

PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES ABOUT SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES:

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## ABSTRACT

The literature in the field of school psychology suggests that the role of the school psychologist has been primarily as a person who conducts assessments for the special education population but that school psychologists desire to be engaged in additional services, such as prevention and direct intervention. Influences on the role of school psychologist may include: perceptions of consumer groups, the power and influence of the school principal and special education legislation. A qualitative study was conducted to obtain the perceptions of principals, as an individual consumer group, about current and desired school psychological services, as well as potential barriers to expanding the role. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten elementary school principals in Central/Northern New Jersey and the data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Classical Content Analysis. Results suggested that principals perceived assessment to be the primary activity of the school psychologist and that many school psychologists were also involved in consultative activities, or served as a resource to staff and families. Most of the principals in this study expressed a desire for additional services, such as providing training to parents and staff, as well as having the school psychologist have more direct contact with students. The envisioned role was also seen as preventative rather than reactive with increased flexibility and increased visibility in the school. The perceived barriers to expanding the role of the school psychologist that were reported were time and financial constraints, as well as legislation. Principals in this study did not view themselves as being a critical influence in defining the role of the school psychologist. They suggested that school psychologists make a plan and approach the administration with recommendations of how to expand their services in the

school. In order to facilitate this, training programs could place a greater emphasis on preparing school psychologists for the role of providing training and psycho-education, as well as preparing them for collaboration with administrators and other stakeholders in the school.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

According to the United States Public Health Service (2000), “the nation is facing a public crisis in mental health care for infants, children and adolescents” (p. 12). The report contends that the majority of student mental health needs are not being met, and that when left untreated, they may lead to a number of negative outcomes for the individual, as well as the families and communities of which the individual is a part. However, the potential negative consequences of these issues may be mediated with access to appropriate services.

Schools may serve as logical and ideal settings in which to provide mental health services and related programs to students. Although the primary function of the school system has been to educate youth, the unmet mental health needs are interfering with students’ ability and readiness to learn. The social and emotional development and health of students may be addressed through more comprehensive services in the school. However, school programs designed to enhance the social-emotional development of its students are limited. Research has shown that teachers, school counselors and school psychologists agree that students’ mental health needs are not being met and that schools should provide comprehensive services to students (Repie, 2005).

For over 50 years, the field of school psychology has been called on to help reach this unmet mental health need among students through change in the school psychologist's role. The proposed changes to the field of school psychology generally include expanding the activities of the school psychologist beyond assessment to include more emphasis on prevention and intervention activities (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000).

Research on the perceptions of school psychologists over the past few decades has demonstrated that school psychologists desire to have a greater breadth of roles and functions. School psychologists indicate that that they desire an expansion of the role and involvement in additional services and activities but that no real change has occurred over the past few decades and that school psychologists still spend the majority of their time in assessment related activities (Abel & Burke, 1985; Bramlett, R.K., Murphy, J.J., Johnson, J., Wallingsford, L. & Hall, J.D., 2002; Curtis, M.J., Hunley, S.A., & Grier, J.E.C., 2002; Hughes 1979; Prout, Alexander, Fletcher, Memis & Miller, 1993; Watkins, Crosby & Pearson, 2001).

School psychologists work in connection with a variety of other professionals that make up the system of a school. The roles and functions of the school psychologist are influenced by consumer groups, especially teachers and administrators. It is advantageous to understand the perspectives of the other professional groups and ask what they want and need from school psychologists. Research has shown that most consumer groups consider the primary role of the school psychologist to be special education evaluator. Overall, teachers identify assessment as the primary activity of the school psychologist, are generally satisfied with the services, and desire additional services to be provided, especially consultation (Farrell, Jimerson, Kalamouka, &

Benoit, 2005; Hagemeyer, C., Bischoff, L., Jacobs, J., & Osmon, W., 1998; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Watkins, M.W., Crosby, E.G., & Pearson, J.L., 2001). In general, administrators (including superintendents, principals, and directors of special services) also identify assessment as the primary activity of the school psychologist, and desire additional services to be provided by the school psychologist (Hagemeyer et al., 1998; Hughes, 1979). There have been no recent research studies that examine principals' perspectives as an individual consumer group. However, research from the 1970's and early 1980's showed that principals identified assessment as the primary activity of the school psychologist, were generally satisfied with the services and desired additional services to be conducted (Abel & Burke, 1985; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Senft & Snider, 1980).

Querying school professionals about the roles and functions of the school psychologist is one way to better understand and inform the role of the school psychologist. Reform efforts in the field of school psychology recommend obtaining input from collaborating professionals. While consumer groups may be generally satisfied with the services provided by a school psychologist, there is evidence that they also desire additional services. School psychologists also report a discrepancy between the services they currently provide and the services they want to provide.

Why this documented history of discrepancy between the actual and desired roles of school psychologists has persisted over time remains a question. It appears that there may be barriers or obstacles to reforming the role of the school psychologist. Some influences that may impact the role of the school psychologist and may serve as barriers to the expansion of the role include: the power and influence of principals, legislation and

policy, as well as traits of the individual school psychologist. School principals have been identified as one of the most influential variables affecting the role, function and services of the school psychologist (Benson & Hughes, 1985; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Senft & Snider, 1980; Tindall, 1964). In order to follow legal requirements related to special education law, schools have had to depend on school psychologists to use individual assessment and categorization as a means of providing service. Last, individual personal and professional qualities of the individual school psychologist may be influences on the role of the school psychologist.

A role change for school psychologists may help meet the needs of students' emotional and mental health problems. It is argued that schools are a logical place to provide the services, as students are already there, the environment is conducive to learning, and it provides the ability to collaborate with key adults in the students' lives (e.g. teachers). A shift that is recommended by professionals in the field of psychology includes a move away from the model of individual assessment and diagnosis and towards an ecological model of prevention and intervention.

The current research study aimed to explore elementary school principals' perceptions, as an individual consumer group, and using qualitative research methods, to understand their perceptions of the current and desired services conducted by the school psychologist. Further, the research looked at the principals' perceptions of the envisioned role of the school psychologist, and identified the perceived potential barriers to expanding the role of school psychologist in the school.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*

Mental health issues among today's youth are a major concern. Children and adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are faced with a number of critical issues which impact mental health. Many children live in low-income households or live in homes that are below the federal poverty level. Children face harassment and bullying in the schools by other peers and are affected by violence and abuse in their homes and communities. Further, they experience pressures related to sex, alcohol and drug abuse (Crockett, 2004). According to the Surgeon General's Report from the United States Public Health Service (2000), "the nation is facing a public crisis in mental health care for infants, children and adolescents" (p. 12). Burns, Costello, Angold, Tweed, Stangl, Farmer et al. (as cited in United States Public Health Service, 2000) report that one in five children and adolescents have a mental health disorder and at least one in ten children and adolescents have a serious emotional disturbance. They estimate that anywhere from 70 – 80% of children and adolescents do not receive needed mental health services.

When left untreated, these disorders can negatively impact the lives of the youth and can be costly to the family and the community. The disorders may lead to social and emotional problems, such as family and peer conflicts, substance abuse and violence. Children and adolescents with unmet mental health needs may end up failing out of school and/or going to jail (United States Public Health Service, 2000). On the other hand, students who receive mental health support experience more academic and personal success than those who do not receive needed services (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2006).

### *Mental Health in the Schools*

Schools are ideal settings in which to provide mental health services, as children spend much of their time there. Also, the learning environment is conducive to the integration of healthcare and education, as well as the implementation of prevention and intervention programs. Also, school psychologists and other mental health providers in the school know the student and the staff and can collaborate with other key individuals in the child's life to provide coordinated and integrated services. Problems of accessibility and stigma are also reduced when services are provided in the school (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2003; NASP, 2006; Talley & Short, 1996). The primary responsibility of schools is education of the youth, however, learning is dependent upon the issues the individual brings to the learning environment and schools need to address the issues as they relate to, or interfere with, education. School success is linked to variables such as psychological health, positive relationships,

support and health (NASP, 2003; Talley & Short, 1996). Although it is generally acknowledged and agreed upon that the social-emotional development of students is important, relevant programs continue to be auxiliary and provide only basic services (Adelman & Taylor, 2000).

Repie (2005) surveyed school counselors, psychologists and teachers to obtain their perceptions of school mental health issues. The findings indicate that the professionals believe some students are not having their mental health needs met. The problems that were rated overall as most severe in this study were impaired self-esteem, attention deficits and peer relationship problems. However, the authors note that endorsement of various problems differed based on the role of those being surveyed, as well as the grade level, and that this is only an aggregate conclusion. The services which were most frequently available in schools were evaluation of emotional and behavior problems, individual counseling and crisis intervention. Members of each professional group agree that these three services should be available in the school. The services which were most infrequently available in schools were family counseling, substance abuse services and educational presentations to students about mental health issues. Suggestions are made for schools to offer more comprehensive services to provide more support to students, as well as to families. The school professionals suggested that the barriers to more mental health services in the schools were attitudes and stigma, as well as financial constraints.

Suggestions have been proposed over the past 50 years as to how school psychologists can better help meet the needs of children and adolescents. Recommended changes to the field of school psychology include: more collaboration with state and community organizations, a greater emphasis on indirect services and prevention, the use

of empirically based programs and an emphasis on evaluation of services, as well as an increase in family involvement, by making changes, such as providing evening hours, to accommodate the needs of students and families. Also, cross cultural training for school psychologists has been suggested (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Crockett, 2004). Some propose the implementation of comprehensive school-based mental health programs to provide mental health services to students and to promote social-emotional development of all children (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Crockett, 2004; Nastasi, 1998; Pfeffer & Reddy, 1998). Some recommend health care reform, including having school psychologists provide mental health services as a part of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary healthcare program (Nastasi, 2000; Talley & Short, 1996).

### *Perceptions of School Psychologists*

Professional functions and roles of school psychologists have been a topic of research for many decades. The calls for change to the field of school psychology and the role of the school psychologist span 50 years and offer consistent ideas for change, generally to expand the role beyond that of assessment of special education to include more emphasis on prevention and intervention, among other services (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000). There is a long history of research studies conducted that examine the perceptions of school psychologists by consumers (e.g. teachers, administrators, etc.) and by school psychologists. There were numerous studies conducted in the 1970's and early 1980's, and while the findings may no longer be current, they provide a historical overview.

Researchers collected many consistent findings in the late 1970's and 1980's about the role of the school psychologist. They found a relatively consistent pattern of school psychology practice being dominated by assessment related activities, with varying levels of satisfaction by others, and a documented desire by school psychologists to expand their role. There was a gap in the literature on this subject until the late 1990's and early 2000's. At that time, a few new studies emerged which examined the perceptions of school psychologists by school psychologists, as well as by other consumers. Overall, the findings suggested that there are some differences between what consumer groups and school psychologists perceive as critical functions of school psychological services (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Reschly, 2000).

*School psychologists.*

The perceptions of the role and function of school psychologists by school psychologists have been examined throughout the past few decades. School psychologists have been surveyed to ascertain the amount of time spent in various roles and desired roles or activities. School psychologists report that a majority of their time is spent in psycho-educational evaluations for the purposes of special education and that the other services provided in the remaining time are consultation, intervention, prevention, crisis response, counseling, supervision, training and research (Bramlett et al., 2002; Curtis et al., 2002; Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford & Hall, 2003; Reschly, 2000).

