SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS IN THE SCHOOLS –
YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW (SEPPS):
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE TIED TO DEMOGRAPHICS, STAYERS, MOVERS, AND LEAVERS

Demographics Characteristics and Career Paths for School Psychologists:
A Review of Literature

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## Table of Contents

- Introduction 3
- School Psychologists 5
  - Characteristics of School Psychologists 6
  - Practitioners in Context: Professional Settings and Practices 13
  - The Stayers, Movers, and Leavers 18
  - The Stayers 20
  - The Leavers 21
  - The Movers 22
  - Workforce Trends 24
- Summary of Yesterday and Today School Psychology Characteristics and Tomorrow’s Potential Issues to Address 25
- References 28
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Introduction

There is optimism about the future. Scholars from a variety of disciplines are conducting more research than ever on teacher education... We must continue to openly discuss and debate the role of teacher education in a democratic society such as the United States (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, pp. 756-757).

This manuscript examines the scholarly literature to shed insight into the demographics characteristics and career paths taken by school psychologists.

In 2005, Cochran-Smith and Zeichner edited the seminal book, Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education, which examined characteristics of our nation’s teachers, where they teach, and the influence of demographic variables. Gaining an understanding of how these and other factors relate to the progression of teachers’ career paths is critical, as Cochran-Smith and Zeichner report an average teacher turnover rate of 30 percent, with 6 percent never returning to the profession.

With the dean and associate dean professing interest in determining the influence of school of education alumni in the schools and on student learning, the Neag School of Education (herein, Neag School) at the University of Connecticut introduced an initiative -- A Spotlight on Education Professionals in the Public Schools - Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow (SEPPS). This initiative includes a review of literature (including information from professional organizations, NCES, AACTE, state departments, journals, etc.) of the demographic characteristics and career paths that are representative of educators from each field. This review would provide information such as background characteristics (including gender, race/ethnicity, age, type of employment), factors prevalent among stayers, movers, and leavers, and projections of future trends in the
field. While Cochran-Smith and Zeichner’s (2005) piece is now considered seminal, in many ways the information in this manuscript and accompanying documents updates the information from that 2005 book, and further elucidates field-specific teacher data (e.g., elementary, bilingual, world language, and music education). It also includes information about educators who are not teachers – including school counselors, school psychologists, and principals. Also, throughout this manuscript, we borrow from the writing of Billingsley (1993) in the area of special education to apply to the terms used across educators in all fields. As recommended by Billingsley (1993) and now illustrated in figure 1, “stayers” (retainees) is the label given to those who remain in the same position in the same school between school years; “movers” (transfers) refers to those teachers who stayed in a position but transferred to another school (in the same or a different school district), or who transferred to another type of teaching position; and “leavers” includes those who left the profession, for reasons such as retirement, finding another job in a different field, returning to school, or taking a job other than teaching at the school (e.g., school administration).

![Diagram of Educators' Career Path]

**Figure 1**: Educators’ career path as stayers, movers, and leavers.
School Psychologists

School psychologists play an integral role in promoting positive outcomes for all students by collaborating with parents and school colleagues in order to foster success in academic, social, and emotional domains (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2008). From the field’s inception over a century ago, it has been associated with the role of identifying students with disabilities and recommending appropriate educational placements and modifications. This continues to be a major function of the school psychologist, further reinforced by federal legislation (i.e., the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 1997; and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA], 2004), but there are many other ways that school psychologists serve students and schools as well (Tharinger, Pryzwansky, & Miller, 2008). Among these are working with teams to design and implement evidence-based interventions for students, working with administrators to develop programs for a safe and healthy school climate, building culturally competent school-family partnerships to overcome barriers to success, and helping school personnel collect, monitor, and analyze data on important student and school-wide outcomes (NASP, 2008).

In recent decades, the profession has increasingly advocated for role expansion into areas beyond testing and placement, giving school psychologists increased capacity to address some of the most significant educational challenges. Simultaneously, public awareness of the importance of school-based psychological services has grown (Tharinger, et. al, 2008). It has been estimated that 20 percent of K-12 students experience significant mental health problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000), and most are not serviced in the community, but visit school personnel for help. For this reason, researchers such as Jacob and Coustasse (2008) have
identified schools as a “de facto” mental health system for children. With comprehensive training in both education and psychology, school psychologists are uniquely equipped to link research to practice by providing a range of services in academic and behavioral intervention, assessment, consultation, counseling, school-wide mental health, and crisis response (NASP, 2008).

