being a gatekeeper for special education services. School psychologists in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri have expressed a preference for consultation and intervention and have reported expanding their role to include these practices (Bahr et al., 2017). Many other school psychologists have spent time advocating for these expanded roles; however, the shortages in the field keep workloads heavy and decrease the amount of time available to dedicate to services beyond assessing for special education placement (Tharinger & Palomares, 2004).

### **Retention of Employees and Supervision**

Administrative supervisors are involved in school psychologist retention (NASP, 2018) and, like other administrators, express concern about the retention of their personnel (McConnell, 2011). Organizations want to avoid the frequent turnover of employees due to extra costs associated with regularly hiring and training new staff (McConnell, 2011). McConnell (2011) proposed that employees, in general, are at risk of regretting their job choice if they feel overwhelmed, if they are not given needed help, and if they are not provided with proper resources. Employees are also likely to leave their jobs if they perceive opportunities for better wages and more thoughtful supervision elsewhere. In order to retain employees, employers must be willing to offer pay and other benefits that are considered competitive. Research by Kundu and Lata (2017) showed there are multiple factors contributing to employee retention. These factors include the perceived climate of the workplace, the relationship between employee and supervisor, peer group interaction, and perceived organizational support. Each of these factors contribute to an overall supportive work environment (SWE) and have a stronger effect on employee retention when implemented together. Kundu and Lata's study suggests that

employees who receive these supports are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and stay with an organization long term.

Research by Yamamoto (2011) indicated that many organizations even go beyond implementing SWE practices into their employees' work experience. Often, organizations will try to provide employees with added benefits to ensure their welfare. Common welfare measures include health insurance and accident compensation, but extra welfare measures may even include gifts for employees and other recreational benefits. This is all done in an effort to retain employees by providing them with more opportunities to balance work and personal life. Overall, the study showed that organizational policies that benefit employees and support family life can promote employee retention, although we do not know what policies or benefits school psychology administrators may be using to ensure the retention of school psychologists.

Govaerts, Kyndt, Dochy, and Baert (2011) found other factors that positively predict an employee's intention to stay at their current job. These factors included whether the employee has opportunities to learn and grow within their work environment and whether the employee is given adequate rules and working procedures to follow. In more recent years, employees do not feel obligated to stay at jobs in which they feel their growth is stunted. On the other hand, if employees do feel as though they are learning and developing and are also given the chance to use new job skills, then they are more inclined to stay at their current organization (Rodriguez, 2008).

Employees, in general, are more likely to stay at their current job when they have adequate supervision, a positive relationship with their supervisor, support in balancing work and personal life, and are given opportunities to learn and grow within their work environment (Kundu & Lata, 2017; McConnell, 2011; Rodriguez, 2008; Yamamoto, 2011). Researchers

reported that school psychologists expressed similar needs for support, helpful supervision, and opportunities for growth as other employees (Harvey & Pearrow, 2010; Silva, Newman, Guiney, Valley-Gray, & Barrett, 2016). Because there is a widespread shortage of school psychologists (American Association for Employment in Education, 2016), understanding how these ideas apply to the retention and recruitment of school psychologists is important.

### **Shortages in the Field of School Psychology**

There has never been a sufficient number of school psychologists to meet demands, even during historical periods of limited employment opportunities (Fagan, 2004). Shortages have been reported in all regions of the United States with the northwest and Rocky Mountain regions being most affected (American Association for Employment in Education, 2016). These shortages are predicted to continue through 2025 (Castillo et al., 2014). There is also a continual increase in students attending public schools and a continual increased need for broader services provided (Fagan, 2004). NASP recommends a ratio of 1,000:1 students per school psychologist in general, and a ratio of 700:1 when comprehensive and preventative services are being provided (NASP, 2017). Regardless of these recommendations, the ratio of school psychologists to students has been much higher for more than half of school psychologists in 2010 (Curtis, Castillo, & Gelley, 2012). In the 2009-2010 school year, the ratio of school psychologists to students across the United States was at or above 1,500 to 1 (NASP, 2011).

There are several speculations as to why shortages persist. According to Davis, McIntosh, Phelps, and Kehle (2004), one possible contributor to the shortage is that, historically, the field of school psychology has not been aggressive in marketing the profession. The general public may be unaware of the role that school psychologists take in education. Furthermore, it is common for the community to confuse the role of school psychologists with guidance

counselors. This general lack of awareness and understanding may be a factor in the ongoing shortage especially considering that in the past, information on the profession has been limited at colleges and universities leaving students ignorant to the possibility of pursuing this profession. Results from a survey given to undergraduate psychology students about their perceptions of graduate degrees in psychology also showed that over 20% of the students had never been exposed to school psychology (Stinnett & Capaccioli, 2013). Another survey study conducted by Bocanegra, Gubi, Fan, and Hunsmann (2015), pointed to graduate students having significantly more exposure to the fields of counseling and clinical psychology than school psychology. Results also showed that increased exposure to the field of school psychology positively correlated with an intent to apply for a school psychology graduate program.

Another possible contributor to the shortage of school psychologists is that the field is predominantly comprised of female school psychologists. Female school psychologists, compared to males, are less likely to follow the traditional path of working for 30 years before retiring (Fagan, 2004). Results of surveys studying the demographics of school psychologists in the field showed that male school psychologists were significantly older than females and had more experience working in schools (Castillo, Curtis, & Gelley, 2013). These older employees are more likely to stay with an organization as opposed to their younger counterparts (Govaertes et al., 2011). Therefore, the school psychology workforce mostly consists of younger females and is projected to continue, as 80% of enrollment in school psychology graduate programs are female students (Castillo et al., 2013).

Research conducted by Castillo et al. (2013) found another issue related to the shortage is the lack of culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists. The majority of school psychologists are shown to work with populations that are racially similar to themselves. White

school psychologists are more likely to work in populations with fewer racial minorities than school psychologists of other races. This creates an issue when the number of racially and ethnically diverse students is growing faster than number of racially and ethnically diverse school psychologists (Castillo et al., 2013). Researchers predict that responding to and repairing the lack of ethnic and racial diversity is an essential step in ensuring the survival of the profession of school psychology (Zhou et al., 2004).