School psychologists report a discrepancy between actual and desired roles in schools and they wish for a change in job roles and functions. They report wanting to decrease

time spent in assessment activities and increase their involvement in counseling, consultation, prevention, training, parent education and direct intervention/treatment (Abel & Burke, 1985; Alexander, Fletcher, Memis & Miller, 1993; Curtis et al., 2002; Hughes 1979; Prout et al., 1998, Watkins et al., 2001). The findings of these studies suggest no major shifts in the actual or desired professional roles in the past, up to the present. Bramlett et al. (2002) also found no changes in the activities of school psychologists and that time spent in assessment activities has been consistent.

*Consumer groups.*

The literature documents a history of perceived role conflict for school psychologists, with school psychologists desiring to expand their role beyond that of assessor. In addition to obtaining the perceptions of school psychologists by school psychologists, researchers have also examined the perceptions of consumers of school psychological services. Collaboration with stakeholders is important for school psychology reform and therefore, there is a need to seek perspectives of the consumers. Much of this type of research is older and the historical perspective is that consumers see school psychologists primarily as assessors but would like to see more services offered. Results from numerous studies of consumer groups (e.g. teachers, administrators, etc.) indicate their perceptions are relatively consistent with each other, in terms of considering the primary role of school psychologist to be special education evaluator, though there is some variation between consumer groups regarding other actual and desired services to be

provided by the school psychologist, *in addition* to assessment (Abel & Burke, 1985; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004).

*Principals.*

Results from studies surveying school principals suggest that principals endorse assessment as the most prevalent and desirable activity and believe the most important activities of a school psychologist include traditional psychological testing, personality and emotional assessment and screening and consultation. Principals also desire more time from the school psychologist and an increase in individual and group counseling treatment, in-service trainings and preventative mental health services, as well as participating in organizational design and school climate. Overall, there is a historical satisfaction with the services of the school psychologist and a minimal discrepancy between actual and desired roles, according to principals. There are no recent studies which survey principals' perspectives as an individual consumer group (Abel & Burke, 1985; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Senft & Snider, 1980).

*Administrators.*

A variety of other administrators (e.g. superintendents, directors of pupil services), in addition to principals, have also been surveyed. In general, administrators see school psychologists as primarily providing assessment for special education and some behavior modification. Many advocate for school psychologists to be more involved in

counseling, parent education, training, consultation, organizational development and prevention (Hagemeier, Bischoff, Jacobs & Osmon, 1998; Hughes, 1979). Hughes (1979) also found that some administrators desired school psychologists to spend less time in assessment.

### *Teachers.*

Surveys of teachers at schools suggest some consistent perceptions across studies, and also more inconsistencies than among other consumer groups. Many teachers assert that assessment is the primary function of school psychologists and desire more services, *in addition* to assessment. Overall, teachers in these studies were satisfied with the services and also desire more services and recommend increases in psychological staff.

Consultation is one of the services most frequently endorsed as desirable by teachers (Farrell et al., 2005; Hagemeier et al., 1998; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Watkins et al., 2001). However, some teachers surveyed believe that school psychologists have too many assessment responsibilities and other teachers surveyed did not turn to the school psychologist for services other than assessment (Landau & Gerken, 1979). General education teachers who were surveyed seem to have limited views of the roles and functions of a school psychologist, as well as fewer requests for help and less satisfaction with services than special education teachers. Special education teachers who were surveyed reported the common roles for a school psychologist were assessment for special education and behavior modification but would like to see more of school psychologists' time spent in prevention, intervention and consultation. Teachers who do

not utilize school psychological services beyond assessment may not believe that additional services are part of the role of a school psychologist or they may have limited access to and contact with the school psychologist (Gilman & Medway, 2007; Hagemeyer et al., 1998; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Peterson, Waldron & Paulson, 1998).

### *Recent Consumer Comparisons*

One critical and informative study was conducted in 2004. Gilman and Gabriel conducted a pilot study in which they surveyed more than 1700 teachers and administrators from eight school districts in four geographical regions, as well as school psychologists from the representative districts. Of the participants, 1533 were teachers and 87 were school psychologists. Further, there were four superintendents, 11 assistant superintendents, 56 principals and 19 assistant principals surveyed, all of whom were analyzed together as a total group called “administrators.” Participants completed the *School Psychology Perceptions Survey* which asked the professionals questions about knowledge, satisfaction and helpfulness of school psychological services, as well as future desired roles and functions.

The authors found that teachers and administrators hold different perceptions of school psychological services. Their findings suggest that teachers are less satisfied than administrators with school psychological services and that they perceive the services to be less helpful. Administrators report less severe problems to the school psychologists, whereas teachers report handling less severe problems in another way and reporting only the more severe problems to the school psychologist. About 1/3 of the teachers and

administrators report wanting school psychologists to be more involved in assessment, while most school psychologists want the same amount of involvement. Both teachers and administrators want more consultation. However, teachers and school psychologists want more counseling and involvement with the general education population than the administrators. Gilman and Gabriel suggest that what is desired by the administrators is what is currently being practiced in the school system, thus providing a rationale for the historic and current lack of discrepancy between actual and ideal roles, according to administrators. The results also suggest that key stakeholders have different understandings of the school psychology discipline.

A limitation of this study, as relevant to the current research, is that principals were combined with other administrators in the analysis, who may have different beliefs and influences. Also, the survey was a “fixed-response survey that may have limited more comprehensive explanations of the dynamics surrounding the perceptions of school psychological services” (p. 280). The authors recommend further research to include qualitative procedures.

Anthun (1999) also conducted an evaluation of school psychological services in Norway by surveying teachers, administrators and school psychologists from external agencies. His findings suggest that there is a mismatch between the needed and the provided services, with too much time spent on assessment. He recommends movement towards more intervention and prevention to increase the quality of services provided to students. However, Anthun surveyed school psychologists who work for external agencies, therefore, the results may not be generalizable to school psychologists, who work in the schools, in the United States.

Overall, there are limited published studies that have been conducted recently about the perceptions of the role of school psychologists. Of the research that does exist, it suggests that school psychologists are still experiencing a discrepancy between their actual and ideal roles, with a desire to conduct additional services beyond assessment. (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). Surveys of teachers present more mixed reactions, suggesting a possible movement away from the stereotyped perception of school psychologists as diagnosticians towards interventionists. Gilman and Gabriel (2004) surveyed the beliefs of administrators, who are generally satisfied with the services, however the sample was not large enough to analyze based on administrative position, and thus, the findings cannot be generalized to school principals.

### *Influences on Role Definition*

There are a variety of factors which influence the roles and functions of a school psychologist. Much literature exists which documents a consistent history of school psychologists' discrepant perceptions between the actual and desired roles. Therefore, it is important to examine the factors which maintain the status quo, since there is compelling evidence that school psychologists desire a change.

A factor that is influential in defining the role of the school psychologist, and which has been explored in the earlier sections of this review, is the perceptions and expectations by the consumers of the services. The literature demonstrates that others' expectations of school psychologists are primarily as evaluators of special education. While trends seem to indicate that some consumers desire additional services, the

primary role of school psychologists is still as providers of assessment for the purposes of special education. This appears to have contributed to the maintenance of that role, as it impacts expectations of the services to be provided.

Another relevant influence on role definition is related to the power and influence of the administrators. School administrators are identified as one of the most influential variables affecting the role, function and services of the school psychologist (Senft & Snider, 1980; Tindall, 1964,). More specifically, school principals have been identified as “largely important” to “too influential” in defining the roles and functions of the school psychologist (Benson & Hughes, 1985). Landau and Gerken (1979) suggest that if there is a conflict between perceptions of consumer groups, “the more salient force lies with the principals” (p. 206).

Further, in regards to change in a school system, Sarason (1982) writes that principals “occupy a key role in the educational change process” (p. 184) through implementation of change in their school which is influenced by the principals’ perceptions of “the system.” Earlier surveys suggest that principals were satisfied with the traditional role of the school psychologist and may not have sought change. There are no recent analyses of principals’ perceptions to indicate whether or not they are looking for change.

Legislation and policy are also influential in the determination of the functions of a school psychologist. In order to follow legal requirements, schools have had to depend on school psychologists to use individual assessment and categorization as a means of providing service. The legal requirements, as well as the funding source, have been influential in perpetuating the link between school psychology and special education. There are predictions that as legislation turns towards intervention, the role of the school

psychologist may shift (Benson & Hughes, 1985; Reschly, 2000). Other factors that have been surmised as influences on role definition include the school psychologist to student ratio, thereby hindering or allowing more services to be provided, and finally, geographical region, which has been found to effect professional practices to some degree (Reschly, 2000).

There are also some personal factors that may impact how roles and functions of the school psychologist are identified. Some examples of these include personal characteristics (e.g. personality, values, previous work experiences, etc.), as well as training level (e.g. doctoral versus non-doctoral) (Benson & Hughes, 1985). Training level has been found to have a minimal influence on the amount of assessment responsibilities, with doctoral level school psychologists conducting fewer assessments (Reschly, 2000).

School psychologists also report on their perceptions of forces considered to impact school psychologists' roles and those included: large caseloads, legislative mandates, policy development, funding sources, individual characteristics, school setting, geographical region and number of students served (Bramlett et al., 2002; Curtis, Walker, Hunley & Baker, 1999).

### *Future Predictions/Desired Roles for School Psychologists*

Predictions have historically been made as to what the field of school psychology may be in the future. While there has been a call for change in school psychology for many years, assessment has remained the primary responsibility. The Thayer Conference

in 1954, as well as other professional conferences (Spring Hill and Olympia) in the 1980's generated ideas about the future of school psychology but those ideas have not altered the field of school psychology in the predicted ways (Dawson, Cummings, Harrison, Short, Gorin & Palomeres, 2004; Nastasi, 2000). Reschly (2000) cautiously predicts that while the assessment responsibilities will continue to dominate the roles and functions of the school psychologist and school psychologists will focus on children with disabilities, there may be a trend towards less standardized testing activities and more intervention and consultation based assessment. He warns, however, that in order for change to occur, we must escape from the historical perspective of school psychologist as assessor. He also warns that system reform is likely to take a long time.

Recommendations are made for movement towards a public health perspective, which promotes social and emotional development of all students and provision of mental health services, and away from the medical model, which is based on assessment of pathology as a primary role and focus on a small population of students (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004; Reschly 2000; Sheridan & Gutken, 2000).

A conference on the future of school psychology was held in the fall of 2002 among individuals in the field, at varying levels. The Invitational Conference on the Future of School Psychology (Futures Conference) served as a catalyst for joining efforts to improve the overall practices of school psychology. It had been over twenty years since the last conferences were held to discuss the future of school psychology and participants were eager to work beyond the conference in work groups and through collaboration with others. The purpose of calling the conference together was a need to discuss the future of school psychology, to discuss needs and issues confronting today's youth and concerns

about upcoming shortages of school psychologists (Dawson et al., 2004; Ehrhardt-Padgett, Hatzichristou, Kitson & Meyers, 2004). The predicted shortage of school psychologists is based on attrition and retirement and shortages are expected through 2020, with the greatest shortage being through 2010, and mostly at the doctoral level. The implications for this shortage may include a reconceptualization of the role of school psychologist as the school psychologist to student ratio increases and there may be a shift away from the individual model and towards a systems-level approach in which the school psychologist becomes a facilitator of services (Curtis et al., 2004).

