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Rural, Urban, and Suburban School Communities and Their Impact on School Psychologists

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### **Abstract**

CROSIER, CLAIRE Rural, Urban, and Suburban School Communities and Their Impact on School Psychologists. Departments of Sociology and Psychology, June 2018.

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School psychologists play an important role today in the education of students by helping those with and without diagnosed disabilities. Their role as a school psychologist entails assessing students, providing interventions, consulting with teachers and more. This study looks to see if school psychologists have a different role depending on their community location, specifically rural, urban and suburban locations. Past research is outdated and finds varying results with some finding that the role differs depending on the setting, while others find more similarities than differences. This study found both similarities and differences in characteristics of school psychologists, the population of students who they work with and with their overall job satisfaction. However, there were no large differences in their overall role and there were more similarities than differences. These results suggest that location may not affect the role of the school psychologist but it affects other parts of the job. Data were taken from phone interviews of school psychologists in each of the community settings and transcribed to be analysed. Limitations and future research are discussed.

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## Rural, Urban, and Suburban School Communities and Their Impact on School Psychologists

School psychologists play an important role in all schools, helping children who are in need, especially those who are struggling in school or have a diagnosed disability; however, some individuals are unaware of the role that school psychologists play in the education system. If it were not for school psychologists, many children would not be able to receive the free and appropriate public education that they are legally entitled to and deserve. Children do not have to have a diagnosed disability to work with a school psychologist, but many of them often do.

### **Overview of the Role of School Psychologists**

Historically, the main role of a school psychologist has been to complete assessments and evaluations (Fagan & Wise, 2007). In the early 1950s, school psychologists reported that they spent two thirds of their time doing assessments. The profession of school psychology has evolved so that school psychologist spend less time doing evaluations, however, it is still one of the main roles of school psychology. Today, school psychologists have three basic roles: assessment, intervention and consultation. These are the basic roles of school psychologists, but these are not the only roles as they have many additional tasks.

Assessment is broadly defined as the “complex problem solving or information gathering process” that school psychologists use to determine if a child is in need of special services, such as speech therapy, or being placed in a special education classroom (Ragan & Wise, 2007, 117). However, before a formal assessment and referral to the Committee on Special Education begins, school psychologists are involved in a more informal assessment. Committees typically consist of parents of the student, teachers (general education or special education), a representative from

the school district and a school psychologist (NYS Education Department, 2002). The informal assessment is called the pre-referral process, and many schools use a specific tool called response to intervention (RTI). The use of RTI started after the 1990 Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA) which was formerly called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. The IDEA gave schools the opportunity to use 15% of their special education money to provide interventions to any child who was at risk for having a disability (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). RTI identifies children who are at risk and monitors their progress by looking for changes. This prevention model has a varying number of tiers depending on the school. Some schools have more tiers than others, but there tends to be a range of two to four tiers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Tackett, Roberts, Baker, & Scammacca, 2009). Each tier implements varying levels of instruction that change in intensity, getting more intense as the child progresses through each tier (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). For example, an intervention might be given more frequently or for longer periods of time when progressing from one tier to another. Interventions or tiers do not replace each other but rather additional interventions are added (Tackett et al., 2009). In a three tier model, the first level is sometimes referred to as the level of prevention. This tier helps struggling students and many students do not need further supports. Tier II can be referred to as secondary instruction where additional and more intensive services are added. Lastly, Tier III is the tertiary level of prevention and is done only after a child does not make progress with Tier I or Tier II. If the interventions work, then the child will continue the intervention but will not be diagnosed with a disability. If the interventions do not work, the child will be referred to the Committee on Special Education in hopes that he or she will qualify for special education services due to having a disability (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Once a child is referred to the Committee on Special Education, it is determined whether he or she qualifies for services. Formal assessments are used along with observations to form a case to the Committee on Special Education of why the child should be considered to have a disability and what services they qualify for and need. Therefore, assessment consists of both written and oral reports (Ragan & Wise, 2007). The written report details what the school psychologist has found and provides recommendations for interventions. Oral reports consist of meetings with the parents, teachers and a team of school staff. The Committee then comes to a decision. Most referrals are started by school personnel; however, parents have the right to initiate the process (Harris, Gray, Rees-McGee, Carroll, & Zaremba, 1987). It is estimated that 75% of referrals are started by school personnel, with most of these referrals being for academic problems such as reading difficulties (Harris et al., 1989; Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingford, & Hale, 2002). Harris and colleagues (1987) found that 52% of referrals were for poor academic performance and 31% were for referrals relating to social and emotional problems. Additionally, approximately 50% of all elementary evaluations occur from kindergarten to second grade (Bramlett et al., 2002).

Assessments have been found to be the number one role of school psychologists by many researchers (Ragan & Wise, 2007; Bramlett et al. 2002; Curtis, Walker, Hunley, & Baker, 1999). Bramlett and colleagues (2002) found that school psychologists spend 46% of their time doing assessments. Following the assessment, the school psychologists' basic role included intervention and consultation. However, school psychologists spend much less time with both of these roles compared to assessment.

School psychologists in the Bramlett et al. (2002) study reported spending 13% of their time doing interventions. While there may be overlap of interventions and assessment, intervention is seen as a separate role where school psychologists use their skills to recommend and develop specific interventions. Teachers and other school staff will then implement these interventions and report back on what does and does not work. They may even provide interventions by doing individual or group counseling, but the amount of time available for counseling varies depending on school psychologist. According to Bramlett and colleagues (2002), school psychologists only spend 8% of their time counseling and Curtis and colleagues (1999) found that 17.8% of school psychologists did no counseling at all. Of the population that did counseling, 34% of school psychologists counseled more than 10 individuals throughout the year, 46.5% of them counseled group sessions and 20.3% counseled individuals (Curtis et al., 1999).

Another important role of school psychology is the consultation with teachers and other school staff. Consultation is “a mutual problem-solving process between two or more professionals” (Ragan & Wise , 2007, pp. 136). This a way that school psychologists can have an indirect impact on students by helping teachers who then help the students. There are a wide variety of consultations that school psychologists are a part of including: mental health consultation, behavioral consultation, crisis consultation, and parent consultation. Therefore, school psychologists have an impact on all aspects where students may be struggling. Consultation and intervention both follow the role of assessment for school psychologists but they do not spend nearly as much time in these areas as they do on assessment. Additional roles



of school psychologists include: running conferences, supervising staff, leading in-services for teachers, doing research, interacting with parents, conducting parent trainings and more.