Paradoxically, amid this heightened awareness of need and broadening scope of professional responsibilities, the field is presently confronting an ongoing personnel shortage, with major implications for the future of the practice (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2003). The shortage is expected by some researchers to linger through 2020 (Curtis, et. al, 2003), while others project it could last well beyond that date (Fagan, 2002). This critical issue prompted extensive discussion at the landmark 2002 Multisite Conference on the Future of School Psychology (Graves & Wright, 2007). In a session devoted to the topic, participants concluded that efforts to enhance recruitment and retention of school psychologists would not adequately suffice to meet the impending need. Rather, they argued that “changes in school psychology practices and service delivery will be required to use the resources we have to maximize the benefits to the children and schools that we serve”. To accomplish that end, they endorsed a greater emphasis on services involving collaboration and consultation with parents and school professionals (Cummings & Harrison, 2006).

Characteristics of School Psychologists

To better understand how to potentially address a shortage in the coming years, it is necessary to discern the demographics of school psychology practitioners today. It is at least equally important to identify factors and characteristics that are associated with individuals’ career paths, including the decision to enter the profession. Obtaining precise data on the demographics of practicing school psychologists is challenging in the absence of a complete
national database of information on credentialing or employment (Charvat, 2005), but one of the best sources of information currently available comes from regular surveys of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), whose membership has been estimated to account for approximately 70 percent of school psychologists (Fagan & Sachs Wise, 2000). The surveys collect information about members on variables such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, preparation, professional roles and practices, and employment setting. NASP conducts a national study based on the results of these surveys every five years (Castillo, Curtis, & Gelley, 2012). Research examining the findings over time (e.g., Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999; Curtis, et. al, 2003; Castillo et. al, 2012) provides an historical analysis of trends and changes in the field in recent decades.

Based on the background characteristics of the professionals surveyed, a “prototypical” school psychologist could be conjured up as a white female with at least 10 years of experience, working in a suburban school. This is not to say that most school psychologists fit that particular description, but those characteristics represent several aspects that are immediately apparent from the data.

First, the great majority of school psychologists are Caucasian (90.7%) and a very large proportion (76.6%) are women, according to a 2009-10 survey of 1,272 NASP members (Castillo et. al., 2012). With respect to gender, this has not always been the case – in 1970, men outnumbered women in the profession by approximately three to two, but the percentage of women rose steadily over the next 50 years. The gap between men and women gradually decreased until the early 80’s, when representation from each gender became roughly even (Castillo, Curtis, Chappel, & Cunningham, 2011). By 1990, 65 percent of school psychologists were female (Graden & Curtis, 1991). The reversal is demonstrated at the university faculty level
as well. About 80 percent of school psychologists on university faculties were male in 1970, and it was not until 2000 that the genders were evenly split. By 2010, 62 percent of faculty respondents were female (Curtis, March, Castillo, Stockslager, & Gelley, 2012).

In contrast, the racial/ethnic composition of the field changed very little over the same period, and school psychologists continue to be overwhelmingly white (90.7% as compared to 93.9% in 1990 and 96% in 1980). Both African-Americans and Hispanics are still vastly underrepresented, comprising 3 and 3.4 percent of school psychologists, respectively (Castillo et al., 2011). Changes in representation from other ethnic groups (e.g., Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American) are virtually negligible. To put the underrepresentation in context, only 9.3 percent of school psychologists reported membership in a minority group, while minorities comprised 42 percent of PK-12 public school enrollment overall and 80 percent of student enrollment in the 20 largest school districts. Thus, the shortage of practitioners of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds is particularly pronounced.

Bilingual school psychologists are in short supply as well. It is considered best practice for English learners to be assessed for proficiency in both languages. Whenever possible, students should be assessed in their native languages by a bilingual school psychologist (American Educational Research Association [AERA], American Psychological Association [APA], & National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME], 1999; O’Bryon & Rogers, 2010). Although fluency alone is not an indication of competency in bilingual school psychology, it is estimated that around 10 percent of all practicing school psychologists are fluent in one or more languages besides English (Charvat, 2008b). Of these, 57 percent report that they have provided services in another language. Based on the estimated total number of practicing school psychologists, this amounts to approximately 1,650 practitioners. Given that
English learners account for an estimated 4.7 million students (NCES, 2011) it is easy to see that native language assessment occurs all too infrequently.

Furthermore, there is no consensus on exactly what constitutes a true “bilingual school psychologist” or what additional training is needed to become one (O’Bryon & Rogers, 2010). Several training programs specialize in preparation to work with the population, but only Illinois and New York confer an official credential (Soleto-Dyengar, Geddes, Luhrs, & Teague, 2009). NASP is currently drafting a position statement on bilingual school psychology, but has not yet released a description of competencies. The association maintains a directory of practitioners who identify themselves as bilingual school psychologists across 45 languages. The directory has grown from approximately 316 listings in 2009 (Soleto-Dyengar et al, 2009) to over 820 listings at present, which seems to signify mounting attention to the matter in the professional community.