At the conference, participants asserted that mental health needs are not being met in today's youth and that school psychologists may provide these services. Some of the suggestions that were made included: group service delivery via consultation and prevention programs, less emphasis on traditional individual assessment and more emphasis on assessment linked to intervention, collaboration with other organizations, home and other school professionals to serve the mental health needs of the students, a focus on evidence based interventions and more attention to diversity and multi-cultural approaches (Dawson et al., 2004; Ehrhardt-Padgett et al., 2004).

It is argued that a paradigm shift in school psychology is needed, with a move away from the individual level and towards a more ecological and systems level to follow a public health approach addressing the academic and social problems of today's youth. In this new paradigm, there would be less emphasis on the individual diagnosis of the child with a problem and more emphasis on prevention. Additionally, the school psychologist would need to examine the larger systems (e.g. school, family, community) as well as the individual, based on the theory that behavior is a function of interaction between the

individual and the environment. Interventions would be based on the ecological assessment of the problem. Effective partnerships between home and community and school would be another critical component of the new school psychology. Some of the strategies that school psychologists would utilize and in which they would need to be adequately trained include: advocacy and public policy, research, collaboration and communication, practice, pre-service training and in-service training (Curtis et al., 2004; Dawson, et al., 2004; Sheridan & Gutken, 2000; United States Public Health Service, 2000). A comprehensive model such as the ones being advocated would include collaboration within and across agencies, consideration of ecological contexts and a continuum of services from prevention to treatment and evaluation of services. It would also include interventions at the universal (school-wide) and targeted (at-risk students) levels, as well as intensive intervention for those with severe problems (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Nastasi, 2000; United States Public Health Service, 2000).

The implications of a paradigm shift like this for school psychologists would include changes at the setting level, as it may require school psychologists to expand services into the community or home, and changes at the level of intervention, requiring expansion of services from the individual or small group to the larger population. Another implication may be around education and training as there would likely be changes in training and field experiences to encompass some of the new required skills. One consideration may be to make a division between school psychologists and psychologists with state licensure, who operate out of the schools, who have specialized in working in school roles (Talley & Short, 1996). In order to move the field into this new paradigm, school psychologists are going to have to advocate for policy change, at the state and federal

level, as well as at the school administrative level, to influence those who determine the role. They will need to be involved in research in order to provide empirical data as support for the expansion of the role (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Sheridan & Gutken, 2000).

The paradigm shift would alter some of the roles of a school psychologist. School psychologists would have responsibilities such as: providing direct services (e.g. counseling), collaborating with other professionals from a variety of disciplines in efforts to maximize, but not duplicate, services, advocating for systems reform and linking practice and research. They would also be responsible for the consideration of cultural specificity and consideration of an ecological perspective in development of interventions (Nastasi, 2000). More specifically, the paradigm shift would result in school psychologists participating in more indirect service by working with key stakeholders in children's lives (e.g. teachers, families) to change behavior. In doing so successfully, school psychologists would reach more students and would increase the likelihood of success by collaborating with those who work directly with the students. School psychologists are being called upon to use research to plan interventions and inform theory, as well as using research skills to inform program development and evaluation. An emphasis on prevention would also help to ensure a healthy environment in the school for all students and would help to prevent mental health, behavior and academic problems (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000).

### *Research Question*

There are an increasing number of children and adolescents with unmet mental health needs which are impacting individuals and communities. Schools appear to be a venue in which to offer prevention programs and identify children and adolescents with mental health problems, as well as to provide treatment. School professionals identify a number of social and emotional issues that impact education. As a result, shifting the current and historical paradigm of school psychology may be a way to provide mental health services in the school setting.

Additionally, there is a documented history of role discrepancy between what school psychologists want to be doing and what they are actually doing. By expanding the role of school psychologist to involve more direct and indirect services to all students, and provide mental health treatment, it may be possible to retain professionals, and also, to meet a need that is apparent in the schools and communities.

Knowing that there is a need for mental health services in the schools, and school psychologists who are eager to provide the services to all students, questions arise concerning why school psychologists have persisted in the role of assessor and what the barriers are to expanding the role of school psychologist.

School psychologists work closely with other school professionals to help students in the schools. One salient influence on the role of school psychologists is the consumers. It is important to understand how consumer groups perceive the role of school psychologists (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Nastasi, 1998). Specifically, building principals are identified as very influential in defining role expectations and in promoting

change (Benson & Hughes, 1985; Sarason, 1982). Gaining a better understanding of the principals' perceptions of school psychology may help in reform efforts by school psychologists to adjust role functions (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Nastasi, 1998).

In order to gain a better understanding of the historical role definition discrepancy and the unmet mental health needs of children and adolescents, it will be beneficial to conduct a study and obtain the perceptions of school building principals of school psychological services. The studies that currently exist are mostly quantitative in nature and it is believed that an expansion of those studies, in the form of a qualitative study, in which the researcher can ask open-ended questions, may provide information that is helpful in understanding the apparent role discrepancies. Also, some of the existing studies group principals and administrators (e.g. superintendents, directors of pupil services, etc.) together. However, research indicates that principals are very influential in the role definition of school psychologists, so it is believed that to specifically question them to understand their perceptions of current and desired school psychological services and roles, as well as the perceived barriers to change, may be most helpful in understanding the future of school psychology.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Principals are known to be influential in the defining of school psychological services and the role of the school psychologist. The current study explored elementary school principals' perceptions of school psychological services, and the role definition of school psychologists, which may be helpful in influencing the future of school psychology. More specifically, principals were asked about their perceptions of current school psychological services, desired school psychological services and the perceived barriers to change. The perceptions of principals might be better understood by using qualitative methodology, which encourages participants to respond to interview questions, without being limited by close-ended questions that often appear on surveys or questionnaires. This study was designed to gain a better understanding of school principals' perceptions by the utilization of qualitative research methods and Classical Content and Interpretative Phenomenological Analyses.

### *Overview of Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research aims to explore a phenomenon and make sense or meaning of an experience. It involves a dynamic process of interpretation. It is the “interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made” (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994, p. 2). Qualitative research methods include the use of a natural setting as the context for data collection and the researcher as a key instrument involved in data collection. Further, the researcher gathers the participant’s perspective, via language, and interprets the words to understand the meaning and experience of the participant via comprehensive data analysis. Qualitative methods are selected for studies in which the topic needs to be further explored (Creswell, 1998). For example, in the current study, the researcher obtained the perceptions of elementary school principals to better understand the psychological services that are being provided in schools. Principals also revealed what services they would like to see provided in their schools and what they perceived to be the barriers to change.

### *Data Collection: Interview Process Overview*

The individual interview is considered to be one of the most essential tools of qualitative data collection. Interviewing “provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (Seidman, 1991, p. 4). It is a means by which to gain subjective insight into

the participants through an understanding of the experiences of the individuals (Banister et al., 1994; Seidman, 1991). Seidman (1991) recommends including a pilot of the interview, with a small number of participants, as part of the research design.

The semi-structured interview is recommended as a source of data collection for phenomenological studies, in order to obtain perceptions of the participants. The semi-structured interview process allows the researcher to explore the areas in which the participant perceived gaps or contradictions that may not be captured by a questionnaire. Using the semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to probe interesting areas and allowed for a greater flexibility of coverage (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2003). In particular, interviews are recommended for studies, such as the current one, in which the roles of a professional group are to be explored because the researcher can further probe areas of interest (Banister et al., 1994).

#### *Data Analysis: Overview*

Data analysis is the interpretative work that the researcher does in order to understand the participant's experience and meaning and to identify themes, with a focus on the phenomenon being researched (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) recommend using more than one type of qualitative analysis in order to more fully understand and interpret the data, which represents the experiences of the participants, in school psychology research. Additionally, they say that "using more than one type of analysis can strengthen the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings" (p. 575). Using multiple methods allows the researcher to draw on strengths of each method,

thus obtaining more meaning and “enhancing the quality of inferences” (p. 579). There are several approaches or methods that can be used to analyze and interpret qualitative data, including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Classical Content Analysis.

### *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach is concerned with an individual’s personal perceptions and meaning of an event or situation and aims to understand a topic from the perspective of those being studied. It attempts to understand the structure of what is being studied through understanding the perceptions of those who experience it. The focus, therefore, of the study is a perception. This method is phenomenological in that it includes an exploration of each participant’s personal experience (Creswell, 1998; Reiman, 1986; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 1999).

The Interpretative Phenomenological Approach assumes connections between a person’s language and his/her thinking and emotional state. The researcher’s duty is to interpret and organize the participant’s perceptions from what he/she says. It is a particularly useful approach in exploring how individuals perceive a specific situation and how they make sense of that experience, as the intent of the research is to further explore an area of interest. The themes that are identified in the transcript are concise and theoretical connections, but are still grounded in the actual responses. The process of verifying the themes against the original transcript is ongoing throughout the analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a dynamic research process that recognizes that the researcher is an active participant in the research process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, this research includes a “two-step interpretative process” (p. 51) in which the participants are trying to “make sense of their world” (p. 51) and the researcher is trying to “make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p. 51). Understanding the participant’s perceptions is an interactive activity, based on the researcher’s own preconceived assumptions and personal interactions, which are required to make sense of the participant’s personal experience through interpretation. The analysis intends to say something about the particular participants studied, not to make general claims about a larger population. In other words, statements can be made about the specific individuals in the study because the analysis has come from the close examination of individual transcripts (Smith et al., 1999).

### *Classical Content Analysis*

Classical Content Analysis is frequently used in qualitative research. It is a qualitative technique that can be used to analyze data when the source of data is talk. It describes the data and identifies underlying themes, by focusing on the frequency with which codes are used to determine which concepts are most cited in the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Berelson defined Classical Content Analysis in 1952 as “objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (as cited in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 596).

In this analysis, the researcher reads through the data, “chunks and codes the data” (Leech & Onwuebuozie, 2008, p. 596) and then counts the number of times each code is used. The information that is produced is used to provide descriptive information about the data, including which codes are used most and might be the most important factors for the participants. Classical Content Analysis is particularly useful to obtain frequency of responses and themes.

#### *Current Study: Procedure*

##### *Protection of the Participants.*

The research was conducted in accordance with the American Psychological Association ethical guidelines including: use of informed consent, maintenance of confidentiality and insurance that participants are not subjected to any undue stress or anxiety as a direct result of participating in this study. Participation in this study was completely voluntary and informed consent was obtained (*see Appendix A: Informed Consent*). Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. In order to maintain confidentiality, the data (e.g. consent forms, interview transcripts and tapes) that was collected was retained in a locked drawer at the researcher’s home. Approved research protocol included plans to retain the raw data from this study for at least five years after the date of completion. The only people who had access to the data were people directly involved with the research including: the researcher, members of the dissertation committee and the interview transcriber. It was

not expected that the information that was collected in this study would involve any significant risk or discomfort to the participants. Participants were given a copy of the informed consent, which included contact information for the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Rutgers University that could be used if they had any questions about their rights as research subjects.

*Participants.*

In this study, ten elementary school principals from Central/Northern New Jersey were interviewed. Principals were recruited to participate in the study in one of two ways.

In the first way, the researcher contacted a professor in education at a local graduate school. The professor provided information about the research study to four elementary school principals who were currently enrolled in the doctoral program at the school in 2008. That year, three principals expressed interest in participating in the study and provided the researcher with their phone numbers. The researcher contacted each principal and set up an appointment to meet at a time that was convenient for the principal. In 2009, the process was repeated with a new class of students and at that time, one elementary school principal was enrolled in the program and volunteered to participate.