### **Impact of Location on School Psychologists**

These important roles of school psychologists are said to be influenced by personal, professional and external variables and therefore no school psychologists spend their time doing the same things (Ragan & Wise, 2007). An example of an external variable is the community location or setting where a school is. The National Association of School Psychologists sends out a survey to its members every five years to gauge where the profession of school psychology is going (Walcott, Charvat, McNamara, & Hyson, 2016). Their latest survey found that 25% of the school psychologists worked in an urban school, 50% worked in a suburban school and 21% worked in a rural school. While school psychologists may work in varying school communities, there is limited research that investigates if there are difference in their role due to their location. Most of the current research focuses on the role of rural school psychologists with few studies available on urban, suburban and all three locations combined.

Rural, urban and suburban school districts have very different characteristics, even within each setting, which not only makes it difficult to define these community settings but also to define how it impacts school psychologists. The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) defines school locations in 4 different categories, each with their own subcategories. For the purposes of this study, school location will be split into urban, suburban and rural and each of which will be defined by adapting the National Center for Education Statistics definitions of school locale. While the definition of rural, urban and suburban are terms we learn when we are

in elementary school, they are not as straightforward as one would think. It is difficult to find a definition that is consistent with other definitions since there is a lot of variation in detail and specifications. In this study, schools that are referred to as urban are located inside of an urban area or city and inside a main city with a population range of more than 250,000 for a large urban area or city, between 250,000 and 100,000 for a mid-size urban area and less than 100,000 for a small urban area or city. Suburban will refer to an area that has a population ranging from more than 250,000 for a large suburban area, between 250,000 to 100,000 is a mid-size suburban area and less than 100,000 is a small suburban area and is located outside a main city. Rural will be defined as a location five or more miles away from an urbanized area. These definitions are broader than then the National Center for Education statistics and fit within the study. All past research that looks at community location does not define rural, urban or suburban, even when using the term.

### *Studies on Rural School Psychology*

The most research to date looks at school psychology in rural areas and discusses different aspects of working in a rural school. These studies find that there are many challenges of working in a rural community but that the role of school psychologists does not drastically differ. The term rural refers to a variety of areas depending on the community and the accessibility of resources (Goforth et al., 2017). Rural communities are thought to have a strong sense of community where they share a culture and common values. These cultures and values vary depending on the location and context of a rural community. Rural communities are more of a closed system relying on similarities among group members for unity/ solidarity and therefore

have trouble trusting outsiders (Cummings, McLeskey, & Huebner, 1985). Lack of trust of outsiders can affect parents' willingness to change their child's education plan at the recommendation of a school psychologist. Other characteristics of rural communities include high levels of poverty, unemployment rates and mental health issues such as drug addiction (Goforth et al., 2017; Edwards & Sullivan, 2014). Also, children living in poverty are at higher risk of health related issues and often cannot access the necessary resources to address their health problems (Goforth et al., 2017). These community characteristics have also been observed to impact academics. Children in rural areas have lower academic performance and are less likely to attend college than suburban students (Goforth et al., 2017; Edwards & Sullivan, 2014). These schools also had slightly higher than average special education identification rates. Rural schools were also found to receive less funding, which impacted their ability to recruit and retain good teachers.

Based on the studies, rural communities have many challenges that school psychologists have to overcome. The studies show that rural communities have an impact on school psychologists but that they do not significantly change their role. The location of the community can lead to many challenges for school psychologists (Goforth et al., 2017; Edwards & Sullivan, 2014). Rural communities are not close to suburban and urban areas which can lead to the school psychologists feeling isolated, especially from their professional community. Living in a small rural area also leads to some confusion for school psychologists. Once they are a part of the community, it can be difficult to separate their personal and professional lives. In a small rural community, everyone knows everyone. Cummings and colleagues (1985) discuss how school psychologists in rural areas have to be generalists instead of specialists. They have to have the

ability to provide a wide variety of services and functions that might otherwise be unavailable at a small rural school district. There is evidence of higher rates of burnout in rural areas (Cummings, McLeskey, & Huebner, 1985; Edwards & Sullivan, 2014). In order for school psychologists to avoid burnout, they must be aware of all the environmental factors that can cause burnout. However, Goforth and colleagues found that rural school psychologists actually had higher job satisfaction than other community settings.

School psychologists in a rural setting have to work with the unique demands of the community but their overall role is still very much the same as other settings (Goforth et al., 2017; Cummings, McLeskey, & Huebner, 1985). School psychologists in rural areas spend their time doing assessments, consultation, intervention and more. All of these roles overlap with the role of school psychologists in other communities. While the role was very similar, studies have found some differences. For example, rural school psychologists served more schools, had less experience, spent more time traveling, were paid less, and had less access to parents (Goforth et al., 2017). However, they served the same number of students and had the same opportunities for interventions and professional development as other communities. Overall, school psychologists in rural schools have very similar roles compared to urban and suburban schools, but the challenges and experiences are different.

### *Studies on Urban School Psychology*

Research on the role of school psychologists in urban settings also looks at the population of children with which they work. Urban communities have different needs compared to rural and suburban communities. The children in urban settings often live in unsafe conditions and

attend failing schools that lack resources (Graves, Proctor, & Aston, 2014). Teachers have to spend more time responding to individual behavior problems, class discipline, and weapon possession than those in rural and suburban schools. There is also an achievement gap between urban and suburban communities. Demographically, urban schools have a higher percentage of African American and Latino students, higher rates of poverty and more students who perform lower academically than rural or suburban communities. Urban school psychologists work with a population of 50% or more minority students and serve about 40% more students than other communities.

One difference that has been observed is in urban student referrals (Hyde, 1975). Approximately 89% of referrals in urban schools were teacher initiated with the remaining 11% initiated by parents. A gender difference was also noted with more males being referred than females. In Hyde's (1975) study, 91 males were referred to 48 females in one school. Interestingly, most referrals were seen in kindergarten through 6th grade with more than half being in grades kindergarten through 3rd grade. In this school, 2% of the population was referred in one year, which is not significantly higher than past research.

Challenges that urban school psychologists faced included very heavy workloads, no time for counseling or consultation, reviews and paperwork, and spending most of their time doing assessments. These urban school psychologists reported that their heavy caseload hurts other aspects of their job such as the ability to counsel children. Other challenges that face this community setting are a lack of funding and resources in schools and communities. Rural communities face this same struggle. Graves and his colleagues (2014) suggest that school psychologists should be prepared for working with an urban population because of their

challenges and needs. Overall, urban school psychologists took part in the same roles however the population they worked with and the challenges they faced were different.