Also noteworthy is the so-called “graying of the field” that has been occurring as professionals reach retirement age. Nearly one-third of all school psychologists were over 50 in 2004, and the proportion has been expected to rise (Curtis et al, 2003). NASP membership surveys indicate that the mean age of school psychologists rose from 38.8 in 1981 to 47.4 in 2010 (Castillo et al, 2011). This phenomenon was also clearly illustrated in a cross-sectional study of job satisfaction in which the same survey was administered to 3 random samples (N=237; N=228; N=232) of different NASP member cohorts over 22 years (Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006). Descriptive information from that study revealed that 56.1 percent of their 1982 sample was younger than 38 and 17.0 percent were 50 and older. By the third administration in 2004, only 23.0 percent was under 38, while 46.9 percent was over 50. Along with advancing age, professionals’ mean years of experience has rapidly increased. Between 1990 and 2000 the
proportion of school psychologists with at least 20 years of experience doubled (Curtis et. al, 2003).

School psychologists might also be described in terms of preparation, professional characteristics, and entry into the field. Professionals can be trained at either the doctoral or specialist level. The specialist degree, or its equivalent, can be obtained by completing a minimum of 60 credits and a one-year internship. A number of states require specialist-level practitioners to have completed a NASP-approved specialist program; generally, this degree is the requirement for working as a school psychologist or program administrator. In addition, some states require that practitioners obtain certification as a Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) (NASP, 2011) in order to be credentialed. Doctoral level school psychology is a specialty professional psychology, as recognized by the American Psychological Association (APA). Thus, doctoral programs may pursue APA accreditation in addition to NASP approval. The degree takes longer to complete and is generally required to pursue a faculty career in an academic setting. Only doctoral graduates are eligible to become licensed as independent psychologists but specialist-level school psychologists are permitted to practice privately in a few states (NASP 2011).

The 2009-10 NASP survey indicated that 79.5 percent of respondents had been trained to at least the specialist level (i.e., specialist degree or equivalent). Surprisingly, the percentage reporting that level of training had declined from 86.5 percent in 2000. It appears that more degrees that specifically carried the title of a specialist degree were held in 2010 (46%) than in 2000 (28%), suggesting that practitioners were previously more likely to obtain their training as an add-on to the master’s degree. In 2010, 24 percent reported having doctoral-level training in
school psychology, but 32 percent held doctorates, inclusive of other fields. Of those who worked in the schools, 16 percent held doctorates (Castillo et. al, 2011).

Included under the umbrella of “professional characteristics” are credentials and memberships in professional associations. Of those practicing in the schools in 2009-10, 55 percent held the credential of Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP), while 86.7 percent held state certification, down from 94.6 percent in 1990. Curtis, Castillo, and Gelley (2012) pointed out that the rate of state certification was the lowest it had been in 20 years at the time of that survey administration. About a third of school psychologists hold state licenses, half of which are doctoral licenses, and this proportion has remained relatively unchanged over 20 years. State licensure allows 61.4 percent of those holding it to practice outside the schools. After a sharp increase in the percentage holding doctoral licenses between 1995 and 2000, rates have been fairly stable for the last 20 years (Castillo et. al., 2011).

School psychologists affiliated with NASP usually maintain memberships in multiple professional associations. The majority of those surveyed (Castillo et. al, 2011) were members of at least one additional association. Most frequently, they held memberships with their state school psychology associations (61.8%). Other commonly reported memberships were with the National Education Association (NEA) (31.3%), local teachers’ unions (28.0%), APA (15.7%), and APA Division 16 (10.9%).

Some research has attempted to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of school psychologists by delving more thoroughly into their prior experiences and motivations for choosing the career. For example, Graves and Wright (2007) investigated the characteristics of those who decide to pursue the degree and their reasons for doing so. Their sample of 307 student members of NASP included one-third doctoral students and two-thirds non-doctoral
students. The majority of both groups (79.4%) indicated their highest degree prior beginning the program was a bachelor’s, and most (74.3%) had majored in psychology. Parental level of education was quite high; nearly half of the students’ mothers (47.3%) and more than half of the fathers (54.8%) had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. The vast majority of students (86%) intended to work in public schools after graduating.

