



The Association of
Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards



OAMHP
Ontario Association of
Mental Health Professionals



ONTARIO
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SECTION ON
PSYCHOLOGY
IN EDUCATION



of the ONTARIO
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

The Role of School Psychology in the Mental Health Care for Children and Youth in Ontario

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards
Ontario Association of Mental Health Professionals
Ontario Psychological Association
Ontario Psychological Association, Section on Psychology in Education

The Role of School Psychology in the Mental Health Care for Children and Youth in Ontario

Preamble:

We strongly believe that the increasing need in mental health care for children and youth can only be addressed through a joint effort and intergovernmental collaboration; as well as coordination of and collaboration by a range of mental health professionals (psychologists, social workers, psychotherapists, mental health workers, etc.), operating in various sectors (health, children's mental health, education, etc.), and in private and government-funded services.

This document focuses on a specific sector of mental health care for children and youth, i.e., school based psychological services, in order to offer a solution in contributing to address this need.

The purpose of this document is

- to summarize relevant data (focus on Ontario and Canada, with the possibility of other provinces collecting and adding their own); and
- to offer contribution to addressing the need in mental health care for children and youth by keeping /expanding school psychology services.

Working Group:

Chair:

Maria Kokai, Section on Psychology in Education (SecPE), Ontario Psychological Association, Executive Council (EC)

Members:

Sue Ball – Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards

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Carolyn Lennox – Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards, Past President

Sylvain Roy - Ontario Psychological Association

Judy Wiener - Educational and School Psychology Section, Canadian Psychological Association

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to describe how school psychologists and school psychology services can play an even more significant role in addressing the mental health needs of children and youth in Ontario. Data shows an increasing demand for mental health support for children and youth in Ontario. And across Canada. Addressing this demand requires a joint effort and intergovernmental collaboration and coordination of a range of mental health professionals operating in various sectors.

1. Based on evidence, numerous professional and advocacy organizations have pointed to schools as the ideal, natural environmental settings for mental health services for school aged children and youth.
2. Strong evidence regarding school psychology services points to the significant role school psychologists¹ can play in addressing these needs, and in contributing to addressing the growing demand for children and youth' mental health services. School psychologists:
 - a. Are highly trained mental health professionals with knowledge, skills and expertise in human learning and behavior; child development and mental health, applied to services such as assessment and diagnosis, prevention and intervention, as well as collaborative consultation, in the context of the learning environment and community school culture
 - b. Are regulated by the College of Psychologists of Ontario (CPO)
 - c. Are members of the Multidisciplinary School Teams, which provide a framework for service delivery; where team collaboration is based on each team member bringing unique and complementary knowledge, skills and perspectives to the consultative process
 - d. Provide a continuum of mental health services flexibly, and based on identified needs and availability of resources, including:
 - i. Mental health promotion, prevention and early identification at the whole school /whole class level,
 - ii. Targeted intervention for those at risk for developing difficulties,
 - iii. Intensive intervention/counselling for students with significant behavioural/mental health challenges,
 - iv. Comprehensive psychological assessment, including identification of strengths and needs; diagnosis of learning and mental disorders (LD, ADHD, ASD, depression, anxiety, etc.), with recommendations for evidence-based intervention/strategies; with consideration to cultural and linguistic diversity,
 - v. Collaborative consultation with educators, parents, community practitioners, school and system administrators,
 - vi. Crisis intervention, school safety including threat assessment, and suicide risk assessment, prevention, intervention and postvention.
3. Current employment infrastructure is engagement by school boards in a well-established organizational structure; making school psychology services the only publicly funded psychological service currently widely available to children and youth in the Ontario.
4. Recommended adjustments to the presently existing "infrastructure" in school psychology services are:
 - a. To better meet the demand for services:

¹ In this document the term "school psychologist" is used to include registered psychologists and psychological associates with an established competence in school psychology.

- i. Reach the recommended ratio of school psychologist to students (1:700 to 1:1000) by the appropriate number of dedicated positions in school boards for school psychology.
 - ii. Ensure stability in positions/funding for continuity and reliability of services.
 - iii. Allow for expanding services to consistently include early preventative interventions to avert problems from becoming severe and requiring more intensive services.
 - iv. Allow for expanding services to consistently include knowledge translation and capacity building for educators and parents.
 - b. To increase the number of qualified school psychologists the following is required:
 - i. More opportunities for graduate training in school psychology
 - ii. More opportunities for paid residency programs in school psychology
 - iii. Retraining opportunities, including enhanced graduate training programs
 - iv. School board positions allowing for the full continuum of services
 - v. Compensation comparable to the health care sector.
5. With these adjustments to the currently existing “infrastructure” in school psychology services, a more comprehensive continuum of accessible and equitable mental health services for children and youth in Ontario can be achieved. This would lead to
 - a. Better accessibility of services
 - b. Equity of access to services
 - c. Continuity of care for individual students
 - d. Flexible adaptation of services to the specific school culture.