### *Other Studies on Location and School Psychology*

It is difficult to find research that compares the role of school psychologists with all three settings: rural; urban; and suburban. Some studies compare rural and suburban while others look at other forms of location such as regions. Reschly and Connolly (1990) compared rural and urban school psychologists. They concluded that there are very few differences and the differences that were observed were not consistent. Their findings come from a national survey of school psychologists which found similar results about school psychologists in different communities. All school psychologists who took the survey had similar education and certification but had different levels of experience. They found that school psychologists in rural settings had less experience than those in an urban settings and suburban settings and that suburban school psychologists were slightly older. School psychologists also had different salaries with suburban schools have significantly higher pay and rural and urban having no significance in pay. Rural school psychologists also had higher student to school psychologist ratio but not significantly higher than other settings. Lastly, urban schools were found to have a significantly higher number of minority students. These researchers conclude that while there are differences, school psychology and school psychologists are more similar than different regardless of the community setting.

A similar study surveyed school psychologists from Virginia and reached very different conclusions from Reschly & Connolly. This study concluded that rural school psychologists

were found to have a more diverse role, spend less time doing assessments and engage in activities at the systems and community level (Hughes & Clark, 1981). Rural school psychologists have a more diverse role that can include things such as consulting with school board members, conducting home visits to meet with parents, and designing a school wide program. School psychologists working in a rural schools reported spending less time doing evaluations/assessments, than urban school psychologists, with rural schools spending on average 49.70% of their time on evaluations/assessments compared to 67.23% of urban school psychologists' time. Similarities were also observed such as, time spent doing continuing education activities and job satisfaction.

Huebner (1985) is one of a few studies that looks at the impact that rural, suburban, and urban school settings have on decision making. His study focuses on how psychoeducational decisions of school psychologists vary depending on the setting but it does not specifically focus on their role as school psychologists. The results of the study found that location does not impact a school psychologist's decisions, but that urban school psychologists were less likely to diagnose children as "mildly mentally handicapped (Huebner, 1985)" than those in rural and suburban settings. Another study found different educational levels for school psychologists with more suburban school psychologists having their doctorate (20%) than urban school psychologists (7.3%) (Cleary, Gubi, & Prescott, 2010). However, their education level did not impact the frequency that they provided assessments.

Lastly, Hosp and Reschly (2002) look at regions in the United States to see if the different regions have an impact on the role of school psychology. After completing their survey, they found a variation in demographic characteristics, current and preferred roles, job satisfaction

and assessment practices. However, not all aspects of school psychology differ by region, but there are some that have a significant impact on the school psychologists. One similarity that was observed was the degree level of school psychologists. Doctoral level school psychologists were not very common in any of the regions and all of the regions also had a majority of women, however, some regions had more gender diversity than others. The student to school psychologist ratio varied from 1,048 in the northeast to 3,857 in the east south central. School psychologists also worked with more African American students and Hispanic students depending on region. Differences were also found in the hours spent doing assessments ranging from under 19 hours to over 26 hours per week but everyone spent approximately one half of their time doing assessments. School psychologists also spent different hours providing student intervention however no one spent more than 25% of their time doing interventions. No differences were found in consultation with approximately one quarter of school psychologists' time spent doing consultation. Lastly, when looking at job satisfaction all of the school psychologists were very satisfied with their colleagues and their work duties and were only dissatisfied with their ability to get a promotion. Satisfaction did vary, however, depending on pay with the highest paid school psychologists having more job satisfaction. Overall, many similarities and differences were observed with community setting having an impact on school psychologist.

### **The Current Study**

The current study was done as a way for the researcher to better understand what it is like to be a school psychologist, specifically, in different settings. This study examines the



relationship between the role and function of a school psychologist and the school's location, specifically rural, urban and suburban. Past research has been inconclusive when comparing different locations, with some studies finding significant differences and others finding no difference. Most of the past research is also very outdated with studies from as far back as the 1960s and with limited comparisons of all three settings. There are more studies that looked at the role of rural school psychology compared to urban or suburban school psychologists. It was hypothesized that the role and function of school psychologists would vary depending on the school location and community. Qualitative data was collected in order to answer the research question.

## **Methods**

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to determine if the role of a school psychologist varies depending on the community location of the school, specifically rural, urban and suburban school districts. Interviews were conducted with current school psychologists who work in either an urban, rural or suburban community. Some school psychologists had experience in more than one community setting. Data were collected in the form of these interviews, which were later transcribed to look for similarities and differences.

### **Population and Procedure**

Before arranging the interviews, the researcher reached out to the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee to determine if approval to interview individuals was needed. The Chair of the Human Subjects Committee said that approval from the committee was not required.

Interviews were then arranged with school psychologists from different community settings. Names and contact information of school psychologists from three different school districts (rural, urban and suburban) were retrieved from their supervisors such as the Director of Pupil Personnel Services or the Director of Special Education. After their contact information was acquired, emails were sent out asking seven individual school psychologists to participate in this senior thesis research study by agreeing to be interviewed about their role as a school psychologist. Once the school psychologists responded, a convenient time was set up for their interview and a signed consent form was obtained from each before the interview took place. The consent form explained that being a part of this research had minimal risks, if any, and they were given the option to be recorded.

Seven interviews were conducted starting March 27th, 2018 and completed on April 23rd, 2018. Of the seven interviews, one school psychologist currently worked in a rural school district, two currently worked in an urban school, and four currently worked in a suburban school. However, many of the school psychologists interviewed had experience in other school community settings. Of the seven interviewees, three had worked in a rural school, two had worked in an urban school, and two had worked in a suburban school. Every interviewee was female and had a range of years in the field of school psychology with the least experienced having 4 years and the most experienced having 21 years. All interviews took place over the phone, and a voice recorder was used in order to record the interviewee's answers. All interviewees agreed to have their interviews recorded. Interviews started with an introduction of the researcher and the senior thesis research question. Interviewees were told that a range of questions would be asked but that they did not have to answer questions which they were not comfortable with

answering. Some interviews had a time constraint due to the school psychologist only having a limited amount of time so some questions had to be skipped or skimmed over while other interviews were able to go into more depth. Overall, the length of interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 2 hours. The interview questions ranged from topics such as the individual's background, the school and location where they work, the students who they work with and the biggest obstacles and best parts of their job as a school psychologist (See Appendix A). The interviews finished up by thanking the school psychologist for taking time out of their day to speak with the researcher. All interview recordings were then transcribed in order to be analysed.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed using Scribie (auto choice) in order to compile the data into a usable form. After the transcriptions were completed, the researcher used the transcriptions and her notes from the interviews to look for similarities and differences. First, all answers were compiled and sorted into a summary of what the rural, urban and suburban school psychologists said. This was helpful in noting similarities and differences between and within the different communities. The researcher then looked for a way to accurately represent all the information by not forcing rural, urban and suburban categories. Overall themes from the questions and answers were then used to show an accurate representation of all the data collected throughout the study. Not all themes noted differences in location, and some noted similarities or a variation in all of the school psychologists answers. Lastly, the researcher then took a step back to look at the big picture and to see what story the data told.