According to Weaver and Allen (2017), school psychologists are also at risk of burnout due to the emotional nature of their work. School psychologists often deal with highly emotional situations and must manage their external expressions or natural responses to these situations. Weaver and Allen referred to the control of external emotional expressions as surface acting, which is the management of emotional expressions to align with profession expectations. Weaver and Allen's research showed that school psychologists who report high levels of surface acting in their daily work may quickly become exhausted and experience job burnout. They suggested that school psychologists may need more training in their graduate programs and ongoing professional development to handle these types of emotional situations and prevent burnout within the profession.

Many school psychologists find it difficult to respond efficiently to the demands placed upon them (Farrell, 2010). School psychologists also face ethically demanding situations which can lead to burnout and potentially leaving their job before retirement. Huhtala et al. (2017) surveyed 133 school psychologists who reported experiencing different levels of stress, worry, and exhaustion tied to their work. The school psychologists who reported encountering multiple ethical dilemmas a week had more difficulty sleeping and felt more exhaustion than others surveyed. In another survey of school psychologists conducted by Boccio, Weisz, and Lefkowitz



(2016), one third of respondents also reported feeling pressure to act unethically from administration. Over 16 % of respondents who felt this pressure from administration reported wanting to leave their position or the field altogether within the next five years.

Another issue that may contribute to school psychologist retention is the location of administrative supervisors. A supervisor's limited time and availability along with distance from the school psychologists they oversee were all listed as barriers to receiving support and supervision (Silva et al., 2016). Administrative supervisors are often at the district office and not immediately available at the school where the school psychologist is working. Being far in proximity poses issues for direct supervision and assistance that school psychologists may need (Murphy, 1981).

There are many pieces that affect the shortage and possible retention of school psychologists such as marketing of the profession (Davis et al., 2004), age and experience of school psychologists (Govaertes et al., 2011), cultural diversity (Castillo et al., 2013), emotional burnout (Weaver & Allen, 2017), administrative pressure (Boccio et al., 2016), and limited supervision (Silva et al., 2016). Supervisors play a role in some of these shortage issues and may be able to have an effect on retention (Boccio et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2016).

### **Supervision of School Psychologists**

Descriptions of supervision often refer to two different types of supervisors in the field of school psychology (NASP, 2018). Clinical supervision focuses on supervising the direct services of school psychologists such as counseling, assessment, consultation, and school-wide prevention and intervention efforts. In contrast, administrative supervision focuses on the legal, contractual, and organizational aspects within a school district, which include hiring, firing, assigning school placements, annual evaluations, and planning/providing professional learning

opportunities. Clinical and administrative supervision are distinctly different, although the roles may overlap in practice.

Effective clinical and administrative supervision is an important aspect that ensures that school psychologists are providing quality services in schools. Proper supervision should be available in order for school psychologists to increase their quality of services, broaden roles, and be held accountable for their work (Murphy, 1981). Some roles of administrative supervisors include periodically evaluating school psychologist job performance, keeping skills and practices current among supervisees, setting the tone for the workplace, and acting as a model professional for staff (Murphy, 1981). Other roles include keeping adequate records, maintaining a good supervisory relationship, using multiple methods of supervision, giving effective feedback and evaluations, and knowing ethical and legal guidelines (Simon, Cruise, Huber, Swerdlik, & Newman, 2014).

In 1977 the American Psychological Association (APA) and NASP published standards and guidelines for school psychologists that focused on the importance of supervision; however, the nature and details of supervision were not clearly defined (Murphy, 1981). Although there may have been a lack of clarity in the past, NASP (2018) recently published position statements detailing recommendations for school psychology supervisors. Some of these recommendations included the following: (a) school psychologists should have access to supervision throughout their career, (b) supervisors should have proper training, and (c) clinical supervision must be given by a certified school psychologist.

Researchers have found that supervisors have an impact on how school psychologists perceive their work environment. For example, a survey conducted by Silva et al. (2016) of early career school psychologists reported that only 38% of respondents have access to mentoring and

only 29% reported currently receiving supervision. The majority of respondents reported a desire for more supervision because it could help prevent feelings of burnout. One third of respondents said that because of lack of supervision, they felt pressure to act outside of their professional boundaries. This lack of attention to supervision and possible practice beyond their professional boundaries may contribute to school psychologist burnout.

Principals, special education directors, and others without school psychology credentials should only provide administrative supervision and not clinical supervision (NASP, 2018), although having a credentialed school psychologist as an administrative supervisor is preferred (Harvey & Pearrow, 2010). Despite expectations for school psychologists to have access to adequate clinical supervision, it is common to see administrators, principals, district workers, and others with limited training in psychology acting as administrative supervisors (Harvey & Pearrow, 2010).

Other related service providers in education (e.g., school counselors, school social workers, speech language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists) have similar supervisory needs as school psychologists (Swank & Tyson, 2012) and are also affected by personnel shortages (American Association for Employment in Education, 2016). Like school psychologists, these related service providers may frequently be supervised by building or district administrators who often have experience as classroom teachers who then move into administrative positions. Building principals and district administrators may provide administrative supervision that focuses on hiring and firing decisions, assigning school placements, mandated annual evaluations, and professional learning experiences (Henderson & Lampe, 1992).

Although principals or other district leaders may provide administrative supervision for related service providers, including school psychologists, this supervision has been deemed insufficient (DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011). Even though district or state guidelines may permit administrators who are not school psychologists to evaluate school psychologists' job performance or provide administrative supervision, research implies that both clinical and administrative supervision of school psychologists is most effective when the supervisor is a trained and credentialed school psychologist (Harvey & Pearrow, 2010).