On a 12-item Likert scaled survey, both doctoral and non-doctoral students had the same three principal motivations for pursuing the degree. Specifically, these were: 1) the desire to work with children; 2) working in a school environment, and 3) job stability. Analyzing open-ended responses, the authors again found a large proportion of (30%) emphasizing the desire to work with children. Past personal experiences or encounters were also described often (30%) as factors influencing the decision.

There was little difference between doctoral and non-doctoral candidates in terms of motivations, except that non-doctoral candidates placed significantly higher importance on “job stability” and the “public school work schedule”. Doctoral candidates issued higher ratings to “working in non-traditional settings”, which is not surprising as the degree allows graduates that opportunity.

In surveying practitioners’ career paths and motivations, Wilczenski (1997) found that 48 percent of a sample of 720 had experience in the education field before becoming school psychologists. Of those with prior experience in schools, 33 percent had been general education teachers, 15 percent had been special education teachers, and 6 percent had been counselors. They had experienced a variety of career paths, but the largest proportion reported they had interrupted a first career to begin a career in school psychology (37%). Many reported an uninterrupted path, with school psychology as their first and only career (33%). Another group
reported having embarked on the career only after they had finished raising a family (21%), while the smallest percentage indicated they had interrupted their career to attend to family commitments but later returned to the field (9%).

By far, the most commonly cited reasons for choosing the profession were 1) interest in the content of the field (89%) and 2) desire to work with children (84%). When offering their motivations for choosing the career, respondents were more likely to note intrinsically-motivated factors (e.g., interest in content, desire to work with children, challenge, desire to influence policy) over extrinsic ones (e.g., availability of jobs, status, financial opportunities, encouragement from others).

Practitioners in Context: Professional Settings and Practices

NASP membership survey data (e.g., Castillo et. al, 2011; Curtis et. al 1999; Curtis et. al, 2012) also offers information on the prevalence rates and characteristics of school psychologists’ employment settings and practices. In 2010, 83.7 percent of respondents were working in public schools as their primary site of employment, while 9 percent reported working in private or parochial schools, and 7.4 percent indicated they worked in a university.

Among school-based practitioners, it was reported that 40 percent work at the elementary level, 26 percent at the middle school level, 19.4 percent at the high school level, and 13.6 percent in pre-kindergarten (Curtis et. al, 1999). The largest proportion (43.4%) works in suburban settings, while urban and suburban schools are each serviced by approximately one quarter of school psychologists (26.5% and 24%, respectively). An additional 6.1 percent have described their school locations as some combination of urban, suburban, or rural (Castillo et. al, 2011).
Concerning the number of students served, NASP’s official position is “the ratio should not exceed 1,000 students to 1 school psychologist” (NASP, 2010 p. 10). Currently, 43.6 percent of school psychologists report that their district employs 1 school psychologist for fewer than 1000 students, which marks an improvement from 1999-2000, when less than 36 percent of those surveyed could say the same (Castillo, et. al, 2012). Meanwhile, 18.4 percent reported serving double or more than the recommended number of students, and 20 percent of these documented a district ratio of greater than 3000:1.

There is a well-documented gap between practitioners’ most preferred or valued activities and those they spend most of their time doing (e.g., Curtis et. al, 1999; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Meacham & Peckham, 1978; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Smith, 1984; Stoiber & Vanderwood, 2008). Specifically, studies have consistently revealed that school psychologists allocate a great deal more time to traditional assessment and special education responsibilities than any other activity. As a result, they have less time to engage in desired roles involving intervention, consultation, and other activities. Nevertheless, the proportion of time spent conducting initial evaluations and reevaluations for special education has been declining steadily. In 1994-95, the majority of school psychologists (59.1%) reported that more than 70 percent of their time was devoted to conducting evaluations (Curtis et. al, 1999). More recent surveys indicate that school psychologists now spend an average of 47 percent of their time on this same activity (Castillo et. al, 2012). School psychologists report conducting a mean of 27.3 initial evaluations per year, compared to 39.9 ten years ago. Only a small minority (18.1%) reported completing more than 50 reevaluations in 2009-10, while 20 years prior, it had been the norm for school psychologists to complete that many reevaluations per year (Castillo et. al, 2011).
That trend is, in part, due to legislative changes adherent to the reauthorization of IDEA (IDEA, 2004), which signaled a new direction in assessment practices for determining special education eligibility. Prior to these changes, a discrepancy between a child’s IQ score and academic achievement was frequently relied on as the sole criteria needed to determine the existence of a learning disability and eligibility for special education. Now, the presence of a discrepancy is neither sufficient nor necessary to identify a disability, and the possibility of inadequate instruction must be ruled out. In light of this, measuring a student’s response to scientific, research-based intervention (i.e., RtI) is viewed as an appropriate component of the assessment process (Sullivan & Long, 2010). Thus, school psychologists are increasingly called on to assist with developing research-based intervention plans and monitoring student response.