## **Results**

Throughout the interviews with school psychologists, many similarities, differences and trends were observed. Some of these these trends and observations directly relate to the school location while others are not as directly connected. School community and location are just one small piece in a large network of influences on the students. Some areas in which trends were observed include: the characteristics of school psychologists; student and school populations; roles and responsibilities of school psychologists; job satisfaction of school psychologists; and the direction of school psychology in the future.

### **Trends in Characteristics of School Psychologists**

All interviewees in this study were female which was expected due to the field of school psychology being female dominated. Educational background and years of experience of the school psychologists who were interviewed are shown in Table 1. Four out of the seven individuals interviewed had a master's level degree, one had her certificate of advanced study (CAS) and two had received their Doctor of Psychology (PsyD). There was a range in the number of years that people had been working and the length of time in their current school district. Locations of past jobs also varied with some who had experiences in all three settings and others who only had experience in their current setting.

There are both similarities and differences, depending on location, for education level and experience. It was observed that school psychologists who worked in rural and urban school

districts have lower education qualifications than those who worked in the suburban school district. Two of the suburban school psychologists had their PsyDs and two had their

Table 1: Summary of interviewees experience and educational background in the field of school psychology.

Interviewee	Current School Community	Past School(s) Community	Degree	Certified School Psychologist?	Years in the Field	Years in Current District
Person A	Rural	N/A	Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS)	Yes	21 years	11 years
Person B	Suburban	Rural, Urban	Masters in School Psychology	Yes	12 years	2 years
Person C	Urban	Rural, Suburban	Masters in School Psychology	Yes	18 years	14 years
Person D	Urban	Rural, Suburban	Masters in Developmental Psychology	Yes	11 years	3 years
Person E	Suburban	N/A	Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) in School Psychology	Yes	3 years	3 years
Person F	Suburban	N/A	Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) in School Psychology	Yes	12 years	10 years
Person G	Suburban	Urban	Masters in School Psychology	Yes	21 years	17 years

masters. In the urban school district, the school psychologists had their masters and in the rural district the school psychologist had her CAS. As for years of experience, there is also a variety.

The rural and suburban school districts had the most experienced school psychologists with 21

years of experience while the suburban school also had the least experienced school psychologist with 3 years of experience. There is no obvious observable relationship between location and the amount of experience the school psychologists had. There also seems to be no relationship between location and the number of years the school psychologists have in their current school district. The suburban school district had the school psychologists who had been with them for the shortest and longest amount of time. Therefore, there seems to be a relationship between location and educational level but no obvious relationship between years of experience and years in current school district with location.

School psychologists were asked about their decision to become school psychologists and from their answers commonalities and individual differences were observed. Some individuals expressed one reason for wanting to become a school psychologist while others had multiple reasons. Reasons varied from personal experiences to wanting to help children. The most common reason for wanting to become a school psychologist, and the one given by four of the seven individuals interviewed, was to help and advocate for children. Two of the seven decided to become a school psychologist because of an influential school psychologist or a person with a similar role when they were in school or college. Other responses for why they wanted to become a school psychologist, given by only one respondent, were because they wanted to: work with children and not just help them; have a preventative role in schools to help with behavioral issues; understand behaviors; have job security; and a flexible work schedule. No differences were found in the varying education or experience levels of why the interviewees wanted to become the school psychologists.

The school psychologists in rural and urban settings expressed wanting to help and advocate for children as the main reason they chose school psychology, whereas the school psychologists from suburban settings each gave a different answer including wanting to understand behavior, help with prevention and personal experiences but did not focus on helping children. It is unclear if this is because of the setting in which they work or the way that they interpreted the question. This is one example of how school psychologists are affected and not affected by the location of their school while there are many other factors that location affects such as the students and school characteristics.

## **Trends in Student and School Populations**

### *Demographics*

One of the first steps to understanding whether the location affects the role and function of the school psychologist was to see what community setting the school psychologists believed their school was in and why. While many of the school psychologists thought the question was self-explanatory, it was important to hear why they thought their community was rural, urban or suburban. With this, the researcher was able to gather data defining rural, urban and suburban with the characteristics that the school psychologists brought up. The school psychologists, who talked about the rural school district that they currently worked in or had worked in the past, brought up rural characteristics such as: a lack of businesses; lots of acreage with homes; no housing developments; country setting; cities being farther away; and at least 30 minutes away from services such as hospitals, doctors' offices and grocery stores. However, one school psychologist noted that it was a rural area but not isolated. This rural school district had all the

school buildings located on one campus with approximately 700 to 800 students and one school psychologist for the entire district. The urban locations were described as very city-like with walking, buses or taxis as the main forms of transportation. These school psychologists also mentioned that: this location is a struggling urban school districts in their state; the district receives inequitable support compared to suburban districts, low funding, and an underserved population. There were more than 10 different elementary schools in this district with an estimated 400 to 450 students per school and one school psychologist per building. Lastly, the suburban school psychologists described their suburban location as being neither the city or the country but close to a city, more populated, with mostly single family houses, and neighborhood schools. There were multiple elementary schools with approximately 300 to 400 students per school. There was one school psychologist per elementary school. Using these definitions then allowed more trends to be observed in other research areas such as the demographics of the children and schools.

One demographic characteristic question was the gender of the students seen by the school psychologists. Five of the seven school psychologists interviewed said that they see more male students than female students. One school psychologist said that she did not see a gender difference in the students she saw and another one did not want her answer to be recorded since she was not sure that her answer was accurate. Overall, a population gender difference did not seem to differ depending on location. Interestingly, one school psychologist stated that there was more of an equal distribution of gender in students at the suburban school where she worked compared to rural school where she used to work. However, she still saw more males than females. This school psychologist attributed these differences to the reasons that the children



were being referred. In the rural school district, students were being referred for anger management while in the suburban district students were being referred for perfectionism and anxiety.