The remaining six principals were recruited through the school district where they worked. The researcher contacted superintendents from six local districts. The superintendents provided a written letter of permission for the researcher to recruit

principals and to conduct the interview in their school districts. Then the superintendent provided information about the study, via email, directly to the principals or indirectly through the director of special services. If interested, principals contacted the researcher and provided their phone numbers. The researcher contacted each interested principal and set up an appointment to meet at a time that was convenient for the principal.

#### *Interview Procedures.*

The interviews for this study were conducted according to the recommendations of Smith and Osborn (2003), which included using minimal probes, asking one question at a time and monitoring the effect of the interview on the respondent. The researcher began with a set of questions that served as a framework to guide the interview. The questions were asked in an open and neutral manner and did not need to follow the given sequence on the interview guide. The mean time of the interviews was 48 minutes and 33 seconds, with a range of 33 minutes and 15 seconds to 84 minutes and 6 seconds. Interviews were conducted from September 2008 through October 2009. The interviews were conducted at the participant's choice of location for convenience of the participant. The four principals enrolled in graduate school selected to meet at the graduate school where they were taking courses, and the six principals recruited through their school district selected to meet at the elementary school where they worked. The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner and consisted of questions that queried the perceptions of principals about school psychological services. All interviews were recorded by audiotape, with the permission of the participant, and transcribed verbatim.

*Interview Protocol.*

A pilot interview was conducted in May 2008 with one retired elementary school principal. She was asked to provide feedback to the researcher about the questions that were asked. No major changes or revisions were suggested to the interview protocol. She only suggested clarification on the question about the major influences on the daily activities of the school psychologist in the current school psychological services section. She suggested adding “In other words, who or what most impacts the daily activities of the school psychologist?” The researcher used this information and followed up the question with her recommended wording when conducting the interviews.

In the final interview protocol (*see Appendix B: Interview Protocol*) that was used for the study, the interviewer asked the participants to discuss the following issues. First, principals were asked to provide information about their school, the school psychologist’s position and to describe their own professional and educational background. For example, the researcher asked the principals for information about the school, including the grade levels of the students that attend the school and the total number of students in the school. Next, the researcher asked about the school psychologist, including how many school psychologists serve the school, and how many other schools the school psychologist serves, if applicable. Principals were also asked where the school psychologists’ offices were located. The researcher asked the principals to describe their own educational background, and their professional background, including the positions and number of years in education.

The next set of questions focused on the current school psychological services that are offered at the participants' schools. For example, the researcher first asked the principals, "In what roles and activities are the school psychologist in your school involved?" Principals were first asked to provide unprompted responses to the interview questions. Unprompted, in this study, meant that the question was provided as an open-ended question and the interviewer did not provide any suggestions or identify any potential services. When the principals were finished responding to the unprompted question, the interviewer identified a number of services that might be provided by a school psychologist and asked the principals to confirm or deny whether their school psychologists were involved in these services. These responses were considered to be prompted responses in this study. Participants were only asked to respond to prompted activities that were not given unprompted. In other words, the researcher only asked about potential services that were not initially provided as unprompted responses by the principals.

Then the researcher handed the principals a card which listed eighteen services that may be provided by a school psychologist and asked the principals to rank the top five activities in which their school psychologist *spends the most time* on a regular basis.

Following is a list and definition of the eighteen services that were identified on the card in the interview for this study. Consultation meant serving as a resource to the teacher and providing professional information to teachers, related to behavior or other psychological topics. Academic or learning assessments/testing meant conducting any of the battery of standardized tests that school psychologists complete, such as the Stanford-Binet or Wechsler Intelligence scales. Behavioral

assessments meant collecting direct and indirect data on student behaviors in the school, such as conducting classroom observations and recording the frequency of a problem behavior. Emotional or personality assessments included conducting projective and objective measures, such as depression scales, as part of the special education evaluation, or otherwise, in the school. Report writing included writing up the results of a Child Study Team evaluation or other summary of activities completed. Case management included the activities that are required for the students for whom the psychologist is the identified case manager, such as attending meetings. Parent education was the formal or informal exchange of information that is provided to parents or family members, related to behavior or other psychological topics. Teacher or in-service training was the formal presentation of professional information to staff members, such as providing a workshop. Individual counseling reflected the process of meeting on a one-to-one basis with a student to provide treatment related to the student's emotional or mental health and group counseling was meeting with more than one student at a time to provide treatment. Family counseling meant an occasion in which the school psychologist met with a student and his/her family to provide treatment related to the mental health needs of the family. Prevention activities included providing educational programs at the class or school level, such as an anti-bullying lesson. Crisis response included a range of situations in the school or classroom in which the psychologist is called upon to react, such as assessing a student who has expressed suicidal ideation. It also included serving on a crisis response team. Supervision meant oversight of other staff members. Research included formal data collection and analysis as part of a study. Program development

and evaluation meant creating and assessing outcomes of school-wide programs that would be available to a specific population or to the entire school body. Pre-referral intervention or Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) team member meant either serving on the school team or providing psychological consultation to the team. The I&RS team is a multi-disciplinary team of professionals in the school who plan services to assist students, and assist staff to assist students, who are having learning, behavior or health difficulties.

The term “Child Study Team” also needs to be defined for the purposes of this study. In New Jersey, the term “Child Study Team” (CST) describes a group of professionals (including a school psychologist, social worker, and learning disabilities teacher-consultant) who work together to address concerns related to a student’s functioning in school and conduct an evaluation and related activities to assess the best academic program placement for the student.

Finally, in this section of the interview, principals were asked to identify the major influences, or who or what impacts, the daily activities of the school psychologist.

The next set of questions addressed the desired psychological services to be offered at the participants’ schools. For example, the researcher asked the principals, “In what roles and activities *would you like* the school psychologist in your school to be involved?” Principals were first asked to provide unprompted responses to the interview questions and followed by prompted responses, as described above.

Then the researcher handed the principals the same card with the previously mentioned eighteen services that may be provided by a school psychologist and asked the

principals to rank the top five activities in which *they would like* their school psychologist to *spend the most time*.

The last set of questions that the interviewer asked the principals related to the perceived barriers to changing or expanding the role of school psychologist. For example, the researcher asked the principal to identify what, if any, were the barriers to having the school psychologist involved in more roles and activities. Principals were first asked to provide unprompted responses to this interview questions. When the principals were finished responding to the unprompted question, the interviewer identified a number of potential barriers that might affect the roles and activities of a school psychologist and asked the principals to confirm or deny whether they thought these issues were barriers in their schools. These responses were considered to be prompted responses in this study.

Last, the researcher asked the principals what resources they would need in order to allow the school psychologist to be involved in additional services.

At the end of the interview, participants were invited to make suggestions concerning what a school psychologist could do to overcome the barriers and become involved in more services. They were also asked if they had any additional comments, related to the subject, that were not covered in the interview. In closing, they were thanked for their participation in the study.

### *Current Study: Data Analysis*

In this study, the researcher used both Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Classical Content Analysis to analyze the interview data. Smith and Osborn (2003)

recommend an idiographic approach to the analysis which was followed in this study. The researcher analyzed one entire interview transcript before moving onto the subsequent ones.

The researcher followed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis guidelines recommended by Smith and Osborn (2003), though they acknowledge that the process given is not a “prescriptive methodology” (p. 66). First, initial notes were obtained in the following way; the researcher read and re-read the first transcript, in an effort to become completely familiar with the interview and to gain new insights with each re-reading. Then the researcher made notes about important points that were made by the participant. Next, she noted any interesting or significant responses. Mann and Abraham (2006) noted that “significant” points may be over-identified at this time to avoid missing any important or potentially relevant information. Smith et al. (1999) also noted that the notes, at this stage, are general and unrefined and refer to large parts of excerpts from the interview. The second stage is the transformation of initial notes to emerging themes. Key words were recorded to reflect emerging themes and then the researcher aimed to connect and cluster the themes. The researcher dropped any themes which did not fit into the emerging structure or were not well-supported by evidence in the text.

The researcher repeated the aforementioned steps of analysis for the remaining transcripts, utilizing the themes from the first interview. If any new themes emerged in the subsequent analysis of other interviews, the researcher reviewed previously-analyzed transcripts to look for evidence of the new themes. The shared themes were translated into a narrative account to explain and illustrate the themes, and are provided in the Results and Discussion section of this report.

Then to further support the findings, the researcher conducted analysis using Classical Content Analysis. Responses that were given by the participants were grouped for conceptual consistency and used as codes in the analysis. In the analysis, the interviewer counted the number of times each code was utilized in each section. The interviewer created a table identifying the frequency of the codes for the interview. Then the process was completed for each subsequent interview. New tables reflecting the frequency of the codes across all ten interviews were then created.

### *Investigator Context*

Interviewers are considered to be a recognized part of the interviewing process and procedure. Therefore, Seidman (1991) advises interviewer investigators to include an autobiographical section which describes the researchers' context and interest in the proposed research. The researcher's personal experience with the area under investigation must be kept in mind during the course of data analysis in this study.

The researcher is a doctoral candidate in professional psychology, with certification as a school psychologist in New Jersey. During her training, she had experience as a school psychology student in a position in which the job function and role were narrowly defined, serving primarily as evaluator and case manager for a small number of special education students. In the geographical location in which the researcher was trained, many of the school psychology positions follow this model.

However, in another position, she has also had the experience of working as a school psychologist in a position in which the job function and role are more flexible, serving

more students in the school and providing mental health services. In this position, she has no responsibilities for special education evaluations, testing or case management. Rather, she is involved in activities, such as individual and group counseling, consultation or serving as a resource to the teachers, working with community agencies, crisis response and parent education. As a result of these experiences, the researcher has become interested in learning about job function and role of school psychologists and the historical discrepancy between what school psychologists want to be doing and what they are actually doing, in an attempt to better understand why the discrepancy still exists. Therefore, the present study is in response to the researcher's desire to better understand the perceptions of school psychological services and the role of the school psychologist.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### *School and Principal Demographics*

The participants in this study were asked to identify information about their schools including: the grade levels that attended the school and the number of students that were in the school. Further, they were asked to provide information about the school psychologist including: how many school psychologists served the school, where the offices of the school psychologist were located and how many schools the school psychologist served.

Based on the criteria of eligibility for participation, all of the principals worked at elementary schools. However, there were a variety of grade levels that attended each school. Three principals worked at schools with students in grades Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The remaining seven principals worked at schools with the following grade levels: pre-Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, pre-Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, pre-Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade, pre-Kindergarten through 1<sup>st</sup> grade, Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Principals also reported the number of students at their schools. The numbers ranged from 300 to 750 students. Four principals worked at schools with 300 – 399

students. One principal worked at a school with 400 – 499 students. One principal worked at a school with 500 – 599 students. Two principals worked at a school with 600 – 699 students. Two principals worked at a school with 700 – 799 students .

In terms of the school psychologist, all ten principals reported that they have one school psychologist that served their school. Six of the school psychologists' offices were located in the school building, two of the offices were located in another school building that the school psychologist served, and two school psychologists' offices were in a centralized administration building.

Principals were also asked how many schools the school psychologist served. Three principals reported that the school psychologist only served their school. Five principals reported that the school psychologist served a total of two schools (one other in addition to their school). One principal reported that the school psychologist served a total of three schools (*See Table 1: School Demographics*).