The average proportions of time reportedly spent on practices other than assessment in 2009-10 were as follows: 25 percent developing and delivering intensive individual interventions, 20 percent promoting and delivering academic and social-emotional services for all students, 16 percent in consultation, and 9 percent on individual student counseling and student groups. There appears to be a trend toward less engagement in counseling (Castillo et. al, 2012). In 1994-95, only 17.8 percent of school psychologists reported that they did not counsel any students, compared to nearly one third (32.2%) who did not counsel in 2009-10 (Curtis et. al, 1999). Data also indicate that school psychologists only occasionally conduct student groups, in which therapies or interventions for a particular type of problem are delivered to several students together in a small group setting. Less than a third reported conducting one or more behavior groups, and only 10-20 percent reported conducting one or more groups for academics, mental health, or other issues (Curtis et. al, 2012). It should be noted that these averages are based on
reports of school psychologists who work at both elementary and secondary levels, and findings may not apply equally across different grade levels.

Studies have found that professional practices often differ across various employment settings and characteristics. For example, Curtis et. al (2012) found significant differences between practice in suburban settings and other settings (i.e., rural and urban). Specifically, more time in suburban schools was devoted to promoting universal social/emotional services for all students, student groups, and individual counseling. Furthermore, school psychologists in rural schools conducted significantly fewer mental health groups and more initial evaluations than those in suburban schools, supporting some previous findings that more evaluations are conducted by school psychologists in rural settings (e.g., Curtis et. al, 2002).

Ratios are also associated with the types of services that school psychologists deliver. Lower numbers may allow school psychologists greater flexibility to participate in a greater variety of practices (Curtis, et. al, 2002). Although NASP has issued the minimum guideline of 1000:1, the association has explicitly recommended 500–700 students per school psychologist for those attempting to deliver comprehensive integrated services (i.e., the NASP Practice Model [NASP, 2010]). As early as 1984, it was found that lower ratios were associated with less time spent on assessment and more time spent on intervention (Smith, 1984). Lower ratios have been found to predict a school psychologist’s capacity to engage in activities typically described as more desirable, such as consultation and intervention, while higher ratios are associated with more time spent on special education evaluations and consultations for individual student issues (Curtis, et. al, 2002; Curtis, et. al, 2012). Conversely, less time is allocated to organizational consultation, intensive individual intervention, student groups, and collaboration with the special education team (Curtis et. al, 2012).
It is important to note that all of the data reported thus far has come from NASP members. In fact, almost all published research on school psychologists over the last 25 years has been conducted using NASP membership lists (Lewis, Truscott & Volker, 2008). In addition to other limitations inherent in any survey research, there is the possibility that characteristics of NASP members are not generalizable to the entire population. For example, some researchers reason that data based upon NASP member surveys may actually overestimate the proportion of school psychologists working in public schools (Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2011), and there may be various other ways that studies of NASP members fail characterize the field as a whole. Lewis and colleagues (2008) set out to test for possible bias by conducting telephone interviews with NASP and non-NASP members and comparing the results.

Overall, Lewis and colleagues (2008) concluded that NASP members are representative of the population in many ways, including gender, age, years of experience, and degree earned. However, they drew attention to several distinctions. First, they found that only 57.3 percent of their sample belonged to NASP, suggesting that previous non-empirical assumptions (e.g., Fagan & Wise, 2000) may have, in fact, overestimated NASP membership among school psychologists. Second, they found that NASP members are significantly less likely to belong to an ethnic minority, which is relevant given the serious concerns about the lack of cultural diversity in the field. Third, in terms of professional characteristics, NASP members were more likely to hold NCSP certification and membership in state professional organizations. Finally, they found NASP members were significantly more likely to use curriculum-based measurement (CBM), a research-based assessment procedure that closely tracks individual student progress in reading. As CBM is commonly recommended as best practice in contemporary school psychology (Shapiro, 2011), this finding begs the question of whether NASP members are more attuned to
current trends and practices, perhaps as a result of greater access to research or more engagement in continuing education (Lewis et. al, 2008)

**The Stayers, Movers, and Leavers**

Research specifically investigating the characteristics associated with practitioners who stay within the same school, migrate between schools, and leave the field is limited. Attrition data has been cited as one of the most important elements for accurately estimating personnel needs (Connolly & Reschly, 1990) and also one of the most difficult to determine (Curtis, et. al, 2004). Most studies have suggested that those who begin a career in school psychology expect to remain in the field for more than 5 years (Anderson, Hohenshil, & Brown, 1984; Wilczenski, 1997; Wilson & Reschly, 1995; Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006). Ysseldyke and colleagues (2006 p.10) believe that “there appears to be considerable mobility within and attrition out of the field, the full extent of which is difficult to estimate.” Without direct empirical evidence, estimates of annual attrition rates have ranged from 5 percent (Reschly, 2000) to 35 percent (Knoff, 1990). Additional study is warranted to further investigate the question of the rate at which school psychologists leave their positions and the field.