### **Summary**

Overall, research has shown that employees benefit when they have access to adequate supervision because support from a supervisor can help prevent feelings of burnout (Silva et al., 2016). Furthermore, employees are more likely to stay at their current jobs when they have suitable supervision, a positive relationship with their supervisor, support in balancing work life and personal life, and are given opportunities to learn and grow within their work environment (Kundu & Lata, 2017; McConnell, 2011; Rodriguez, 2008; Yamamoto, 2011). Thus, we can see that supervision plays a role in the retention of school psychologists in a variety of ways.

Recently, NASP (2018) defined two separate types of supervision: clinical and administrative. Clinical supervision focuses on supervising the direct services of school psychologists, and administrative supervision focuses on the legal, contractual, and organizational aspects within a school district; however, some areas of clinical and administrative supervision may occasionally overlap (NASP, 2018). The distinctions and similarities between both types of supervision are useful, especially when we are considering the perceptions of administrators in the recruitment and retention of school psychologists. The focus

of this study is on administrative supervision because administrative supervisors typically oversee the hiring of school psychologists for their district.

Larger workloads are being placed on a limited number of school psychologists due to growing student needs, making it increasingly important to understand and respond accordingly to school psychologist shortages (Fagan, 2004). One way to do this, is to look closely at the recruitment and retention of school psychologists which is typically done by administrative supervisors. The purpose of this study is to describe how administrative supervisors are responding to widespread shortages and what methods they use to recruit and retain school psychologists. Specific research questions include the following:

1. How do administrative supervisors of school psychologists describe their current staffing needs?
2. How do administrative supervisors of school psychologists recruit and retain school psychologists?

## CHAPTER THREE

### Method

#### Participants

The participants of this study were administrative supervisors, also known as district leaders, who supervise school psychologists in public school districts. For the purposes of this study, administrative supervisors only included individuals who work at the district administrative level in public schools, supervise at least three school psychologists, and have the primary responsibility of hiring and evaluating school psychology personnel (NASP, 2018). We used this definition to differentiate between administrative supervisors and clinical supervisors, who provide professional one-on-one clinical supervision.

We purposefully sampled school districts from Colorado (CO), Utah (UT), Nevada (NV), and Wyoming (WY) because of professional connections with the research team. We also purposefully sampled districts that have at least three school psychologists in their district, as reported by the potential participant. Lastly, we identified the administrative supervisor through the district's website when that information was available. To gather state district information, we first obtained a list of districts in each state by looking at a state's board of education website. Next, we gathered the district's student population information from the National Center for Education Statistics (2018). We organized districts in each state by size according to their student population. Large, medium, and small districts will respectively have 25,000+, 25,000-8,000, and below 8,000 students. By using a stratified sampling procedure, we selected a number of large, medium, and small districts from each state. We used district websites or phone calls to identify the district school psychologist administrative leader.

Administrators from charter and private schools were not included because they typically have one school psychologist and their perceptions and experiences may be markedly different than those who supervise several school psychologists. We were not able to find information on the number of school psychologists working in charter schools or how their roles may vary from public school settings (NASP, n.d.).

A total of 50 individuals were contacted via phone or email to participate in the study. Thirty-one individuals were not interviewed because they either did not meet criteria or did not respond to the invitation. Of the 19 total participants, 13 were male and 6 were female. The mean age of participants was 45 years. Fifteen participants specified their ethnicity as Caucasian, one specified as LatinX, one specified as bi-racial/multi-racial, one specified as East Indian, and one preferred not to answer. Eleven participants had a Master's degree, six had an Education Specialist degree, and two had a Doctorate degree; furthermore, 15 participants held an administrative license while 4 did not (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Demographic Data of the 19 Participants*

<i>Category</i>		
Gender		<i>n</i>
	Male	13
	Female	6
Mean Age		45
Ethnicity		
	Caucasian	15
	Other	4
Highest Earned Degree		
	Masters	11
	Education Specialist (Ed.S.)	6
	PhD	2
Administrator License?		
	Yes	15
	No	4

Eleven participants described their school districts as suburban, four participants as urban, three participants as rural, and one participant described their district as rural geographically and urban in size. Participants also reported an average of 41 schools in their districts with a standard deviation of 24.24 and a range of 4 to 87 schools. Participants reported an average of 30,112 students in their school districts with a standard deviation of 23,329.97 and a range of 70 to 80,000 students. Finally, participants reported supervising an average of 20 school psychologists in their district with a standard deviation of 16.11 and a range of 3 to 56. They also reported supervising an average of 58 professionals other than school psychologists with a standard deviation of 72.34, and a range of 0 to 306 (see Table 2).



Table 2

*District Information*

<i>Category</i>	
District Setting	<i>n</i>
Urban	4
Rural	3
Suburban	11
Other	1
	$\bar{x}$
Schools in the District	41
Students in the District	30,112
School Psychologists Supervised	20
Other Professionals Supervised	59

*Note.* Other professionals listed included occupational therapists, behavior specialists, paraprofessionals, social workers, speech language pathologists, and physical therapists. Means were rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Procedures**

After identifying the school districts and administrators from the respective districts, we contacted them by telephone or email and invited them to participate in this study. We explained the rights of research participants and gained their consent to be a research participant before proceeding. During this contact, we determined if the potential participant met criteria to be included in the study. One of the first questions asked was if they are responsible for the hiring of school psychologists (See Appendix). If yes, participants were then asked if they supervised at least three school psychologists within their district. If the participant met criteria, we emailed a Qualtrics Survey containing demographic questions and a consent to participate (See Appendix). Researchers and the participant then scheduled an agreed upon time to conduct the full phone interview. The phone interview consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions with

potential follow-up or clarifying questions (See Appendix). The researcher asked each participant the same questions in the same order. Responses were recorded and then transcribed word-for-word. Interviews continued until responses became repetitive and saturation was achieved. Saturation, or the ability to understand all of the data, usually occurs around 16-24 interviews (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). For the purpose of this study, we conducted 19 interviews. Each interviewee was offered a \$50 VISA gift card to compensate them for their time.