Another observable difference in school locations was the race of students which impacted the population with whom the school psychologists worked. In both the rural and suburban schools, there was not a lot of diversity in the student population, with a majority of the students being non-Hispanic white. In the urban school district, there was much more diversity, with a large percentage of African American students and not as many white students. The urban school district also had a large population of other minorities such as Asian and Latina/Latino. Therefore, it was observed that the race of the student population who school psychologists work with is affected by the school's location.

The researcher also observed a difference in socioeconomic status among the populations of students in the varying school communities. Urban and rural communities had similar socioeconomic populations compared to the suburban community. The urban school district had students from very low socioeconomic backgrounds with an estimated free and reduced lunch being over 75%. For the rural school district, students came from low socioeconomic backgrounds but this specific school district's free and reduced lunch was estimated to be below 50%. The suburban school district was known for having a more affluent population. School psychologists described the students as coming from "privileged" or "good" backgrounds. This suburban school district had an estimated free or reduced lunch under 25%. Free and reduced lunch is just one measure of the socioeconomic status of families in a school district and community. While these free and reduced lunch statistics are estimates, it demonstrates how the

location of a school is an indicator of the students' socioeconomic status and with whom the school psychologists work closely.

Parent involvement in school is another factor that can affect students and school populations. The suburban school district reported very high parent involvement with many of the parents being very educated themselves. In the rural school district, the school psychologists reported "decent" parent involvement but that there were many more opportunities for them to get even more involved. Lastly, in the urban school district, the school psychologists reported very low parent involvement. The school psychologists in both the rural and urban school districts also reported the parents having a lower educational level. Many of the urban school psychologists noted that parent involvement was affected by the structure of their students' families. Many students from this urban school district came from families with: a single parent; English as a second language; incarcerated parents; large families and/or grandparents as their caretakers. All of these factors impact the population of students with whom the school psychologists work.

### *School Climate and Special Needs*

School climate, or the overall feel of the school, is another factor that was thought to impact the role of the school psychologist and has been found to differ depending on location. The school climate is shaped by staff and students and may be negatively influenced by the needs of the children in the school. The school psychologists who commented on their experience in a rural school district noted the school as a caring environment with students in the population having needs and struggles. However, they said that these students with needs and

struggles do not have a negative impact on the overall school climate. One school psychologist said “as far as tough kids and fighting, there's not a lot of that” in regard to the question about school climate.

The suburban school district also noted a supportive school climate, but with a different population of students that shape the environment. The atmosphere in this school district was described as very professional, with high expectations for students and an above average public school. One school psychologist talked about academics shaping the school environment with it being “above the norm academically” and how “the norm is skewed” in this school district. When discussing behaviors that might impact that environment, one school psychologist said that “we don't have a lot of students who reach the point where they have to have a meeting with the principal or letters are sent home, but we do have a handful.”

Last, the urban school psychologists discussed their school as a very challenging climate. The school psychologists talked about the importance that the school's climate be sensitive to trauma that the children have experienced in their lives. Many of the challenging behaviors, that impact the school climate, are by the same students every day. These behaviors include threatening other students and bullying. One school psychologist said “there's a lot of kids who just leave the classroom whenever they want and run up and down the halls.” She noted the importance of being trauma sensitive because the population they are working with are “just kids having to survive day to day in a lot of different ways, not just food wise, but there's gangs in the area, a lot of mental health issues that parents, as well as the students are dealing with the school.” The school psychologists and other staff have to “help the kids deal with that on a day to day basis, and that almost comes before the academics because if you do not have the kids

regulated to learn...the learning doesn't happen.” Another school psychologist also reported behaviors as becoming more difficult and teachers responding with “I've never had to deal with this before,” “I can't believe what's happening,” and “I've never struggled like this.” Overall, each community shaped the school climate to be slightly different with rural and suburban being generally good climates while the urban location environments was reported to be a very challenging climate.

School psychologists work with a variety of different students. Some are children who have behavioral difficulties, that impact the school climate, and others that have learning difficulties. Most of the students who school psychologists work with have been diagnosed with a disability and have an individualized education plan (IEP). The rural school district in this study had an estimated special education identification rate that was around the national average and slightly more than 10%. The suburban school district had an estimated special education identification rate below the national average while the urban school district special education identification rate was estimated to be higher than the national average. Therefore, the suburban school district had the fewest number of identified students, the urban school district had the most identified and the rural school district fell in the middle. Another interesting point that one school psychologist brought up was that, in her experience, parents from urban and rural communities hesitate to have their child identified with a disability while those in the suburban districts want their child to be identified so that they can receive more services. Location can impact the number of students identified for special education services in a school district and affect the students with whom the school psychologists work.

Of the identified students who received special education services, school psychologists see a variety of special needs and disabilities. The top three most common populations of children served by school psychologists were children with 1) learning disabilities, 2) speech and language impairments and 3) other health impairments (OHI), which most commonly include attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and mental health disorders. Other impairments and special needs mentioned by the school psychologists included autism, behavioral challenges and anger management issues. However, location does not seem to play a role in the type of special needs seen by school psychologists.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### *Assessments/Evaluations*

Six of the seven school psychologists who were interviewed in this study reported that one of their main roles was to assess and evaluate students. This role does not seem to be affected by location; however, the assessments themselves may be different depending on the location. Rural and urban school districts do the minimal testing to determine if a child is eligible for special education services. Their requirements for receiving services are “cut and dry” as one school psychologist put it. In the suburban school district, the school psychologists reported doing much more detailed and in-depth evaluations because eligibility for services is more flexible. Many of the evaluations in the suburban school district were from parent requests because the parents know how to find resources in order to help boost their child’s performance and future. One school psychologist said that she saw more 504 plans in the suburban school where she had worked but more IEPs in the urban school where she currently works. She said

“they [parents] wanted 504 plans where there wasn't one really needed so that they [their children] could have longer amount [of time] for testing and get into college.” While school psychologists technically have the same main role, in reality there is a difference between rural and urban, and suburban community settings. It was also noted by one school psychologist that her reports from evaluations and assessments had to have different writing styles depending on the population she was working with in order for parents to be able to understand. The suburban population had more education and was therefore able to understand a higher level of analysis compared to the rural district who needed to have the information in simpler terms.