**Leavers from School Psychology**

Curtis et. al (2003) mentions three possible alternatives of why school psychologists stop practicing within the schools: 1) they may enter into new types of school or district positions; 2) they may accept other types of positions but retain the identity of school psychologist (e.g., faculty, private practice, clinic); or 3) they may leave the field entirely. It is estimated that retirements account for a large proportion of those who leave the practice. As the field’s age and experience level rises, increased retirement rates are inevitable (Curtis et. al, 2003). In a survey investigating retirement plans by state, Thomas (2000) concluded that at least 27 states would
have a 50 percent retirement rate by 2012. A later study (Curtis, et al, 2004) projected that, based on years of experience and prevailing retirement rates, two-thirds of all then practicing psychologists would retire by 2020. In the first five years, attrition among special educators and related services personnel is linked to inadequate supervision and mentoring, poor working conditions, and the struggle to meet unrealistic annual yearly progress (AYP) demands under increasing duress (NASP, 2006). Some have speculated that attrition and mobility may result when practitioners’ job responsibilities are widely different from what they have come to expect in their training (Ysseldyke et. al, 2006). However, few studies have directly and empirically investigated patterns and motivations of movement that are specific to school psychologists.

Wilczenski (1997) conducted one of the only empirical studies that examined these questions. Using a longitudinal design with survival analysis, the author examined the attrition risk profile of five subgroups determined by years of experience. The group most vulnerable to attrition included practitioners who had six to ten years of experience, and the risk increased with each additional year during that interval. Practitioners with 11 to 15 years of experience comprised the next highest risk profile. In both groups, especially the six to ten year group, the most common reason for leaving was perceived career advancement opportunities. This usually entailed a plan to pursue a career in administration (i.e., a director of special education or of pupil personnel services).

Those with more than 15 years of experience were least likely to leave, with the exception of retirement. This pattern of attrition peaking with moderate experience is distinct from that of teachers, who tend to leave earlier in their careers. The author speculates on several possible reasons. First, obtaining advanced credentials to become a school psychologist generally requires more of an investment of time and money, which could reflect the desire for job stability
or more solid career plans. Second, because many school psychologists have previous experience with education, they might have more realistic expectations of the position and less tendency to become frustrated (Wilczenski, 1997).

The Stayers

Little is known about the factors or characteristics associated with school psychologists’ staying in the same school, but it is probable that the more satisfied individuals are with their jobs, are more likely they are to remain. Factors frequently associated with high job satisfaction are role diversity and membership in a state school psychology association (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006), as well as smaller ratios (Reschly & Connolly, 1990) and advancement opportunities (Levinson, Fetchkan, & Hohenshil, 1988). Proctor and Steadman (2003) found that school psychologists who served a single school demonstrated significantly higher satisfaction, greater perceived effectiveness, and lower levels of burnout than those who were split between multiple school sites. With respect to roles and functions, Sullivan and Long (2010) observed that school psychologists practicing in RtI model schools were more likely to feel satisfied and challenged in their positions. School psychologists generally tend to report high satisfaction with the level of activity and independence afforded them, their capacity to provide social service, the job’s alignment with their personal values, and their coworkers. They are less satisfied with systemic/organizational factors and policies and the limited opportunities for advancement (Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006). Overall, job satisfaction has been quite strong for over twenty years (Levinson, 1983; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Worrell et. al, 2006), and appears to be trending upwardly (Worrell et. al, 2006).
The Leavers

Just as job satisfaction might reasonably predict decisions to stay in a position or the profession, burnout can be explored as an antecedent to leaving. Burnout is a phenomenon of disengagement unique to the human services professions that has been described in three dimensions: 1) emotional exhaustion, or feeling of being overwhelmed and overextended by job responsibilities; 2) depersonalization, characterized by a loss of empathy for clients; and 3) reduced personal accomplishment, or the sense of not being able to make a difference through one’s work (Malasch & Jackson, 1981). In a meta-analysis of turnover among child welfare, social welfare, and human service workers, Barak, Nissly, and Levin (2001) determined that the variables most strongly predicting both intention to leave and actual turnover were burnout, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, social support, and fairness/management practices.

