



PRACTICE PAPER

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Expanding School Psychology
Workforce Capacity in the
Boston Public Schools

Created by

**Behavioral Health
Services Department**

Expanding mental health supports for a more supportive and safer learning environment.

The NASP Practice Model expands and integrates the role of the school psychologist, providing a powerful framework for the provision of school psychological services. To provide this range of services, NASP recommends a staff to student ratio of 1:500 for school psychologists (NASP, 2020), requiring a well-trained, diverse, and large workforce of school psychologists.

In light of national staffing shortages (NASP, 2023), schools and districts need comprehensive recruitment, professional development, and retention plans. There is a particular need for more school psychologists from racially, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to better meet the needs of all students and families (Barrett et al., 2019).



Implementing CBHM to expand mental health supports in Boston Public Schools.

In Boston Public Schools (BPS), as of the 23-24 school year, 23% of students were classified as having disabilities, 33.7% were listed as English Language Learners, 69.8% were from low-income families. To address the high learning and social-emotional needs of our students, BPS Behavioral Health Services (BHS) department has implemented the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Model (CBHM) in line with the NASP Practice Model to provide services to all students across Boston.



Expanding the role of the Behavioral Health Services Department

To provide these services, the BHS department currently employs 109 school psychologists (92.4 FTE) and has invested heavily in workforce capacity, targeting each phase of the pipeline, from partnerships with training programs and recruitment efforts, to in-service professional learning, workplace culture and climate, and retention efforts. During the 22-23 school year, school psychologists engaged in 11,061 direct and 17,340 indirect services hours at the Tier 1 level.

Tier 1 services included Social Emotional Learning for all students, facilitating professional development for teachers and other staff, as well as participating in grade level, climate and culture, and instructional leadership teams. School psychologists implemented 23,992 consultation meetings at Tier 2, and provided 6,294 special education assessments and counseling to 771 students at Tier 3. In addition to these services, school psychologists spent over 2,000 hours responding to crises.



Workforce at a Glance



→ PHASE 1

Recruitment

- University Training Programs
- Project PROVIDE
- NASP Exposure Project

→ PHASE 2

Development

- Job Embedded Professional Development
- Coaching & Mentorship
- Project PROVIDE

→ PHASE 3

Retention

- Professional Learning Communities
- Leadership Opportunities
- Commitment to Equity & Workplace Culture

Recruitment relies on three primary approaches.

University Training Programs

Many students who complete an internship or practicum with BHS continue on to work for the district. Trainees receive individual supervision, and are afforded opportunities for group and peer supervision, as well as networking opportunities within the BHS department. Our university students support the work of the department across domains of practice.

Project PROVIDE

Boston Public Schools (BPS) has received a Mental Health Service Demonstration grant that is funded by the U.S. Department of Education (DoE). Project PROVIDE is designed to increase the number, quality, and racial and linguistic diversity of school psychology, social work, and school counseling interns in BPS. This initiative helps BPS more efficiently transition trainees to full-time roles, aiding in filling job openings and retaining mental health providers.

NASP Exposure Project

The NASP-EP was developed to address workforce shortages and limited cultural and linguistic diversity amongst practitioners (Barrett et al., 2019). BHS interns and practicum students collaborate with school-based professionals (e.g., AP Psychology teachers and guidance counselors) to share their experiences and increase awareness about the field of School Psychology among high school and university students.

Robust opportunities for professional development.

Job Embedded PD

Professional development includes monthly staff meetings (80 hours/year), online PD (100 hours/year), monthly Professional Learning Community (15 hours/year), one-on-one coaching with a District Coach (available monthly or as an 8-week series), and a two-day Summer Institute. Additional strategies include peer-led PD (28 sessions in 24-25) and expert-led training, coaching, and professional development opportunities. Staff continue to refine their skills, which are documented through monthly activity surveys.

Coaching & Mentorship

All new school psychologists with mentors within the department automatically and immediately after hiring. In addition, the District Wide CBHM Coaching Model enables school-level School Psychologists to partner with school leaders and teams to coordinate tiered social-emotional and behavioral health supports.

Project PROVIDE

Project PROVIDE offers training opportunities to a range of school-based behavioral health trainees and professionals, and includes monthly training, supervision, and mentorship across disciplines (i.e. school social workers, school psychologists). As part of Project PROVIDE, trainees, early career professionals, supervisors, and mentors have access to a range of free professional development and an annual conference.

Retention Efforts to Strengthen the BHS Department

Professional Learning Communities

Monthly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings provide school psychologists with a structured space for problem-solving, training reinforcement, and department updates. These smaller groups of 10-12 staff members foster deeper connections and collaboration among colleagues. PLCs also help integrate interns and practicum students, creating a supportive environment and strengthening the pipeline for future school psychologists. By strengthening relationships and encouraging peer learning, they promote professional identity and long-term retention.

Leadership Opportunities

New roles, such as the CBHM Instructional Coach and Data Coordinator, offer direct staff support, professional development, and career growth opportunities. All central office positions, including the directors of the department, are held by school psychologists, many of whom have worked within BPS schools.

Commitment to Equity & Workplace Culture

Since its establishment in 2020, the Equity Committee, led by school psychologists, has expanded its influence through initiatives like a department-wide book club and a staff climate survey, fostering a more inclusive workplace. Alongside professional learning communities and leadership opportunities, it strengthens workforce retention and supports high-quality services for BPS students.



THANK YOU

Thank you to our staff, students, and families for their dedication and commitment to supporting behavioral health in Boston Public Schools! For more information, visit cbhmboston.com.

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Boston Public Schools