Table 1  
School Demographics

<b>Grade Levels</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Pre K – 8	1
Pre K – 5	1
Pre K – 4	1
Pre K – 1	1
K – 2	1
K – 3	1
K – 5	3
K – 8	1
<b>Students in School</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
300 – 399	4
400 – 499	1
500 – 599	1
600 – 699	2
700 – 799	2
<b>School Psychologists</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
1	10
<b>Location of Office</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
In School	6
Other School	2
Central Building	2
<b>Schools Served by School Psychologist</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
One	3
Two	5
Three	1

Of the principals who participated in this study, eight were female and two were male. Nine of the participants were Caucasian and one was African-American. The participants in this study were also asked to provide information about their own professional background. The principals reported on the number of years that they had previously been a teacher. Four of the principals taught for 0 – 10 years, four of the principals taught for 11 – 20 years, and two of the principals taught for 21 or more years. Eight of the ten principals also reported on the number of years that they have been a principal. Due to the conversational manner of the interview and the nature of the responses, two of the principals only gave the total number of years in education and did not specify the number of years that they had been a principal. Of the principals who reported on this, three reported being a principal for up to 5 years. One reported being a principal for 6 – 10 years. One reported being a principal for 11 – 15 years. Two reported being a principal for 16 – 20 years. One reported being a principal for 21 or more years (*See Table 2: Principal Demographics*).

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Table 2  
Principal Demographics

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Female	8
Male	2
<b>Race</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Caucasian	9
African-American	1
<b>Years as Teacher</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
0 – 10 years	4
11 – 20 years	4
21 + years	2
<b>Years as Principal*</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
0 – 5 years	3
6 – 10 years	1
11 – 15 years	1
16 – 20 years	2
21 + years	1

*\*Two principals did not report the specific number of years as principal.*

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In addition, some of the principals spontaneously offered the following information. One principal reported being a reading specialist, one reported being a learning consultant, and four reported being vice-principals before becoming a principal. Four principals reported that they were doctoral candidates in Educational Leadership, and one principal reported she completed her doctoral studies as a Change Agent. Seven principals reported having one to three masters degrees. Due to the conversational manner of the interview and the nature of the responses, three principals did not provide information about their own educational background.

### *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

The data was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. It is a particularly suitable method of analysis for this current study, given the small and homogenous nature of the sample. The researcher followed an idiographic approach to the analysis and followed the recommended guidelines of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, marked by: (1) a reading and re-reading of the transcript and preliminary notes marked in the margins, (2) identification of themes for each transcript which most strongly represented the participants' perceptions, then (3) a comparison of themes across the interviews. Notes and themes were identified for unprompted responses only in this study.

There were a number of key themes that were identified by the researcher in this analysis which were important in better understanding the principals' perceptions of school psychological services. The themes that were identified were: (1) level of

satisfaction with school psychological services, (2) role definition of school psychologist, and (3) envisioned role of school psychologist.

### *Level of Satisfaction with School Psychological Services*

This theme identified the overall impression of the principals' satisfaction with the school psychological services in their schools. Though each principal reported a different set of activities in which the school psychologist was involved, the principals in this study felt that the services that were provided by the school psychologist at their school were good.

Three sub-themes emerged from the data, representing a variety of perceptions about the services. Some of the principals envisioned more services and were excited by the potential for expansion of the services. Some of the principals also identified additional desired services but expressed little expectation about the potential for change. A couple of the principals felt overall that the services provided were adequate as they were.

#### *Satisfaction with current services, desire for expansion.*

Three of the principals expressed high levels of satisfaction with their school psychological services but desired even more services. Respondent 02 described her school psychologist as "excellent at what she does" and that "her services that she provides, her role, are fabulous." Respondent 04 reported that the school

psychologist is “excellent” and that there is a “real community feel” at her school and that includes the school psychologist and other members of the Child Study Team.

Respondent 06 described her school psychologist as “dynamite and motivated.”

All three of these principals had one school psychologist, on-site, who predominantly, or solely, served their elementary school. Each of these schools had 675 or more students. Two of the principals had been in administration for less than ten years and one did not report on the number of years that she had been a principal. Each of these principals described the school psychologist’s position at his/her school to be collaborative. For example, Respondent 06 noted that “there is some collaboration with our school counselor” and school psychologist.

The principals also reported a close relationship with the school psychologist and being well informed about what the school psychologist did. These principals discussed ways in which student problems are addressed collaboratively with themselves and the school psychologist. For example, Respondent 02 reported that if a parent calls with a concern, “we would have a meeting and talk about it” and then try to match the student with the professional’s “clinical area of specialty.” For example, “heavy emotional based issues” would be assigned to the school psychologist. Similarly, Respondent 06 said that the school psychologist “takes more of a role in terms of recommendations with the social and emotional behaviors” but that “in terms of the academic that might more likely come [the principal’s] way.”

These principals also had additional personnel (e.g. social worker, counselor) in addition to the school psychologist. For example, Respondent 06 reported that they “have one school psychologist, a social worker on the Child-Study Team, and a social

worker that functions as the school counselor.” Respondent 04 indicated that they have a school psychologist, as well as a “school counselor who also is certified as a school psychologist.” Respondent 02 talked about collaboration among herself, the school psychologist, the guidance counselor, the social worker and the school nurse.

Each of these principals also reported that the school psychologist was involved in a variety of activities at school. In addition to Child Study Team responsibilities (e.g. testing, case management), they identified other services (e.g. counseling, consultation, parent/home visits) that were not identified by other participants in the study. For example, Respondent 04 noted that her school psychologist is “not just a person who some would say just tests kids.” In fact, two of these principals were the only ones in the study who identified counseling as a current unprompted activity. This suggests that the role of the school psychologist at these three schools is more extensive than at the other schools.

However, the principals were all still interested in expanding the role even more and reported that they were open to new ideas. These principals recognized that there was a need for additional services. They noted that there are a lot of emotional needs. For example, Respondent 02 reported that “there is an increase in special needs students” and that “students coming now to school ... just have a great deal of emotions.” They also desired to have more time/personnel to conduct additional services and to collaborate with other mental health professionals in the school (e.g. guidance counselor, social worker, etc.). For example, Respondent 06 would like to see “another person in which we could really address the needs of students” and to “expand and multiply what our social worker is able to do.” Respondent 02 thought

that “you would need more members on the whole team” who would “just have to work together and share those responsibilities.”

*Satisfaction with current services, desire for expansion, low expectation for expansion.*

Five of the principals also reported being satisfied with the current services and identified additional desired services but expressed little expectation about the potential for change.

All five of these principals shared the school psychologist with at least one other school. One school psychologist was based in the school building, one was based in a central administrative building and three were based in other school buildings. There were 300-600 students in each of these schools, with three of the principals reporting 300-350 students. Two of the principals had been in administration for less than ten years, two of the principals had been in administration for 10 – 19 years and one did not report on the number of years that he had been a principal.

All five of these principals described the school psychologist in their schools to be involved in Child Study Team responsibilities (e.g. testing, case management, etc.) and four of them reported that the school psychologist provided consultation or served as a resource to staff. Each of these principals also reported that they would like to see the school psychologist involved in staff or parent training and having more direct student contact (e.g. going to classrooms, teaching lessons, etc.) and visibility in the school.

Although the principals identified services that they would like to see the school psychologist provide, they expressed a low expectation for change. Many of these principals projected an attitude that was articulated by Respondent 08 who thought that it is “just the nature of the beast.”

Financial constraints were one common barrier which principals thought would be difficult, or impossible, to overcome. For instance, Respondent 01 expressed a desire for having a full-time school psychologist but reported that “[she knows] with the budget that wouldn’t happen” and Respondent 07 felt that to have what you really need “is very difficult.” Respondent 08 said that they would need the “financial resources to do it, which we don’t and we will not.” Respondent 09 echoed a similar sentiment by saying that “it comes down to money.”

Another barrier that was identified as potentially insurmountable for these principals was a lack of time. For instance, Respondent 01 said that they “just don’t have the resources to be able to work directly with [the neediest] students ... on a daily basis.” Respondent 07 said that “on a regular basis, they don’t have the time” to do additional activities, such as behavioral assessments or counseling and that “they would like to, but they just can’t do it.”

The responsibilities of the Child Study Team were another factor which inhibited these principals expectation for change. For instance, Respondent 07 said that school psychologists have “such a heavy load at this point that they don’t do [parent education] anymore.” Respondent 08 reported that the “structure here is that the team is the team” and that additional services are “not part of the nature of the team.”

Further, it is “the setup of what this team has always been and it’s hard for people to change.”

*Satisfaction with current services, low desire for expansion.*

Two of the principals reported being satisfied with the current services and expressed low to no desire for change. Respondent 05 expressed feelings of a lack of need for additional services and satisfaction with the services and Respondent 03 expressed a feeling that “it is what it is” and “there is just nothing you can do about that.”

Both principals shared the school psychologist with at least one other school. One school psychologist was based in the school building and one was based in another school building. There were 350 students in one school and 500 students in the other. The principals had been principals for 21 years and for 19 years. Both schools were Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

Both principals reported that their school psychologists were involved in Child Study Team responsibilities (e.g. testing, case management) and served as a resource to parents and staff. Respondent 03 was the only participant in the study who reported no unprompted desired services. In fact, he replied that “there is nothing that I didn’t describe” that the school psychologist already does and that he could not “think of anything else that he would need.” He further went on to say that “we pretty much have everything we need” and that “it is what it is, but again, we have what we need.”

Respondent 05 reported that parent and staff trainings would be a service she would like to see, however she would “rather see [direct student contact] services not impinge upon the school day.” She felt that there was not a great need for additional services and reported “we really don’t have a counseling need” and “there is not that much of a need” for prevention programs. Overall, she thought “services are more pertinent and more demanding on the secondary level right now than at the elementary level” and that she would imagine a shared, not full-time, position “because of the population.” She described the population at her school as “a fairly comfortable community so that the kinds of services that we see are not on a daily basis.”

#### *Role Definition of School Psychologist*

This theme identified the principals’ perceptions of the role definition of the school psychologist. Overall, it seemed that the school psychologist is perceived as a Child Study Team member and engaged in related activities. For the most part, the responsibilities of the Child Study Team define the role. For example, Respondent 08 articulated some of the influences by stating that “the Child Study Team design is her first role in the eyes of her and the district is that she is on the Child Study Team and so that clearly has to be where her time goes first.” Therefore, “it doesn’t really leave that much time for other things.”

The principals reported that the school psychologist conducted testing and learning assessments which is a primary function of the school psychologist.

Respondent 02 reported that the school psychologist “of course does testing for all students that are referred to the school Child Study Team.” Other activities which were identified by principals as Child Study Team activities in which the school psychologist is involved included: case management, report writing and meetings.

The other frequently identified activity that the principals reported in which the school psychologist is involved is serving as a resource or consultant to parents, staff and administrators. Many of the principals rely on the school psychologist for this service. For example, Respondent 04 reported that the school psychologist in her school “will confer on a regular basis with teachers” and Respondent 02 called her school psychologist “a worthwhile and valuable resource.” In addition, Respondent 03 reported that the school psychologist in his school is “instrumental in reaching out to staff members.”

#### *Envisioned Role of School Psychologist*

This theme identified the principals’ perceptions of the envisioned role of the school psychologist. Overall, it seemed that the principals described a new role with increased visibility and direct student contact, as well as providing training and education to staff and families. In addition, the principals described a flexible position with a focus on collaboration with other professionals. On the whole, the principals sought a full-time person who has a flexible schedule, focuses on prevention and is proactive and visible within the school. Principals described how

they would envision the roles and activities of the school psychologist to change to allow for these services.