In order for children to qualify for services, a team of staff from the school meet frequently to discuss possible interventions before going to the Committee on Special Education. This process involves a lot of teamwork. One of the first steps toward getting the special education services for students is through a process called response to intervention (RTI). All of the school psychologists in this study said that their school district used RTI or were in the process of transitioning over to RTI. RTI has different tiers of interventions and when all three levels are insufficient, this staff team goes to the Committee on Special Education. Each school district/location had very similar members in these teams which included, but are not limited to, teachers, social workers, school psychologists and a school administrator.

The school psychologists were asked to talk about any challenges that they have experienced in interpersonal team work. Some of these challenges were more universal, such as overly sensitive teachers, teachers who do not understand RTI and personality differences that clash. However, there was one difference that was commented on between the suburban and rural teams. Suburban teams are made up of many experts in their field with advanced levels of

education and training. This leads to strong opinions and more difficulty coming to an agreement but it also leads to more validity. In the rural school district, there is only one school psychologist so discussions go very differently. Some school psychologists expressed that team work is harder in the beginning, when you are less knowledgeable, because it takes time to become comfortable and confident. While the teams did not always mesh together, they reported being respected by their team members.

Many school psychologists play an even more critical part of these teams because they are the Committee on Special Education chairperson. As chairperson, these school psychologists must organize and conduct the process of identifying students who are in need of special education services. This includes meeting on children who may need services or who may need more services than they are currently receiving. The chairperson is the first person to receive a referral to the committee and must carry it through until the child is found not to qualify or receives the needed services. With this comes meetings, paperwork and less time working with the children. Both the suburban and urban school psychologists, who were interviewed for this study, talked about this position and how challenging it can be. The school psychologists, who were the chairperson of the Committee on Special Education expressed a lot of challenges with this part of their job. One of their first frustrations is that they feel they are doing secretarial work. They are scheduling and attending meetings with teachers, parents and teams. They are typing in data and entering information into individual children's IEPs. As one school psychologist said, "none of us are happy about that [secretary work] because we're like the highest paid secretaries in the district." Being the Committee on Special Education chairperson also takes up a lot of time which takes away from working one on one with the children. Many of

the school psychologists felt that they are not helping as much as they could because they are currently not using their skills. As one school psychologist said, “You don't really get to do a lot of the other things that you really see yourself doing” because this is not why they became school psychologists. School psychologists also do not get paid extra for this. One school psychologist said that this role is “not what I was hired to do.” In contrast, the rural school psychologist and the school psychologist who had previously worked in a rural school never mentioned having to be a Committee on Special Education chairperson. However, the rural school psychologist talked about having to be involved in other activities such as planning different school events.

### *Other Roles*

While school psychologists spend a lot of their time in meetings and doing assessments, they also have a wide variety of other important roles. One of these roles is counseling. All the school psychologists interviewed in this study did some counseling. Some did more than others depending on their preference, other available professionals at their school such as social workers and other duties. Most school psychologists had at least a couple students that they counseled such as a lunch group, an IEP one on one counseling session or counseling due to a recent home or family crisis. Another role that school psychologists have is consulting with teachers and administrators about students. Consultations help to provide interventions to assist all students and not just those who have IEPs. Other roles that were mentioned are advocacy for students, behavior support, crisis management and community outreach. Advocating for students included being a voice for them and helping them get the supports that they needed while roles



like behavior support and crisis management focused on assisting students who have behavioral and emotional difficulties that needed support and interventions. The role of community outreach involved reaching out to community supports and resources to help students and their families. One school psychologist said that community outreach was a core part of her role in the rural school district that she had worked in but not in her current suburban setting.

### **Trends in Job Satisfaction**

School psychologists were asked a number of questions to gauge their job satisfaction at their current school location. One of the first questions asked looked at what school psychologists perceived as the most important part of their job. Answers ranged from the impact that they have in schools to the more logistical parts of the job. Two out of the seven school psychologists said that the most important part of being a school psychologist was advocating for students. Another two school psychologists said that helping children was the most important part of their job. Other responses included to remain compassionate, provide prevention and consultation with teachers, and be organized. It is interesting that none of the school psychologist found assessments, meetings and secretarial work, which they spend a lot of their time doing, as the most important part of their job and this can affect one's job satisfaction.

After asking the school psychologists what their most important role was, they were then asked what was the best part of their job. It was thought that the best part of their job would be something that is a very important factor to their job satisfaction. Four out of the seven school psychologists interviewed discussed working with kids as the best part of their job. More specifically, each school psychologist reported that, in their opinion, the best part of working

with the kids was: small group work with children; working with kids and adults in a variety of ways; the relationship you develop with children; the ability to make a difference; and seeing their success. Other school psychologists said the best part of their job was the opportunities for growth, endless possibilities in their role and ability to help students, the community support, a population of great students and the school schedule (i.e. holidays, snow days, summer vacation, and school breaks). Since many school psychologists said that the best part was working with children, they may not be as satisfied when they spend a lot of their time in meetings and doing what they consider secretarial work.

The researcher then looked at what the school psychologists struggled with in their job to see how this could impact their job satisfaction. The answer to this question was different for each school psychologist who was interviewed. The rural school psychologist said that her biggest struggle was writing reports and being the only school psychologist. This is a struggle specific to the rural location because the other two locations had more than one school psychologist. The school psychologist who commented on her time in a rural school district said that the most challenging part of her job was the students' difficult family life which was out of her control. The school psychologists from the urban setting discussed the roles that they are not paid for, along with keeping track and managing everything such as deadlines, which take away the ability to help the children. The school psychologists in the suburban community said that some of their biggest struggles are not helping needy children but rather are having too much work to do, managing parents' expectations, keeping parents and the school district happy, the amount of paperwork, and the lack of planning time with teachers and other staff. The urban and suburban district school psychologists similarly struggle with the new role of being a chairperson

and the work that it entails. They say that this was not the reason that they went into this field and it takes them away from the part of the job that they like which is working with the children. Two struggles that are unique to the suburban school district are not helping needy children and managing the expectations of parents. These are specific to the suburban school location because, as we have seen with the demographics, the rural and urban school locations had lower parent involvement and higher need. These struggles noted by the school psychologists impact their satisfaction in both their field of school psychology and within their current school setting.