This research was completed in collaboration with another researcher who explored the roles, responsibilities, and professional background of school psychology administrative leaders in school districts. The collaborating researcher used the same recruiting and interview procedures; the interviews included questions that addressed both research projects.

The interview questions were developed, and then pilot interviews were completed with those familiar with the roles of school psychology administrative leaders. Our Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the study procedures and determined that IRB approval was not needed because the professional was only asked to contribute information about some aspect of the external world primarily from the perspective of their special expertise, rather than their personal opinions, preferences, perceptions or experiences.

## **Measures**

The interviews consisted of approximately four questions to determine if the potential participant met the needed inclusionary criteria, ten demographic questions, and eight semi-structured interview questions. Estimated completion time for the interview was about 25-45 minutes. A copy of the interview is found in the Appendix.

## **Research Design**

This study was completed as part of a larger research study that explored the roles and responsibilities of school psychology administrators in school districts. This study was qualitative research with the inclusion of quantitative formatted questions to identify the demographic characteristics of the participants. Eight interview questions elicited open ended responses. Ten of the demographic questions collected nominal data or asked questions such as “how many school psychologists do you supervise?” (See Appendix).

## **Data Analysis**

Once all data were collected from the interviews, demographic responses were summarized, and qualitative responses were analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is used to uncover individuals’ perceptions of situations they are experiencing and how they make sense of those situations (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Each of the 19 individual transcripts were read multiple times, and micro and macro themes were identified. Micro themes are smaller themes specific to each research question. Macro themes are larger themes that were found integrated throughout the entire interview. These themes were then listed in one large table and analyzed by a group of researchers to identify connections between the ideas. The most commonly repeated themes found among the interviews were then translated into narratives that outlined the inherent meaning in each of the participants experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Researchers reported data by including direct quotes from the qualitative responses as evidence of the conclusions and interpretations (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Researchers used the reporting checklist provided by Kelley, Clark, Brown, and Sitzia (2005) which includes reporting how many individuals agreed to

participate and the response rate. Research assistants then reviewed the transcripts and the narratives to check for accuracy of the themes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

Based on questions asked during the interview process outlined in the method section, themes emerged addressing the two research questions:

1. How do administrative supervisors of school psychologists describe their current staffing needs?
2. How do administrative supervisors of school psychologists recruit and retain school psychologists?

The first research question elicited five major themes. The second research question was separated into recruitment and retention for clarity. Two major themes emerged based on recruitment methods, and three major themes emerged based on retention methods. One implicit theme was the administrator's sense of a lack of control regarding recruiting and retention was integrated throughout the interviews.

#### **Research Question One: How do Administrative Supervisors of School Psychologists Describe Their Current Staffing Needs?**

**Theme one: Finding school psychologists to hire is challenging.** This theme included concerns about shortages and a widespread difficulty finding school psychologists to hire. If respondents discussed graduate training or hiring interns, this was identified as a separate theme. Participants expressed awareness of persistent shortages of school psychologists in the field and reported being affected by these shortages. Among participants, the shortage was often their highest concern and the first answer given in response to the interview question of what challenges they face in recruiting school psychologists. Participant A4 stated, "...there's this overall lack of

applicants. It's crazy. The overall lack of school psychologists looking for jobs is extremely challenging.”

A few participants were not affected by the shortage but considered themselves “lucky” because they were still aware of how the shortage was affecting other school districts. Participant A1 explained, “...we have been pretty fortunate the last couple of years; we've been able to recruit a number of good candidates and hire great candidates. I know there is generally a shortage across the state, we have not been there... We could be there this year.” Overall, there is a sense that the school psychologist applicant pool is limited.

**Theme two: Matching school psychologists' workload and compensation is difficult.**

Many school districts are seeing increases in the student population and the intensity and complexity of the social/emotional/behavioral needs of students, and the number of school psychologists in the field is not enough to meet these growing demands on schools.

Administrative supervisors indicated a concern with balancing workload and compensation for their school psychologists. Participants highlighted the demanding work that school psychologists do while emphasizing the mismatch between school psychologists' salaries and workload. Participants shared that aligning job demands and compensation seems to be especially difficult to accomplish due to growing student needs and budget limitations.

Participant R1 highlighted this problem, “I think that we are dealing with increasingly more severe behavior problems that children are exhibiting. I think we're dealing with a lot more children, or maybe we just recognize now the number of children that have been impacted by trauma and how we need to be trauma-informed and try and provide more client resources...” As student needs are steadily increasing, workloads typically increase while pay does not.

Participant R4 summarized workload concerns when they said, “We've done a really good job

with trying to match compensation; however, the compensation coupled with our workload... as it currently stands, we're having a hard time recruiting when we compensate similarly to another district except their workload is a lot less in terms of number of schools and number of students that you would be supporting.”

Participant R9 expressed similar concerns when discussing shortages, “I think a lot of it has to do with workload. People get a high rate of burnout. It seems like a lot of people are going to contract employment. I don't have anything to put my finger on that, but you know they can make more money and not have to deal with district policies and rules.” Participant R9 explained that the workload and compensation in schools is not as well matched as in contract employment, such as assessment positions independent from public school districts. Overall, administrative supervisors find it difficult to recruit new school psychologists when the compensation does not reflect the demanding and difficult workload.

**Theme three: Graduate programs.** Administrative supervisors identified school psychology graduate programs as an essential resource for filling school psychologist and intern positions within their districts. However, many administrative supervisors explained they are faced with two challenges regarding graduate programs. First, they believe that graduate programs do not produce enough graduates to address shortages in the field. Second, if they are farther away from a graduate program, it is more difficult to establish strong recruiting relationships with the universities.