Some of the principals identified a need for a role change for school psychologists. For example, Respondent 04 described the envisioned role as “almost becoming more preventative rather than reactive, or dealing with problems.” Respondent 06 was thinking of the position as “proactive” and “just having the ability to expand where we need depending on what’s presenting itself.” Respondent 05 thought of the role more as “supportive for the front line which is the teachers, giving them ideas and suggestions.”

Principals also suggested a need for additional time from the school psychologist, or more school psychologists, for their schools. For example, Respondent 01 said she would like to “have one [school psychologist] assigned to our building, one or two even.” She later expressed that having “personnel in the building everyday would be great.” She wanted the school psychologist to be there more often in order to “interact more with the children” and “visit classrooms.” Respondent 07 also saw “a need for the school psychologist [to be] in one school ... to do a lot more with the children.” Respondent 02, who has a full-time school psychologist, noted that in order to have some of the desired services they would need “an additional person” and “more members on the whole team.” Respondent 06, who also has a full-time school psychologist, “would love to see ... another person in which we could really address the needs of students” and she would “vouch for another whole full position ... to do the things that we want to do and meet the needs of our students.” Respondent 07 thinks that “having additional people on the child study team would

be helpful so you don't have to spread these people so thin." Respondent 08 desired "a person who is here full time and not shared" so that maybe there is "more opportunity for the psychologist to replicate some of the things [the counselor] does."

In addition to a desire for additional time from the school psychologist, some respondents noted the advantage of having the whole Child Study Team in a building together. Three principals indicated they would like to have an on-site Child Study Team at their school and two of the nine respondents noted a need to be a part of a team. For example, Respondent 01 expressed this sentiment by saying that it "would be great to have the whole team in the building, even if it was for three days, but to have the whole team so they can all talk to each other." Respondent 09, who has a school psychologist who is split among multiple schools, would "love to see a full time child study team here ... being more a part of the team here, not fragmented in the way that they are."

Some of the principals thought the school psychologist would need to have flexibility in his/her schedule (e.g. evening hours, etc.) and noted that the person might have to be off-site, visiting homes and community settings in order to expand the role. For example, Respondent 04 thought that "the day would not necessarily be structured within the day... it could be night time, it could be off-site more, it could be more with groups ... you're looking more at preventative or a dynamic kind of position." Respondent 01 thought about the possibility that her school psychologist "could do the extended school day." Respondent 06 noted she "would just love to have the flexibility" in the school psychologist's schedule. Respondent 08 thought

“we have to be more flexible... doing parent sessions maybe one in the morning and one in the evening, that sort of thing.”

In addition to visions of the position as more flexible, another theme that was repeated by some principals in their description of the envisioned role of a school psychologist was a need for visibility in the school. For example, Respondent 04 recommended to the school psychologist “to get out of your office and ... go into classrooms ... rather than being in your office.” Respondent 09 echoed these thoughts and recommended increasing visibility by “visiting the classroom” and “be a part of the school.” Respondent 10 recommended “just being visible and being out there” and “interacting.” She even gave the example of going to see “the kids in the lunchroom” and suggested not to “take your lunch when the kids are taking their lunch time.” Respondent 07 agreed that the “school psychologists need to interact a little bit more with the children on various age levels” and that “it’s important to be that other adult that [the students] know cares for them and is interested in their welfare and is concerned about them and knows them as an individual.” She recommended the school psychologist “visit the classrooms much more often.” Respondent 08 wanted more time for the psychologist “to just go into a classroom and spend a little time or sit next to a child,” as well as “[walk] around the school and say hi to people and really get to know kids.” Respondent 09 desired “a visibility so that the kids know there is someone in the building that if they didn’t feel comfortable talking to a teacher or the principal that they know there is a place that they could go.” Respondent 05 noted a need to be visible to parents “during back to school night, during conference time, report card time and at PTO and PTA meetings.”

### *Classical Content Analysis*

Per the recommendations of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), the researcher analyzed the data using another method of qualitative analysis to strengthen the findings. In addition to the analysis using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the researcher analyzed the data using Classical Content Analysis by looking at the frequency with which participants responded to certain codes in each section of the interview.

### *Current School Psychological Services*

Each principal was asked to describe the activities in which the school psychologist in his/her school is currently involved. Overall, principals perceived school psychologists' primary function as serving as a Child Study Team member and engaging in related activities and they identified learning and academic assessments/testing as the primary activity.

When the principals were asked what activities their school psychologists are currently involved in, all ten of the respondents replied learning and academic assessments/testing. It was the unprompted response most frequently given. For example, Respondent 07 reported that her school psychologist "comes predominantly for testing" and Respondent 10 said that the school psychologist is "a Child Study Team member who is there to conduct testing."

Unprompted, seven of the ten respondents stated that the school psychologist is involved in consultative activities, or serves as a resource to the teachers. Examples of how a school psychologist may serve as a resource included: dissemination of community information to parents and the provision of psychological and behavioral expertise to teachers to assist with student needs. For example, Respondent 07 called her school psychologist “a resource person for us.” Also, Respondent 08 thought that these “positions are really resources for teachers” and called her school psychologist “a critical resource to the staff.”

Case management was an unprompted response given by six of the principals. For example, Respondent 06 reported that “case management takes a big part of what the school psychologist does.” Five respondents indicated that their school psychologists are involved in other Child Study Team duties including: writing Individualized Education Plans and attending meetings. Crisis response and classroom observation were each responses given by four of the principals as unprompted activities. Serving as a resource to families and serving on the pre-referral team at school were each responses given by three of the principals as unprompted activities. Two principals stated that the school psychologists were involved in individual counseling.

Other unprompted responses that were given by one principal each included: report writing, group counseling, before and after school duty and supervising student entrance and dismissal from school, community coordinator, attend team/grade level meetings, conduct pre-school visits, involved in pre-kindergarten early intervention

services, character education and handling crises in the classroom (*See Table 3: Current Activities: Unprompted*).

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Table 3  
Current Activities: Unprompted

<b>Current Activities, Unprompted</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Academic/Learning Assessments/Testing	10
Consultation/Resource to Teachers	7
Case Management	6
Other CST duties (IEPs, Meetings)	5
Classroom Observation	4
Crisis Response	4
Pre-Referral Intervention/I&RS	3
Resource to Families/Home Contact	3
Individual Counseling	2
Group Counseling	1
Before/After School Duty	1
Community Coordinator	1
Team/Grade Level Meetings	1
Pre-School Visits	1
Pre-K Early Intervention	1
Character Education	1
Report Writing	1
Handling Crisis in Classroom	1

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After the principal was asked to describe the activities in which the school psychologist in his/her school is currently involved, the interviewer identified a number of pre-determined services that might be provided by a school psychologist and presented those that were not given as unprompted responses in the previous question. The respondent was asked to confirm or deny whether the school psychologist in his/her school was involved in that activity. The results of this prompted question follow.

Eight of the ten respondents endorsed behavioral assessments, as well as emotional/personality assessments when prompted. Six of the ten respondents reported that the school psychologists in their schools were currently involved in staff/teacher trainings. Five respondents indicated report writing and crisis response. Four of the principals confirmed that the school psychologists in their schools were currently involved in activities related to the Intervention and Referral Services or pre-referral team at school. Three of the ten principals reported the school psychologist was involved in consultative activities, or serve as resources to the teachers, case management and prevention programs. Two principals endorsed each of the following activities when prompted: parent education, group counseling and school-wide program development and program evaluation. One principal endorsed individual counseling when prompted (*See Table 4: Current Activities: Prompted*).

Table 4  
Current Activities: Prompted

<b>Current Activities, Prompted*</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Behavioral Assessments	8
Emotional/Personality Assessments	8
Teacher/Staff Training	6
Report Writing	5
Crisis Response	5
Pre-Referral Intervention/I&RS	4
Consultation/Resource to Teachers	3
Case Management	3
Prevention Programs	3
Parent Education	2
Group Counseling	2
Program Development (School-Wide)	2
Program Evaluation	2
Individual Counseling	1
Family Counseling	0
Supervision	0
Research	0

\*Respondents were only asked to respond to activities that were not given unprompted

When asked to rank the current activities in which the school psychologist spends the *most time* on a regular basis, the activities which were endorsed most frequently were: case management, report writing, emotional/personality assessments, involvement in consultative activities, or serve as resources to the teachers and learning and academic assessments/testing (*See Table 5: Ranking of Time Spent on Current Activities*).

Table 5  
Ranking of Time Spent on Current Activities

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	Case Management	6
	Report Writing	1
	Program Development	1
	Academic/Learning Assessments/Testing	1
	Emotional/Personality Assessments	1
<b>2<sup>nd*</sup></b>	Report Writing	5
	Emotional/Personality Assessments	2
	Academic/Learning Assessments/Testing	2
	Case Management	1
	Pre-Referral Intervention/I&RS	1
<b>3<sup>rd*</sup></b>	Consultation/Resource to Teachers	3
	Individual Counseling	1
	Pre-Referral Intervention/I&RS	1
	Program Evaluation	1
	Emotional/Personality Assessments	1
	Case Management	1
	Report Writing	1
<b>4<sup>th**</sup></b>	Individual Counseling	3
	Consultation/Resource to Teachers	3
	Case Management	1
	Family Counseling	1
	Behavioral Assessment	1
<b>5<sup>th**</sup></b>	Crisis Response	3
	Pre-Referral Intervention/I&RS	3
	Consultation/Resource to Teachers	1
	Behavioral Assessment	1
	Academic/Learning Assessments/Testing	1

\* One respondent tied #2, therefore did not rank 3.

\*\* One respondent only ranked 1-3, and did not rank 4 and 5.

*Influences on Current Activities of the School Psychologist*

Principals were asked to identify what they thought were the major influences on the daily activities of the school psychologist. More specifically, they were asked to identify who or what impacts what the psychologists do. An overall theme that emerged from the responses suggests that external factors are important. It appears that principals perceive these external factors to determine the role and activities of the school psychologist.

Seven of the ten respondents reported that the legislation and timelines of special education law were most influential in requiring the school psychologist to spend much of his/her time on Child Study Team duties (e.g. learning/academic assessments/testing, report writing, case management, attending meetings and writing Individualized Education Plans). For example, Respondent 02 thought that the “political mandates ... drives what she does.” Also, Respondent 04 described the “very strict time table, time line in terms of when things have to happen” as an influence. Respondent 06 stated that “unfortunately you want the need of the student to always be the paramount but sometimes the time line” is the greatest influence.

Six of the ten respondents indicated that the daily activities of the school psychologist are influenced by the immediate needs of the individual students or “issue management” as Respondent 06 called it. Many of the principals talked about this as affecting the day of the school psychologist, as there were a number of issues that arose throughout the day to which the school psychologist needed to respond. For example, Respondent 03 said his school psychologist may be called in to “diffuse

a situation... whether it is on the parent's side, student, or teacher's side.”

Respondent 10 thought it is “a lot of putting out fires.” Respondent 02 noted that “assisting students who have these emotional needs ... drives [the school psychologist's] work.” These are things that “pop up during the day,” according to Respondent 06, “and take precedence at that time.”

Three of the ten principals indicated that school psychologists are responsible for a large caseload and that is a large influence on their daily activities. Three respondents also indicated that the Child Study Team director influences the daily activities of the school psychologist. Two of the ten respondents indicated Child Study Team responsibilities as influences on the job, as well as teachers. Two of the ten respondents also indicated that the structure of the position, or the way in which the position may be split among schools, is another influence. Other influences that were identified by one respondent each as unprompted responses include: parents, the culture of the school, the time of year, and time constraints (*See Table 6: Principals' Perceived Influences on the Daily Activities of the School Psychologist*).