Once the biggest struggles were identified, the school psychologists were asked about what their school district does well to help them in their role as a school psychologist and one thing that the school district could do to help them improve their role. This would also help identify job satisfaction with how school districts make the job more satisfying but also ways that they could increase job satisfaction. Many of the school psychologists said that one thing their school does well is by providing them with very supportive administration. Others also said the school district helped them by sending them to conferences and trainings, the ability to work with other great school psychologists, having one school psychologist per building and having a monthly school psychology meeting. Most of these last things that help job satisfaction are only applicable to urban and suburban schools since the rural school district only has one school psychologist.

School psychologists, when asked, gave varied answers to how the school district could improve their job and therefore improve their job satisfaction. Three out of the seven school psychologists from urban and suburban school districts discussed how more and/or higher qualified staff would help to improve their job as it would provide more support. Other ways that

school psychologists said that the school districts could improve was by providing a job description that resembles what they actually do, more interventions in the general education classrooms, the ability to spend more time in the building with students, instead of attending meetings, and to stop being pulled in so many different directions. Interestingly, the school psychologists who discussed their experience in a rural setting did not touch on the way the school could improve and commented that the things that needed to be improved were out of the control of the school district such as the community needing more supports.

Overall, the school psychologists discussed the way that their role in their school location affects their satisfaction by talking about the most important part of their job, the best part of their job, their biggest struggle and way that their school district helps them and could help them more. All of this impacts the school psychologists' overall satisfaction with their job. While many of the school psychologists talked about their frustrations, they all ended their interview by saying how they love the profession of school psychology and their job as a school psychologist. School psychologists who had worked in a variety of settings were able to comment more on how their overall satisfaction as a school psychologist has been impacted depending on where they work. The school psychologists who had worked in all three settings (rural, urban and suburban) found their job more satisfying in a rural or urban district. They said that they had an impact on children of need and this led to higher job satisfaction. One of the most unsatisfying things that these school psychologists talked about was while working in a suburban school district. These school psychologists felt like they were pleasing parents and managing their expectations, protecting the district, exploiting resources, and not helping children who really needed help. One school psychologist said "I was so paranoid and pleasing the parents for fear of

a lawsuit... I felt like that was protecting the district from losing money... it was about exploiting those resources to their child's advantage.” Another school psychologist said that working in her past rural school district “was much more satisfying position” than her current suburban position and she “found a lot more fulfillment in working.” However, these same school psychologists also discussed burnout when working with a challenging population. Overall, being a school psychologist had high job satisfaction for everyone, but some said needy populations were more satisfying to work with.

### **Future of School Psychology**

To finish the interview, the researcher looked at what school psychology might look like in the future. Some school psychologists talked about how they ideally saw the profession of school psychology in the future and others talked more realistically about the transformation that school psychology might make. Ideally, in the future, the school psychologists said they hoped school psychology would do more consulting with teachers, parents and teams, more organizing of support services, no longer include the role of being a Committee on Special Education chairperson, working with more children, building relationships with more children and being involved in more preventative measures. Realistically, school psychologists see their role in the future as working with and managing more behaviors, a large mental health focus, more special needs, more expectation of students, more assessments, and more data decision making. School psychologists are seeing higher rates of students with behavioral issues, mental health disorders and all together high need. They think that in the future, school psychologists will have to focus on helping these populations by providing services and supports to these students. With higher

needs comes more assessments and data driven decision making to prove that children need services. Lastly, the pressure from parents, teachers and society of expecting more from children will lead to school psychologists having to provide services to help these children do the best that they can. It will be interesting to see what the role of school psychology looks like in the future.

### **Discussion**

The current study looked at the role of school psychologists in rural, urban and suburban settings to see if their role would vary depending on their location. The original hypothesis, that the role would vary, was not supported by the results. School psychologists, no matter their setting, have a main role of providing student assessments. While their role does not vary, location has many effects on the school psychologist.

This study, like past research, has found a variety of similarities and differences for the location where school psychologists work. For example, past research has found that school psychologists' backgrounds vary depending on location, with school psychologists with higher education working predominantly at suburban schools (Cleary, Gubi & Prescott, 2010). It was also observed that school psychology is primarily a female dominated field (Bramlett et al., 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Past research has also found a gender difference in the population of students who school psychologists work with, no matter their location, just as the current study found (Hyde, 1974; Ragan & Wise, 2007). Another similarity with past research is the

population of students that are in rural and urban schools. This study and others found differences in socioeconomic status, race and parent involvement in rural and urban settings and these different characteristics created challenges to working in that community (Goforth et al., 2017; Edwards & Sullivan, 2014). Rural and urban communities had students who tended to be poor with less parent involvement or access. Urban schools served more of a minority population while rural schools served a predominantly white population.

When looking at the roles and responsibilities, it would found that the roles are more similar than different. All school psychologists spend most of their time doing assessments no matter the community location (Bramlett, 2002; Cummings, McLeskey, & Huebner, 1985; Cleary, Gubi, & Prescott, 2010). Other responsibilities that school psychologists spent their time doing included: consultation; intervention; counseling and more (Ragan & Wise, 2007; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Bramlett et al., 2002). All of these have been seen in past research and were found to part of the role of the school psychologists in this study.

Lastly, past research has also looked at job satisfaction. This study found that many school psychologists reported being more satisfied working in a rural or urban schools. Goforth and colleagues (2017) also found that rural school psychologists have higher job satisfaction, however not all studies have found higher job satisfaction in rural and urban schools. This study looked very broadly at school psychologists in order to get a better idea of what their job is like

in each community setting. All together, the results from this study match the results of past research.