***Sub-theme: Graduate programs do not produce enough graduates.*** During the interviews, administrative supervisors expressed concerns that graduate programs do not produce enough graduates to address shortages. Participant R8 stated, “Well, just in general, our three graduate programs throughout the entire state of XXX [state name redacted] only generate 40 to

50 graduates a year. Sometimes there's even less. And that just doesn't even come close to touching what the demand is." Participant A2 expressed similar sentiments when they said, "What we've found is that typically there are not enough seats in the schools in the state of XXX [state name redacted] to actually fill the number of psychologists that are needed."

***Sub-theme: Being farther away from a program adds to recruiting difficulties.***

Participants from school districts that were not geographically close to graduate programs reported struggling to recruit new school psychologists. Participant A6 explained that because they are farther away from a graduate program, they struggle to develop a relationship with training programs. "It's been very difficult even for us to establish relationships with the universities for where they will send us interns." Similarly, participant R3 stated, "One of the biggest challenges that we have is that we are three hundred miles to the south [of a graduate program]. So, all the psychologists, when they go through their program up there, typically get picked up by local districts as a part of their practicum. We don't even get the opportunity to do that [practicum]. And because we don't get to do that, we are really behind the eight ball in recruiting anybody coming out of these universities." Participant R4 expressed similar thoughts that address distance and number of graduates being produced, "I think some of the challenges that we face as a school district is just the pool of graduates that we can pick from based on our location... We also, from a state point of view, don't have a ton of programs that offer school psychology as graduate programs."

Overall, if graduate programs do not produce enough interns and school psychologists, then the demand is not being met. Furthermore, administrative supervisors from districts farther away from graduate programs report finding it even more difficult to recruit interns and first year school psychologists.



**Theme four: Competing with neighboring local education administration (LEAs).**

Administrative supervisors reported feeling pressure to compete with neighboring LEAs when hiring school psychologists. Responses that aligned with this theme noted competition among neighboring districts based on pay and incentives. Administrative supervisors indicated that they needed to be aware of and match changes made by neighboring LEAs to avoid losing school psychologists to neighboring LEAs who may provide more favorable workloads, compensation, or service delivery models. Furthermore, administrative supervisors conveyed a sense of disappointment and discouragement that they needed to be in competition with neighboring districts. Participant R2 explained, “Having several districts around us that are all competing for largely the same pool of people is a challenge.” Participant A5 also disclosed the following: “...we don't pay very well at the district. It used to be part of competitive pay but just in the last like three years the cost of living... has gone up significantly. So, we're not really keeping pace with that as a district and it's causing problems because other districts across the nation pay better.”

Participant A7 also expressed concerns with their district was not being competitive enough when recruiting school psychologists. “There are a lot of people that are very strenuously recruiting and offering fairly decent sized incentives. And so, we need to up our game to compete with that.” Furthermore, Participant R1 said, “The other challenge is that some of the other districts pay more and that's very difficult because anytime we think we're getting ahead of the curve by offering something, other districts will trump us on that. I lost three people from out of state in one week to another district, another local district. They chose the other district instead of coming to us. So, it's kind of hard.”

Administrative supervisors reported feeling pressure to stay competitive with offers for salary and benefits when recruiting school psychologists. They indicated that they can easily lose opportunities to hire because of competitive neighboring districts, and they use more negative language to describe the competition. Their language conveyed a sense of distress and negativity, which may be due to the hope that educators should be able to work together rather than compete. Administrative supervisors stay aware of changes made in neighboring districts and often try their best to match those changes to salary and workload in order to remain competitive. Administrative supervisors who cannot compete with neighboring LEAs often feel the burden of losing school psychologists.

**Theme five: A worker's market.** Supervisors are also aware that along with national and regional shortages comes the ability for school psychologists to be selective when choosing a district. The participants communicated that applicants can usually choose between multiple job options, and supervisors may have limited resources to influence applicants' decisions. According to Participant A3, "it's a good time for people to be in the business of becoming a school psychologist because there are many opportunities, and they probably end up with a lot of say in where one ultimately does internship or employment."

Another administrative supervisor described how school psychologists can consider salary, benefits, and ideal location when choosing where to work because LEAs will compete to hire them. Participant R7 told the following story: "The district to our west needed school psychologists so they actually came over and visited with our school psychologists and offered them signing bonuses and about fifteen thousand dollars a year more to move to that district. I had a couple [school psychologists] that were interested and thought about it, but then just decided... if the quality of life... [was] equitable in both places they would be long gone... But

it's about where people want to live and be as well.” It appears that school psychologists can weigh their options when choosing employment.

Another administrative supervisor (Participant R8) put it succinctly when they said that whenever school psychology interns ask, “[A]m I going to find a job?” what [they] tell them is in this market you're always going to find a position...” School psychologists can typically choose between many offers when considering employment and administrative supervisors have limited influence.

### **Research Question Two: How do Administrative Supervisors of School Psychologists Recruit and Retain School Psychologists?**

**Recruiting: Recruiting requires appealing workload and compensation.** Overall, administrative supervisors in this sample reported that they are trying to make their districts appealing to potential school psychologists despite facing limited budgets and increasing workloads. When asked what methods they use to recruit school psychologists, Participant A5 said, “I try to tell people that our goal is always to improve our salary structure. And I think we probably will hear in the next year because it's kind of hit the point where they recognize we have to increase our salary because nobody can afford to live here otherwise.” Participant R1 also recognized the importance of increased salary in order to appeal to prospective school psychologists and shared the following, “I’ve worked and worked with HR [Human Resources] to try to see if there’s the kind of things that we can do to try and get the people more money. Because, it’s about money, you know. If you can walk out the door and walk down the street and make more money, well some people are going to do that.”

Workload also affects the appeal of work positions. Participant A9 explained, “We've tried to reduce our school psychologist load each year so they [school psychologists] have fewer

and fewer sites that they're responsible for, which I think has been helpful.” In order to recruit school psychologists, supervisors acknowledge that they need to ensure that the workload and compensation are appealing to applicants. These district leaders indicated that they had to work closely with their HR department and district leaders to communicate the need for competitive salaries and workloads.