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Table 6  
Principals' Perceived Influences on the Daily Activities of the School Psychologist

<b>Influences, unprompted</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Legislation/Timelines	7
Student Needs	6
Caseload	4
CST Director	3
CST Responsibilities	2
Structure of Position	2
Parents	2
Teachers	1
Culture of School	1
Time Constraints	1
Time of Year	1

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### *Desired School Psychological Services*

Each principal was asked to identify the activities in which he/she *would like to see* the school psychologist in his/her school be involved. They were asked to think “outside of the box” and to think of the position in an ideal world with no obstacles or lack of resources. A theme of training and psycho-education emerged as what respondents desire school psychologists to be doing. Many of the responses suggested a desire for the school psychologists to be educating stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers) in the school system about mental health, behavior and academics.

The top unprompted responses, each given by five of the ten principals, were parent education and teacher/staff training. For example, Respondent 10 thought “staff training could be wonderful.” Some principals were even specific in the type of training they desire. For example, Respondent 05 desired:

Workshops for both staff and parents on the issues that are certainly facing our younger populations, again peer pressure, tests, interpreting tests, certainly again how to prepare our children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, parenting skills and also to provide in-services for teachers as well too who might have children that do show behavioral concerns such as immaturity, motivational concerns.

Respondent 08 also thought that the teachers “need training... they need to understand the psychological development of a child,” as well as the impact of “changes in the home” on behavior. Respondent 10 had similar thoughts about the types of training that would be useful and mentioned topics such as “family dynamics,” “how life is different now” than it was in 1970, when some of the teachers started teaching, as well as “behaviors.”

Three of the ten principals stated they would like to see the school psychologist involved in each of the following activities: school-wide program development, classroom lessons and direct student contact. These activities were similar to each other in that they all had to do with training and psycho-education and were considered to be what Respondent 02 called “proactive work.”

Two principals desired consultative activities/resource to teachers, as well as individual counseling. Other unprompted responses that were given by one principal each included: academic/learning assessments/testing, group counseling, school-wide prevention programs, Parent-Teacher Organization involvement, after-school programs, and involvement with community programs (*See Table 7: Desired Activities: Unprompted*).

Table 7  
Desired Activities: Unprompted

<b>Desired Activities, Unprompted*</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Parent Education	5
Teacher/Staff Training	5
Program Development (School-Wide)	3
Direct student contact	3
Classroom lessons	3
Consultation/ Resource to Teachers	2
Individual Counseling	2
Group Counseling	1
Prevention Programs	1
Academic/Learning Assessments/Testing	1
PTO involvement	1
After school program	1
Involvement with community programs	1

\* One respondent said, "None – good as is" in terms of responding to desired activities, unprompted.

After the principal was asked to describe the activities in he/she *would like to see* the school psychologist in his/her school be involved, the interviewer identified a number of pre-determined services that may be provided by a school psychologist and presented those that were not given as unprompted responses in the previous question. The respondent was asked to confirm or deny whether he/she *would like to see* the school psychologist in his/her school be involved in that activity. The results of this prompted question follow.

Nine of the ten principals responded that they would like the school psychologist to be involved in behavioral assessments and school-wide program evaluation when prompted. Eight of the ten principals endorsed the following activities: emotional/personality assessments, consultative activities/resource to teachers, report writing, case management, crisis response and research. Seven of the ten principals desired prevention programs, school-wide program development and serving on the pre-referral team at school. Six principals endorsed family counseling. Five principals endorsed each of the following activities: teacher/staff training, group counseling and academic and learning assessments/testing. Four of the ten principals desired the school psychologist to be involved in individual counseling and three principals wanted supervision of other staff (*See Table 8: Desired Activities: Prompted*).

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Table 8  
Desired Activities: Prompted

Desired Activities, Prompted*	Number of Responses
Behavioral Assessments	9
Program Evaluation	9
Emotional/Personality Assessments	8
Report Writing	8
Case Management	8
Consultation/ Resource to Teachers	8
Crisis Response	8
Research	8
Program Development (School-Wide)	7
Prevention Programs	7
Pre-Referral Intervention/ I&RS	7
Family Counseling	6
Academic/ Learning Assessments/Testing	5
Parent Education	5
Teacher/Staff Training	5
Individual Counseling	4
Group Counseling	5
Supervision	3

\* Respondents were only asked to respond to activities that were not given unprompted.

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In the final question of this section of the interview, respondents were asked to rank the activities in which they *would like to see* the school psychologists spend the *most time*. When asked to complete this ranking, the activities which were endorsed most frequently were: individual counseling, case management, teacher/staff training and school-wide program development (*See Table 9: Ranking of Time Spent on Desired Activities*).

Table 9  
Ranking of Time Spent on Desired Activities

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of Responses*</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Prevention Programs	2
	Teacher/Staff Training	2
	Report Writing	1
	Parent Education	1
	Case Management	1
	Behavior Assessment	1
	Individual Counseling	1
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Individual Counseling	2
	Case Management	2
	Consultation/Resource to Teachers	2
	Pre-Referral Intervention/I&RS	1
	Group Counseling	1
	Academic/Learning Assessments/testing	1
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Program Development	3
	Group Counseling	1
	Individual Counseling	1
	Crisis Response	1
	Consultation/Resource to Teachers	1
	Teacher/Staff Training	1
	Case Management	1
4 <sup>th</sup>	Parent Education	3
	Family Counseling	2
	Supervision	1
	Research	1
	Crisis Response	1
	Program Development	1
5 <sup>th</sup>	Consultation/Resource to Teachers	3
	Pre-Referral Intervention/I&RS	2
	Prevention Programs	1
	Report Writing	1
	Emotional/Personality Assessments	1
	Family Counseling	1

\*One respondent did not complete this ranking.

### *Barriers*

Principals were then asked to identify what they perceived to be the barriers to having the school psychologist involved in more roles and activities. Overall, a theme of lack of resources emerged as the primary barrier.

The top unprompted response was given by eight of the ten respondents who perceived time constraints to be a barrier to school psychologists being involved in more activities. For example, Respondent 03 reported that the school psychologist “has so many things he is expected to do and all of us run out of time. There are only so many hours in a day.” Respondent 07 summarized the time constraint by saying that she:

Personally thinks we’ve overwhelmed our Child Study Team to the point where they could be a lot more effective in terms of the children but there are so many reports to write, there are so many telephone calls to make, there are so many different situations that arise that they have to deal with that they just don’t have enough time to really pay the kind of attention that’s needed to our children.

Four of the ten respondents indicated financial constraints were a barrier. For example, Respondent 05 stated that “the school psychologist’s role obviously could be more expanded if there was more money” and Respondent 07 stated that “because the budgets are very limited ... to have the number of people that you really need is very difficult.”

Three respondents stated that another barrier was federal and state legislation. For example, Respondent 06 reported that “you have certain timelines that the state law says you have to comply with.” Respondent 08 stated that “when it comes to state legislation, there is no way to default that. That’s what the rule is and that’s

what you have to follow.” Respondent 10 noted that “special education law changes so much that it takes so much of their energy to be able to know exactly what’s being done” and that “a lot of time is spent on making sure that they are following that letter of the law because everyone is afraid of litigation.”

Two principals indicated that the structure of the position and being split among other schools was a barrier. For example, Respondent 01 said that her school psychologist was not doing “as much as she probably could if she were there every day” and that “being there for only one day a week is a limitation... and is hard.” Also, Respondent 09 felt that because the position is split among schools “things just get fragmented.” He felt that he did not know the school psychologist well and was unfamiliar with the activities because the school psychologist’s time was split among multiple schools. Respondent 09 also noted that the “Child Study Team didn’t really have a stake or commitment to the building per se ... they’re not easily identifiable ... because they are in and out.” Another problem with the structure of the position was cited by Respondent 01 who noted that the school psychologist is “hearing from three different administrators but then they are taking their directives from central office, the director of special services and many times [the principal and other administrators] haven’t spoken” so there is a “need to work on the communication.” Two of the ten respondents cited large caseloads as a specific barrier and one principal responded that parents were a potential barrier to school psychologists being involved in the desired activities.

Other barriers that were identified by one respondent each as unprompted responses include: employee contract, lack of parental support, overlap with other

positions, Child Study Team responsibilities, lack of legal consultation, lack of need for additional mental health services and paperwork. For example, Respondent 01 reported that the demands of the job require that her school psychologist need to “be in her office all day writing reports” so that means that her school “doesn’t get any of the counseling or prevention programs” that she would like. Also, Respondent 06 noted that “it seems that the paperwork demands are increasing and increasing ... and you spend more time doing that and less time being able to do the meat of what I think ... a psychologist really should be.”

One respondent also suggested that the traditional role of the school psychologist has been a barrier, as the position was traditionally a passive one, in which the school psychologist stayed in his/her office and completed testing but was not accessible to the members of the school community. She felt that the position is changing and more recently trained school psychologists are more interested in additional roles and activities. Respondent 08 discussed the paradigm shifts in the position and felt that there is “definitely a paradigm shift taking place” but that the old paradigm “could be one of the barriers.” The shift she described was that in the past “it was more about ... office time and ... not being active,” so she has seen tenured psychologists who are in the office and have been performing the job in the historical way they are used to doing which she perceives as a barrier to getting out of the office and accepting some of the new roles and activities. Though no longer a barrier in her school, Respondent 10 echoed some of these sentiments by describing that “for years, [the Child Study Team] was kind of like in an ivory tower there, I mean if they could have locked the door and pulled the curtain, that’s how it was” and it was “real hands-off.”

She noted that it caused a lot of frustration for the teachers but after some reconfiguration “it is much more user friendly” and the teachers and school psychologist work in collaboration now (*See Table 10: Barriers to School Psychologists Being Involved in More Activities: Unprompted*).

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Table 10  
Barriers to School Psychologists Being Involved in More Activities: Unprompted

<b>Barriers, Unprompted</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Time Constraints	8
Financial Constraints	4
Federal/State Legislation	3
Structure of Position	2
Caseloads	2
Parents	1
Lack of Need for Additional Services in School	1
Employee Contract	1
Overlap of Roles with other Position	1
CST Responsibilities	1
Paperwork	1
Lack of Legal Consultation	1
Traditional Role of School Psychologist	1

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After the principal was asked to describe the barriers to involvement in more activities, the interviewer identified a number of pre-determined factors that may be barriers and presented those that were not given as unprompted responses in the previous question. The respondent was asked to confirm or deny whether he/she thought they were barriers. The results of this prompted question follow.

Five of the nine respondents indicated that federal and state legislation was a barrier and four of the respondents believed financial constraints were a barrier. Three respondents said parents and the Board of Education were barriers to the school psychologist being involved in more of the desired activities. Two of the nine respondents endorsed each of the following as potential barriers: lack of support of the superintendent, lack of support of the teachers, time constraints and school climate, or an unwillingness of acceptance for the services. One respondent endorsed each of the following barriers: space/room constraints, or not having a room out of which the school psychologist could work, and the structure of the position (*See Table 11: Barriers to School Psychologists Being Involved in More Activities: Prompted*).