### **Implications**

This study helped to identify the importance of school psychologists in all school community settings. From the information gathered, school psychologists are able to make a difference by doing assessments and getting the children the services they need; however, they wish that they could spend more time working with the children. The researcher thinks that, in the future, school psychologists' role should move away from paperwork and meetings to focus more on the children. This could be achieved in a couple of ways. The first way is to hire secretaries for school psychologists who can help them with their paperwork and setting up meetings. While this would not eliminate the meetings, it would lessen part of their current workload. Another way to solve this problem would be to give the paperwork, meetings and Committee on Special Education chair role to another administrator. Schools could create a job for a school psychologist or another staff member to only do the meetings and paperwork. Then, the rest of the school psychologists in the district could focus on the students. Roles that should take priority are helping to provide interventions, consulting with teachers, and providing counseling to both groups and individuals. Intervention and consultation can help to stop issues before they arise and counseling would help to identify children in need. Counseling cannot hurt a student



and may help them in the long run. In today's society, children are having more challenging behaviors and complex needs. The population of students who have mental health issues is rising in schools and children need more support from school psychologists and behavioral health staff in schools. School psychologists have a wide range of skills and they are currently only using a small amount of them. If school psychologists were able to do more work with the children, this might be able to have an impact on the number of school shootings that the United States is currently experiencing. Children need someone who will look out for them and provide them direction especially if their parents are unable. This may not only help the children but also prevent school psychologists from becoming burnt out. Currently, the school psychologists expressed frustration that they do not get to work with children and spend too much of their time doing paperwork. Having a more direct relationship with children could make the job of a school psychologist even more rewarding. With all of this, a clear description should be written so that school psychologists are able to focus on the children and less on paperwork. This would give school psychologists a better understanding of what their role is and is not. It would not have to mandate specific hours that the school psychologist has to spend their time on but give more of an outline of what their expected job is. This may also be helpful for individuals who are looking into the profession of school psychology so they can have an understanding of what people do in this profession.

Lastly, an important takeaway is that the achievement gap still exists today and the reasons for this. Children in suburban schools receive accommodations in order to get an advantage and succeed in school while children, in urban and rural schools with significant needs who may already be behind, are getting the bare minimum. Resources should be more evenly allocated with more resources going to needier school districts. This could be done by giving more funding to lower income areas where less money is raised through taxes and less money to high income areas where more money is raised through taxes to fund their schools. Families in suburban communities tend to have more money so they could provide resources for their children if not provided, but families from urban and rural communities tend to be of lower income, and therefore cannot pay for additional resources for their children. With more funding, schools might be able to help minimize the achievement gap that still exists today.

### **Limitations**

This study has a variety of limitations. The first limitation is that all data were in the form of interviews or qualitative data. While qualitative data gives in-depth and meaningful answers, it is difficult to find significance in the data. Quantitative data gives you a number while qualitative gives you detailed answers and information that you might not previously have thought about. Qualitative data is also limited because it is time consuming. Each individual

interviewed was only able to give a certain amount of time for the interview. Therefore, on occasion, interview questions had to be skipped or skimmed over.

Defining rural, urban and suburban was also a limitation for this study and studies in the past. It is very difficult to define these school community setting with so much variety in every definition. Better definitions are needed so that all studies can use similar criteria when choosing schools although this may be something that never happens due to the complexity. Using the same definitions can allow for fewer differences between studies and more accurate data to better understand the relationship between school communities and school psychologists.

Another limitation of this study was the small number of participants. There were a total of seven participants with one from a rural school district, two from an urban district and four from a suburban district. If there were more interviews, more data might have been collected and the results would be more significant. Also, having an equal number of interviews from each location would help to have better representative data. Due to having limited time and difficulty setting up interview times, there was a low number of participants.

The data from this current study is also not representative of the population of school psychologists and community settings because they are all from around the same area. All of the school psychologists for each setting were from the same school district but different schools within the district. The school districts in this study were also all from the same county.

Therefore, this sample of school psychologists and community settings is not representative to the real population of school psychologists and variability in school settings.

This study was also limited in some ways because it did not collect any demographic information about the school psychologists. The only demographic information that could be gathered was their gender by their name and voice. While the profession of school psychology is mainly women, it would have been beneficial to the study to also interview male school psychologists for their views on their role and the impact of the school community and location.

Lastly, the willingness of the interviewees limited the information gathered for the study. While all the participants agreed to voluntarily take part in this study, some were more willing to talk for longer. Some participants were able to expand and give examples while others struggled to completely answer the questions. The school psychologists who were much more willing to talk had the researcher call them during a time when they could talk such as at the end of the day or on the weekend while the others who were not as willing to talk scheduled the call during the day when they only had about 20 minutes. With improvements to the limitations in this study, more information could be gathered on the relationship between school community and school psychologists.

## **Future Research**

Research in the future should not only look more at the relationship between school psychology and school community but also other factors that can impact school psychology. For example, a longitudinal study should be done to see if the passage of time, such as the progression of years, impacts school psychology. The role of school psychologists could be changing over time and impacting their role more than the schools location. Other factors such as funding of the school should be studied. It could be that the amount of funding a school receives has a stronger relationship with the school psychologists' role than school community since more funding would allow for additional staff and resources. Therefore, this would change the current role of school psychologists. Another study could look to see if school psychologists' roles differs depending on the grade levels they work with. Past research shows that elementary school psychologists do a majority of the testing, so high school psychologists may get to spend more time in other roles such as counseling. Future research can also have a more representative sample of school psychologists and gather school psychologists both qualitative and quantitative data. Other topics that could be examined in future research, that were not included in this study, are salary, preventive services that school psychologists provide, and burnout. All of these factors are worth future research in order to understand what influences and impacts school psychologists.

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## **Interview Questions**

\*= questions to ask if time is limited by the interviewee

### **Individual**

- \*Can you please tell me about your educational background?
  - Masters or PhD?
  - How long have you been a school psychologist?
  - How long have you worked in your current school district?
  - Have you always been an elementary school psychologist?



- Why did you want to become a school psychologist?

### **School/Location**

- \*Can you please tell me about your elementary school?
  - How many elementary schools in your school district?
  - What is/are your school's climate(s) like?
  - What are the demographics? (Race, Socioeconomic Status, Identification Rate, Parental Involvement)
- \*Would you consider your school district as taking place in a rural, urban or suburban setting? Why?
- Have you always worked in an urban/suburban/rural school district?
- Do you think that the setting in which the school is set affects the role of you, the school psychologist?
- Please describe the referral process
  - Interprofessional teamwork can be challenging. Who do you work with in your team? Do you find this challenging in your school district?

### **Students**

- On a weekly basis, how many schools do you visit?
- \*Can you please tell me about the student's you serve?
  - What population of students do you serve the most?
  - Are there any demographic characteristics that stand out to you?
    - Do you see more female or male students?
- Do you do more assessments or counseling?

- If you had to list your top three roles/functions, what would they be and why?

### **Biggest Obstacles & Best Parts**

- \*What is/are the most important part(s) of being a school psychologist?
  - What is the best part about being a school psychologist in your school district?
- What is the biggest thing you struggle with being a school psychologist in your school district?
- What is one thing that your school district does well to help assist you in your role as a school psychologist and what is one thing that they could improve to help you do an even better job?
- \*Where do you see the role of school psychology in the future?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?