**Recruiting: Building relationships with school psychology graduate programs to recruit applicants.** Although many supervisors expressed feeling a disadvantage due to being farther away from graduate programs, other supervisors noted the importance of having a relationship with training programs to hire school psychology interns. Participant A4 said, “We try to stay in close contact with XXX and XXX [university names redacted]. Specifically doing recruitment visits, talking to the cohort of the intern group for the next year... I typically come and speak with the cohort that will be applying that school year and the following school year to talk about XXX school district [school district name redacted] and what that looks like for interns. And the second way that we recruit is through having those connections with the universities and helping anyone who is placed in the district have a positive experience.”

Participant A2 explained that the recruiting methods they used were attempts to reach out to graduate programs. “The only methods we have is to let the universities in the state know that we have openings... we will send information up to XXX [university name redacted], we’ll send information up to the XXX [university name redacted], up to XXX [university name redacted], to try and let them know that we have openings, and that people could apply if they wanted to.”

Participant A9 also mentioned the importance of their relationship with a graduate program in the area when it comes to recruiting the limited number of school psychologists, “...we have a good relationship with one of the universities... so I think that's a good place for

us to be able to go and kind of present our district. But we don't do that with all of the universities and one university doesn't even have a program.”

Being able to recruit school psychology interns appears to be crucial in order to fill openings in school districts. Administrative supervisors reach out to neighboring universities by letting them know they have openings, and by doing recruitment visits and talking to cohorts of school psychology students.

**Retention: Offering support and being responsive.** Many of the administrative supervisors interviewed indicated that their relationship with their school psychologists is a key factor in retention. Participant A1 said, “Because we don’t have control over the pay really.... I think we really try to make up for that with the level of support that we do provide our psychs, and that’s something I think we’re known for...”

Participant A3 emphasized their relationship with their school psychologists. “I think at the grassroots level, building those relationships...taking the time with staff, supporting them, valuing them, conversing with them in a fashion that hopefully conveys: ‘we appreciate you,’ ‘you’re doing a great job,’ ‘you’re essential,’ and making sure people feel that if they feel they need something, they need some assistance, we’re going to deliver on that... So, I think we are just working diligently to be responsive, and supportive.” Participant A9 also mentioned that the collaboration among school teams in the district is helpful for school psychologists. “[We’re] really collaborative and so... if they have questions, they have somebody to go to.”

Participant R2 also explained that supporting their school psychologists and being available to answer questions is important for keeping them in the district. “I just try to be really responsive to whatever my staff needs. That's part of the reason why I try to stay in the office as much as I can, so if they have a problem and they need an answer I can be there and give them

that answer. I try to always have an open door policy and if they have any kind of concerns whether it's with a specific case or if it's with a policy to try to be really open to hearing what their concerns are and either helping them to understand why things are the way they are if they're not things we can change, or help them problem solve through whatever issues that they're with." Administrative supervisors believe that being available to answer questions and offer assistance is one of the best ways to build a supportive relationship with their school psychologists. They report that a leadership style of having an "open door policy" and being readily available to their school psychologists is important for retention.

**Retention: The surrounding community matters.** Administrative supervisors also believe that although the quality of life in the community may be out of their control, the quality of life in the community does play a factor in retaining their school psychologists. The participants reported an understanding that their school psychologists want to live and work in the same area. Participant A2 stated, "Our community is a great community, our school district is a great school district and we really pride ourselves on being able to make people feel comfortable and help them feel comfortable in their working environment."

Participant A8 also shared that community is an important factor. "[A] lot of [retention] is... when they feel a part of the work but also when they have connections in the community, and I think our whole entire district office staff has really tried to make sure that our two interns are feeling welcomed, and that they have the supports needed but also not just at work, you know inviting them to barbecues, making sure they're going to athletic events..."

The same message was reiterated by Participant R3. "[T]hey love to stay because they love the climate in XXX [city name redacted] and they love the fact that they are in a very good

family community and they love the work. And I think they also really value the culture that we have here, that we're very progressive and that they're a key part of the decision making."

These administrative supervisors shared their perceptions that school psychologists will remain with a district if the location is appealing and they feel integrated into the community. The climate and resources of the larger community may influence job retention.

**Retention: Offer job flexibility and match their school psychologists' preferences.**

Offering job flexibility and matching the school psychologists' preferences is another key factor in retaining school psychologists according to participants. This includes allowing the school psychologist to integrate different skill sets into their work and to broaden the role school psychologists beyond completing assessments. For example, Participant A4 reported, "[W]e try to match school psychologist's interests with their assignments. So, if someone really has a passion for elementary preschool, we can set them up with an elementary preschool assignment. If they have a passion for working with older students, we try to set them up with a secondary role. If they have a passion for autism, we have roles that we can put them in, where they can use those skills."

Participant A5 also highlighted an effort to offer flexible job roles to their school psychologists. "I really try to highlight just that we are allowed to be comprehensive school psychs, and that we're not stuck testing kids all day or running around doing two million meetings. We really do have flexibility in our assignments to do mental health support and work with teachers and, you know, support kids in the classroom and do all kinds of things that we're trained to do."

Similarly, Participant A6 expressed, "Nobody wants to come in and do straight assessments. They want to be like psychologists and do some of that... depending on where their

passions lie, things that interest them and stuff, we want them to be not only school psychologists, but specialists in certain areas as well. And that's been something that's really helped us as well. So, you know, if somebody has a huge interest in autism then we allow them to do that.” Overall, administrative supervisors recognize that school psychologists tend to prefer certain job roles, settings, or working with specific populations and that responding to the preferences and passions of their employees helps them to retain their school psychologists.

### **Lack of Control**

Throughout the interviews, there was the sense that the district leaders often expressed an implied lack of influence over the factors that contributed to addressing the shortages of school psychologists, despite their administrative role in the LEA. Many interviews conveyed the idea that administrative supervisors can only “try” their best to improve conditions, and that a lot of issues related to recruiting and retention were beyond their control. Participant R9 expressed that her efforts hardly make a difference because of larger systemic issues in education. “I just feel like the situation is very difficult, and I feel like I'm trying to do everything humanly possible to recruit and retain...If I could wave a magic wand, I would fix public education to begin, and school finance, and funding, and really look at it from a systemic model, because I think the shortages that we experience with school psychologists and other professionals have to do with the profession, and it's currently a very broken and tired system that needs reform.”