Studies of burnout in school psychologists have examined demographics, affective characteristics, and organizational variables as contributing factors. Generally, associations between burnout and demographic characteristics are only modest (Huebner, 1993), but both age and experience have been found to be inverse predictors of burnout (Huebner, Gilligan, & Cobb, 1997). In addition to being generally more susceptible to burnout, younger school psychologists are also likely to experience job-related stress as a result of interpersonal conflict and difficulties with time management. Individual differences in personality traits have been identified as both risk and protective factors. In particular, low self-esteem, narrow interests, and negativity are identified as risk factors for the development of burnout in school psychologists (Huebner, et. al; 1997; Sandoval, 1993), while those who are agreeable, optimistic about the future, and tolerant of others are less prone to this experience.
The Movers

It may be that organizational factors influence the decision to move elsewhere. It stands to reason that a school psychologist who generally enjoys the nature of the work and values his/her role, but feels thwarted by the administration or at odds with institutional values, might pursue a position in a different school or setting. Three organizational variables that lead to burnout are role conflict, role ambiguity, and overextension (Huebner, et. al, 1997). The first, role conflict, refers to instances in which practitioners feel pulled by competing interests, such as when a school administration opposes what the school psychologist believes is in the best interest of the child. Role ambiguity can occur when school psychologists lack a clearly defined role or understanding of what their most important responsibilities are in the position. Finally, role overextension (Huebner, et. al, 1997) is frequently experienced by school psychologists who are called upon to complete many tasks or duties beyond those associated with their core professional identities. Excessive amounts of paperwork or pressure from administrators to take on multiple additional responsibilities within the school can lead to role overextension.

Wise (1996) reports that turnover among school psychologists is lowest in suburban settings (Wise, 1996). Historically, schools in both urban and rural settings have experienced difficulties in meeting staffing needs. Hughes (1986) found that school psychologists who leave a rural school are not likely to seek employment in another rural setting. Moreover, school psychologists who are raised in rural areas are more likely to stay in rural schools. There is a modest research base on the practice of rural school psychology, largely emerging from a wave of interest in the topic in the 1980’s (e.g., Ehly & Reimers, 1986; Huebner, 1989; Hughes, 1986). However, findings are somewhat conflicting and difficult to interpret because of methodological issues and substantial variations across rural settings (Reschly & Connolly, 1990). Reschly and
Connolly (1990) concluded that there were few, if any, difficulties that are unique to school psychologists in rural areas. More recently, stressors have been linked to limited availability of services outside the schools, feelings of isolation from professional colleagues, increased travel time, and challenges of navigating ethical issues of role boundaries and multiple relationships (Clopton & Knesting, 2006; Osborn, 2012).

There is a lack of research exploring school psychologists’ staying, moving and leaving patterns in urban schools with large proportions of students from high poverty communities. Many low-income urban schools are notoriously plagued by problems of inadequate funding, high staff turnover, and lower salaries (Ysseldyke, 2006). Often, students experience significant stressors in their environments, such as violence, crime, and mobility. The proportion of students identified as having a disability also tends to be higher in urban schools (Gruner, 2002). A combination of multiple levels of risk factors contributes to increased rates of disruptive behaviors and lowered academic achievement (Halpern, 1999; Hoaglund & Leadbeater, 2004; Tolan & Henry, 1996). Despite the need, students from low-income urban schools often lack equitable access to effective services (Knitzer, 2000). In a survey of 34 member districts of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, 41 percent reported that school psychologists were the most needed related services positions. Vacancy rates for school psychologists averaged over 8 percent, while in some urban districts they exceeded 50 percent (Gruner, 2002). It is probable that such high vacancy rates exist in these districts both because fewer school psychologists seek employment in low-income, high-need districts and because school psychologists move to higher income schools and districts in seek of less demanding, better resourced work settings. However, more research is needed to support this assertion.
Previous studies (Pierson-Hubeney & Archambault, 1987; Miller, 1981; Wishner, 1990) have found that common stressors for school psychologists in urban schools are high caseloads with inadequate time for evaluation, dissatisfaction with working conditions, overemphasis on the testing role, and perceived lack of respect from colleagues who may misunderstand the role. Racism, organizational demands, and lack of resources have also been noted as areas of concern (Wishner, 1990).