Many other participants conveyed the similar ideas. When asked how they recruit and retain despite shortages, their responses reflected unrewarded efforts, long negotiations, and a continual battle to meet the needs of their school psychologists. Participant R1 captured these efforts when they said, “I’ve worked and worked with HR to try to see if there’s the kind of things that we can do to try and get the people more money.” Overall, the interviews are littered



with the same word: “try.” This communicates a message that administrative supervisors often express a lack of influence in the recruitment and retention process, and that they have little influence over the variables that would make a meaningful difference in their efforts.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

The school psychologist shortage has persisted even during historical periods of limited employment (Fagan, 2004), and has been predicted by researchers to continue through 2025 (Castillo et al., 2014). More recently, NASP has recommended a ratio of one school psychologist per every 700 students (NASP, 2017), but the number of students each school psychologist serves is typically much higher than recommended (Curtis et al., 2012). Shortages of school psychologists have been reported in all regions of the nation with the northwest and Rocky Mountain regions being most affected (American Association for Employment in Education, 2016). Participants from some states in the Western region of the United States (i.e., Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and Nevada) were interviewed to understand how they described their current staffing needs and their efforts to recruit and retain school psychologists in their LEAs.

Because there is limited research on the retention of school psychologists (Fagan, 2004), this study aimed to understand shortages from the perspective of those responsible for recruiting and retaining school psychologists. Furthermore, the results of this study confirmed that administrative supervisors are indeed heavily affected by school psychologist shortages. When asked to describe their staffing needs, participants responded that they have trouble finding school psychologists to hire. One particular reason they gave is that graduate programs do not produce enough school psychologists. This belief is also reflected by other research (Smith, 2019) showing that some students are not even aware of graduate programs available or are never exposed to school psychology in their undergraduate years (Stinnett & Capaccioli, 2013; Bocanegra et al., 2015). Administrative supervisors in this sample shared that the number of

school psychologists available to hire is insufficient and graduate programs are not producing enough graduates to meet needs.

Prior research emphasizes the role that supervisors have in regard to job satisfaction and retention (Huhtala et al., 2017; Kundu & Lata, 2017; McConnell, 2011; Rodriguez, 2008; Yamamoto, 2011). Researchers have also found that administrative supervisors can have an effect on how school psychologists perceive burnout and other work-related pressures (Silva et al., 2016), but extant literature did not show how supervisors describe what they do to recruit and retain school psychologists despite pervasive shortages. This study showed that administrative supervisors recruit by trying to create appealing workloads and salary and by building relationships with school psychology graduate programs. Administrative supervisors work to retain their employees by offering support and being responsive, connecting them with the surrounding community, and trying to offer job flexibility to match their school psychologists' preferences.

Employees tend to leave their jobs if they feel overwhelmed and believe that they can make higher wages elsewhere (McConnell, 2011). The administrative supervisors in this study also were aware of the importance of ensuring that their school psychologists had a reasonable workload. The participants specifically described their desire to ensure that their school psychologists' workload matched compensation to the extent possible. Furthermore, research shows that supervisors need to be supportive (Kundu & Lata, 2017), and the administrative supervisors in this study confirmed in their interviews that a supportive environment is essential for retention. Participants explained that one of the few things in their control is the amount of support they can offer. They believe that one of the ways they successfully retain their school

psychologists is by being supportive and readily available to answer questions and offer assistance.

Finally, NASP recommends that school psychologists provide a wide variety of services focused on helping students academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally (NASP, 2010); however, many school psychologists report that due to heavy workloads and competing demands, they spend the majority of their time conducting assessments (Perfect & Morris, 2011; Suldo et al., 2010). This study showed that administrative supervisors also recognize a need for school psychologists to provide a wide variety of school-based services to ensure that practitioners' interests match their assignments. They believe that one way to successfully retain their school psychologists is to offer roles and responsibilities that align with the desires of the school psychologist. Administrative supervisors try to do this by not limiting their school psychologists to only completing traditional eligibility for special education assessments but rather allowing them opportunities to practice the wide range of services included in graduate programs and allowing their school psychologists to work in areas that match their individual interests. Offering job flexibility and matching school psychologists' preferences were other ways that respondents could influence retention in the LEAs.

Alternatively, the administrators noted several factors that were beyond their control that influenced recruiting and retention practices. The geographical location of the district influenced relationships with training programs. The general quality of life in the community also was emphasized as an element that influenced applicants' choices of where to work. Competing with neighboring school districts for school psychologists also was a challenge that was difficult to effectively address. Similarly, the limited enrollment in training programs was beyond the control of local leaders. Finally, ensuring competitive and reasonable compensation was often

viewed to be beyond the role or influenced by other district leaders, primarily the human resources administrators.

### **Limitations**

As researchers we recognize that we may hold some level of bias in our results due to our work as interviewers and analysts throughout the entire process. We attempted to minimize any biases by having research assistants review transcripts and results for accuracy; however, we acknowledge the potential for human error.

Interviews were semi-structured and completed by two different interviewers; each interviewer had the potential to elicit varied responses due to different interview styles and prompts. Finally, the interviews occurred over a 6-month period that may have contributed to administrative supervisors prioritizing issues based on the time of school year. For example, an administrative supervisor can face different issues in October than they are facing in March which tends to be a likely time for recruiting new school psychologists.

Our sample size was small and may not be representative of the population of school psychologists. Similarly, because this was a small convenience sample, the results are only intended to be descriptive of the perceptions of this sample.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Because this study was limited to one region of the nation, further research could be conducted nationwide to better understand how administrative supervisors describe their staffing needs and recruitment and retention efforts. Future research could explore what typically fully staffed LEAs do to recruit and retain school psychologists. Specific questions could include whether they feel their methods are innovative and proactive, and if they perceive themselves as having a healthier applicant pool. Administrative supervisors who feel pressure to act respond

reactively to changes and shortages may have more difficulty recruiting. Similarly, school psychologists could be interviewed to better understand why they choose to work in a specific LEA and what recruiting and retention efforts were effective.

This study shed light on the issue that administrative supervisors feel a lack of control over shortages and have limited resources for responding to shortages. The school psychologist shortage is a much larger systemic issue that must be addressed as such. Further research could investigate the effectiveness of large-scale efforts to advertise for the field of school psychology and advocate for the expanded role of school psychologists. Finally, future research could also seek to understand ways to increase the capacity of training programs and innovative ways to meet the LEAs that are not geographically close to training programs.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study can help inform practice in two distinct ways. First, it can show common methods that administrative supervisors are using when recruiting and retaining school psychologists. Second, it is a call to action for universities to prioritize training of school psychologists, for NASP to continue to advocate for the role of school psychologists nationwide, and for districts to advocate for the role of school psychologists locally. Furthermore, the field of school psychology could benefit from state leaders and national leaders providing funding for more graduate programs, especially programs that assist administrative supervisors whose school districts are geographically farther away from universities.

There is currently little information available on ideal practices for recruiting and retaining school psychologists. This study helped identify ways that administrative supervisors can successfully recruit and retain school psychologists. In order to effectively recruit, first, administrative supervisors need to create and maintain appealing work conditions such as

competitive salaries and manageable workloads. Administrative supervisors can work with HR to ensure that school psychologists' workload matches their compensation. Second, they need to establish relationships with graduate programs through offering strong options for practicum students and interns and making campus recruiting visits.

To retain school psychologists, administrative supervisors need to offer responsive support to their school psychologists by being easily available to answer questions and address concerns. Creating a community where school psychologists feel that they are a part of and connected to the broader community seems important. Lastly, administrative supervisors need to facilitate a broad role for school psychologists that emphasizes flexibility and that matches their preferences also seemed key to retaining school psychologists.

Issues of recruitment and retention can be traced back to nationwide shortages. These issues are beyond the influence of local leaders and school psychologists. This study showed that despite advocating for change, administrative supervisors often do not have the means to successfully recruit and retain school psychologists. Especially when shortages encourage competition among neighboring districts rather than collaboration. There needs to be a push for action on much larger, systemic levels. Collaboration between educational leaders in state and federal government positions, trainers and graduate educators, with NASP and APA leaders seems to be a key need and could contribute to increased understanding of what is contributing to the shortage and the barriers to training more school psychologists. A public relations campaign to increase awareness of an accurate picture of school psychologists and their essential role in schools could be spearheaded by NASP, state school psychology associations, and locally by every district. Furthermore, there is a need for universities to expand their school graduate

programs and to consider implementing remote training programs to reach as many prospective school psychologists as possible.

## **Conclusion**

Administrative supervisors play a key role in the recruitment and retention of school psychologists in their district. Results from this study showed that administrative supervisors are aware of school psychologist shortages and are affected by these shortages in the recruitment and retention process. First and foremost, administrative supervisors find it difficult to find school psychologists to hire, and they also find matching workload and compensation to be challenging. Additionally, administrative supervisors believe that graduate programs do not produce enough school psychologists, and that being far away from a program adds to recruiting difficulties. Finally, in regard to staffing needs, administrative supervisors feel as though they are in competition with neighboring LEAs, and that the field of school psychology and education is a worker's market.

Furthermore, administrative supervisors use certain methods in order to recruit and retain their school psychologists. When recruiting, administrative supervisors find it necessary to create appealing work environments and build relationships with graduate programs. In efforts to retain school psychologists, administrative supervisors offer support, job flexibility, and connect their school psychologists to the surrounding community. Overall, administrative supervisors recognize what they need to do in order to recruit and retain school psychologists but feel as though influencing change is beyond their control. For that reason, this study sheds light on the need to advocate for the role of school psychologists on a systemic level.



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## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

1. Participation criteria questions: (Asked during initial contact)
  - a. Do you work at the district level as an administrator?
  - b. Are you responsible for hiring school psychologists?
  - c. Do you have at least 3 school psychologists in your district?
  - d. Are you responsible for evaluating school psychologists?
2. Demographic questions (Asked via Qualtrics survey)
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. What is your gender?
  - c. What is your ethnicity?
  - d. What is your highest earned degree?
  - e. Do you have an administrator endorsement/ license?
  - f. What is your official job title?
  - g. How many students are in your district?
  - h. How many school buildings are in your district?
  - i. How many school psychologists do you supervise?
  - j. How many other professionals do you supervise?
    - i. Follow-up: Please name the other professions you supervise.
3. What is the role of district leaders who directly supervise school psychologists?
  - a. Q1: How would you describe your responsibilities as an administrative supervisor of school psychologists?
    - i. Follow-up: What are your primary roles and responsibilities?
    - ii. Follow-up: How would you describe your typical work week?
4. What issues are they facing?
  - a. Q2: What issues are you facing as an administrative supervisor of school psychologists?
  - b. Q3: What else do I need to know to fully understand the role and function of district leaders who supervise school psychologists?
5. How would they describe current staffing needs?
  - a. Q4: What challenges, if any, do you face in recruiting school psychologists?
  - b. Q5: What challenges, if any, do you face in retaining school psychologists?
6. How do they recruit and retain school psychologists?
  - a. Q6: Do you use any methods to recruit school psychologists?
    - i. Follow up: What methods do you use?
    - ii. Follow up: What specific policies or benefits are offered?
  - b. Q7: Do you use any methods to retain school psychologists?
    - i. Follow up: What methods do you use?
    - ii. Follow up: What specific policies or benefits are offered?
  - c. Q8: What would you need to better recruit and retain school psychologists?