**Workforce Trends**

Based on projected estimates of new graduates, retirements, and attrition, researchers projected in 2004 that there would be a cumulative shortage of nearly 15,000 school psychologists by 2020, assuming no increases in demand (Curtis, et. al, 2004). The authors anticipated that the shortage would reach its height near 2010, and would be felt most severely in the need for doctoral level school psychologists, accounting for two-thirds of the shortage. In response, various recommendations for offsetting a shortage at the faculty level have been offered by members of the academic community (e.g., Kratochwill, Shernoff, & Sanetti, 2004; Little & Akin-Little, 2004).

While trainers are needed to bring new professionals into the field, a more immediate concern deals with the potential impact on the ratios of students to school psychologists in PK-12 schools now, as this has a direct effect on the level and types of supports that can be provided to students (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004). Estimates of the average ratio in the U.S. that were calculated in 2004 varied somewhat, but hovered around 1:1500 - 1:1600 (Charvat, 2005; Charvat, 2008a). Recent responses to NASP membership surveys indicated that the estimated average student to school psychologist ratio had decreased from 1:1,483 in 2004-05 to 1:1,383 in 2009-10, an overall 7 percent improvement. (Charvat, 2011). If the upward trends are an
indication, perhaps there will continue to be sufficient numbers of specialist-level school psychologists to allow most PK-12 schools to avoid a major strain on personnel resources. However, this remains yet to be seen. Despite improvements, there remains a large gap between current and recommended numbers. Furthermore, there are enormous variations between and within states that are not captured when reporting these averages. Even as the field as a whole appears to be moving towards more manageable ratios, a serious shortage could carry the potential to undo these gains (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004).

Charvat (2005) estimated that there were 37,893 credentialed school psychologists in 2004. Accounting for new entries and exits from the field, NASP again released estimates in 2008 (Charvat, 2008a) that placed the number of credentialed school psychologists at 35,400, a 6.5 percent decrease over three years. Using concurrent NASP membership survey data to further extrapolate findings (Curtis et. al 2008), it was estimated that there were some 26,700 state-certified practicing school psychologists in public schools. Given that student enrollment is nearing 50,000,000, public schools would need to employ more than 50,000 school psychologists in order to uphold a 1000:1 ratio. Thus, at least by NASP standards, the school psychology workforce is operating at a deficit of over 23,000 employees.

Summary of Yesterday and Today School Psychology Characteristics and Tomorrow’s Potential Issues to Address

School psychologists are a group of specially trained professionals who apply a broad set of knowledge, skills, and competencies to help children and adolescents become educated, healthy, and thriving members of society. Most school psychologists work in public schools, where they perform a variety of functions. Historically, the chief function of most school psychologists has been to assess students for disabilities and determine appropriate placements,
but roles continue to expand to include more involvement in intervention, consultative, and preventative services, among others.

On the job, school psychologists enjoy a high degree of professional autonomy as well as the ability to collaborate with others and work in teams. They have long advocated for enhanced roles and they embrace the challenge of using their skills in diverse ways to have an influence on the lives of others. Occasionally, complications such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and overextension can become burdensome for the school psychologist striving to forge an identity and negotiate competing interests within multiple systems. Overall, however, they have reported high job satisfaction over the years and value the opportunity to provide service and help young people succeed.

The field is facing a shortage of indefinite duration, although ratios have been improving. Undoubtedly, effects of the shortage have not been felt equally across the field. They are better appreciated by considering the trending demographics of the profession and the multiple shortages within it, both current and longstanding. For example, there is an overrepresentation of Caucasian females among school psychologists, and an underrepresentation of all other groups. Curtis and colleagues predicted in 2003 that these and other demographic trends would continue into the “foreseeable future”. There is a need to further examine questions of race and ethnicity in the field to better address the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity in the profession (Curtis et al., 2004). The field will also need to actively increase its visibility to potential minority applicants and develop retention and recruitment strategies in order to remedy this problem (see Davis-McIntosh, Phelps, & Kehle, 2004; Zhou et al., 2004).

Fagan (2004) asserts that if the shortage of school psychologists is considered in terms of need, rather than vacancies, “there has never been a time when there was sufficient personnel”
(Fagan, 2000, pp. 420). Given this statement, along with current estimates, it seems that shortages will remain in effect as the field continues to evolve. According to NASP’s School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice III: “School psychology as a field has matured from its roots in educational assessment and psychology to a broad-based model of service delivery and system change, within a prevention-focused context.”

As a result, school psychologists are taking on new roles and broadening their clientele base beyond students in special education (Davis, et. al, 2004). There has been an increased focus on the role schools can play in promoting children’s equitable access to mental health services (New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). Now, more than ever, school psychologists are needed to lead this effort (Ysseldyke et. al, 2006).
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