Table 11  
Barriers to School Psychologists Being Involved in More Activities: Prompted

<b>Barriers, Prompted*</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Federal/State Legislation	6
Financial Constraints	5
Parents	4
Board of Education	3
School Climate/Lack of Readiness for Change	3
Superintendent	2
Teachers	2
Time Constraints	2
Other CST Members	1
Space/Room Constraints	1
School Psychologist	1
Structure of Position	1
Principal	0
Individual Training of the School Psychologist	0
Lack of Need for Additional Services in School	0

\* Respondents were only asked to respond to activities that were not given unprompted.

### *Desired Resources*

Respondents were asked to identify what resources they would need in order to allow the school psychologist to be involved in these additional desired activities. The principals identified a number of resources that they would need in order to have this envisioned position. The most frequently given response to this question was given by five of the respondents who said they would need financial resources in order to expand the position and budget a full-time, or additional, staff member. One respondent indicated a need for supplies and one respondent indicated a need for county or state approval for the envisioned position.

### *Suggestions/Recommendations*

Principals were told that over the past few decades research has indicated that school psychologists serve primarily as assessors but desire to be more involved in additional services. Then they were asked to make recommendations to school psychologists as to what they could do to overcome some of the barriers and be more involved in the additional types of services. The respondents offered recommendations concerning what a school psychologist should do in order to overcome some of the barriers that were identified and to expand the types of activities they engage in.

A recommendation to school psychologists was made by three of the ten respondents. They recommended developing a plan and approaching the

administration with the plan. For example, Respondent 05 recommended “opening up a dialogue with [administration] to show them, convince them, [express] a desire to expand those services... and provide a plan of action and programming recommendation.” Respondent 06 recommended that a school psychologist “approach [the] administration ... [with] ways that you could expand your role” and “come with a plan.” As a principal, she felt that “when someone comes with a great idea, I am more than willing to support it and see what to do to make it happen.” Respondent 08 said “to map out and manage their own time and approach whoever the supervisor is ... to get your dream and put it down and say this is what I’d like to do.” As a principal, she also felt that “you’d be crazy to say no” and that “you have to feed [someone’s] passion.”

Two of the ten respondents suggested nurturing personal relationships with other stakeholders (e.g. teachers, administrators). They felt these relationships can help to overcome the barriers and are advantageous for the school psychologist. For example, Respondent 02 thought “solid and trusting relationships ... are at the core of everything.” Two of the principals recommended that school psychologists meet with teachers and be an available resource to them. Respondent 04 suggested that the school psychologist “make links with the teachers so that they know you’re there as a resource.” She also recommended “the same thing with the administration.”

One respondent recommended “starting small and expanding.” She suggested “provide additional services and see if you can make a difference in one room ... then do the same thing ... with the population that really needs you.” One respondent

suggested school psychologists take on a liaison role between the school and teachers and community agencies.

### *Facilitators*

Though not specifically a recommendation to school psychologists, some principals spontaneously identified facilitators to having the school psychologist in an expanded role based on what they were doing in their schools. These statements illustrated ways in which the desired and envisioned suggestions are being successfully implemented in schools. These may be used as models for other schools looking to expand the role of the school psychologist.

Some of the respondents spoke of ways in which their schools are currently addressing the need for increased visibility, as was identified in the interviews and reported in the previous sections. For example, Respondent 04, who felt that the role of the school psychologist “is quite ideal” in her school, described how the school psychologist “sees students, the students know who she is.” She also reported that although in “some school systems all the school psychologist does is test kids and that’s it, that’s not the case” in her school. Another facilitator, according to her, is where the Child Study Team is housed. She felt that it sent a message to the community. In her school, the Child Study Team is “housed in the main office and that is part of the hub and center ... and that sends a message that this is an important part of the school.” Similarly, Respondent 10 noted that members of the Child Study Team are now housed in the school building, not in the administration building. She

felt this was part of helping to make them more accessible to the teachers in her school.

Another need that was previously identified by respondents was the need for additional time or personnel. Respondent 06 discussed ways in which her school addressed this need. Respondent 06 described a facilitator at her school to be the existence of an additional social worker who serves as a school counselor, in addition to the Child Study Team. She thought the position came about as a result of “it being seen as a need.” She explained that “there is some collaboration with the school counselor [and school psychologist].”

Respondent 02 discussed the way in which her school successfully addressed the need for nurturing relationships with stakeholders as stated above. She believed that in her school the services the school psychologist provides are effective because of the relationships “between the school psychologist, the student, the principal, the parents and the teachers and the staff of origin.” She believed that it “just allows the child to receive the best services and just allows for this kind of system to operate well.” Also, in this school they have one Child Study Team in the building and she felt that contributed to the “relationships that are forged and the attention that is given to detail for each student.” She felt that she was “fortunate in [her] district because [they] are one school and have one Child Study Team” and she thought that “all schools need a Child Study Team in their school.”

Another facilitator that principals reported as contributing to the positive feelings about the role of the school psychologist was individual traits of the school psychologist. At various points during the interviews, six of the principals

spontaneously mentioned individual traits of the school psychologist that they felt positively impacted the role. Some of the traits that were mentioned were personal attributes that made the person who he/she is. These comments included mostly positive sentiments, such as feeling that the school psychologist in his/her school is a “good person” and “ready to help instantly” (Respondent 03) or has a “good heart” (Respondent 04) and is “approachable” (Respondent 02) and “conscious” (Respondent 09) and “not an alarmist.” (Respondent 08)

Five principals talked about the school psychologists’ professional capabilities, including being “excellent at what she does” and “a valuable contributor to the CST” (Respondent 02), as well as “going above what she has to do” (Respondent 01). Respondent 03 described his school psychologist as someone who is “a team player” and an “outstanding psychologist.” Respondent 08 thought that her school psychologist “was wonderful to work with.” Respondent 04 described the person in the role as “an excellent school psychologist.” Others indicated that the individual school psychologist was “very smart” (Respondent 08), was “well-trained.” (Respondent 02) and had “unbelievably stellar training” (Respondent 03). Another trait that was noted by Respondent 02 was that for the school psychologist in her school, “there’s not a time clock that she is punching to get the job done.” These qualities were ones that influenced how the principals thought about their individual school psychologists. The most commonly expressed traits had to do with being smart and being good at their job. The combination of personal attributes and professional capabilities result in overall positive feelings towards the school psychologists.

In addition, there was discussion in five of the interviews about how the individual psychologist really influences their view of the position and whether or not they see the role as positive or negative. For instance, Respondent 07 acknowledged that “so much of it has to do with the personality of the school psychologist” and that “the level of interpersonal skills or sympathy or empathy or understanding” influences the individual person and performance. Respondent 08 also recognized that “it’s about the individual” and Respondent 01 stated “it is individualized in terms of what the school psychologist does.” Respondent 03, Respondent 08 and Respondent 10 shared experiences as principal with two different psychologists who were very different in terms of personality and professionalism and they all described the ways in which these individuals performed the job and were perceived by others in the school.

### *Closing*

At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if there was anything additional that they thought should have been asked or if they had any questions for the interviewer. None of the participants had any additional comments or questions. Last, they were thanked for their participation and the interview was ended.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Overall, the principals in this study were satisfied with the current services provided by the school psychologist. They reported that the school psychologists serve primarily as Child Study Team members who fulfill relevant responsibilities. They reported that they would like additional services to be provided by the school psychologist, particularly training and psycho-education for parents and staff, but that the school psychologists do not have time to provide additional services beyond the Child Study Team responsibilities. The principals in this study perceived external factors, not themselves, as the primary influences on the role definition of the school psychologist. An implication for school psychologists, based on the data from this study, is that training and psycho-education may be a potential area of role expansion in the schools.

#### *Principals' Perceptions of the Role of School Psychologist*

This study explored principals' perspectives as an individual consumer group. The methodology used in this study allowed for more in-depth discussion about principals' perceptions of school psychological services than previous survey studies (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004).

A key issue from the data in this study was that these principals reported that learning assessments/testing was the most frequent activity in which the school psychologist is currently involved. Overall, the principals in this study were content with the current services provided by the school psychologists. These findings were consistent with research from the 1980's which indicated that serving as an assessor is the primary role of the school psychologist (Abel & Burke, 1985; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Senft & Snider, 1980). It also supports the findings of Gilman and Gabriel (2004) who found that the principals are satisfied with the services provided by school psychologists. These findings demonstrate that the primary role of school psychologist, from the point of view of the school principal, has changed very little in the past thirty years.

In this study, the principals, in general, did not offer an overall positive or negative reaction to the primary role of the school psychologist as a tester. Rather, most of them felt it was "the nature of the beast" or an unavoidable part of what had to be done in keeping with laws and regulations. One principal did mention that she thought evaluation and re-evaluation of a student was "important" to better understand the student. Otherwise, the principals just reported that the school psychologists did the testing but did not report any value associated with that testing.

Another activity which has previously been documented in research as an activity in which school psychologists engage is consultation. In this study, it was the second most frequently given unprompted response. Principals in this study were very positive about the school psychologist as a consultant or resource to the school and its stakeholders. Many of the principals acknowledged positive personal and professional qualities of the

individual school psychologist. Providing information and serving as a resource to families, students, and teachers was an activity for which the principals relied heavily on the school psychologist. It was reported as an area in which the principals valued what the school psychologist was able to provide as a resource to staff and families about psychological and behavioral issues.

### *Principals' Perceptions of Desired Change*

Another key issue from the data in this study was the perceived need for services in the school. According to the Surgeon General's Report from the United States Public Health Service (2000), a substantial number of youth have mental health issues which may lead to negative life outcomes if left untreated. Some past studies have found that principals may desire more time from the school psychologist and an increase in individual and group counseling treatment, in-service training and preventative mental health services (Abel & Burke, 1985; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Senft & Snider, 1980).

The majority of the principals interviewed in this study spontaneously mentioned an increasing need for psychological services for students in the schools. They reported that they see an increase in students coming to school with emotional needs. In common with past research, the principals in this study endorsed a variety of activities in which they would like to have the school psychologist involved.

Past studies which were conducted with principals suggested that there was a minimal discrepancy between the current and desired roles of a school psychologist. However,

the research did show that principals desire more counseling services, staff training and preventative mental health services, at school and community levels.

The results of this current study suggested that principals are interested in more indirect services, particularly in the form of staff and parent education. These activities were endorsed most frequently as the activities in which the principals desire to see the school psychologists involved. These principals desired an increase in activities related to training and psycho-education about psychological and behavioral issues impacting today's students. The emphasis seemed to be on educating other members of the school and home communities who were perceived to be the "front-line" with students. These findings are consistent with the proposed preventative models of school psychology (Curtis et al., 2004). Based on the data in this study, it appears that an area of potential for growth for the school psychologist is that of serving as an expert to educate stakeholders on relevant student needs.

Individual and group counseling were endorsed as desired activities by some of the principals but were not discussed at length in the way training and psycho-education were. The principals in this study appeared to be less interested in group and individual counseling than some of the previous research has found (Abel & Burke, 1985; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Landau & Gerken, 1979; Senft & Snider, 1980). Also, some principals even reported that they did not want counseling during the school day for elementary school children, except in emergency situations.

Research from the late 1970's and early 1980's showed that principals desired testing as an activity; however, it was not frequently endorsed as a desired activity in this study. It is possible, based on principals' current perceptions of the field, that it is assumed that

testing will always be part of the role. The model of the school psychologist as primarily serving on the Child Study Team is deeply ingrained in the minds of many of the principals.

### *Principals' Perceptions of Influences*

A key finding in this study was that these principals did not report themselves as being a critical influence in defining the role of the school psychologist. Overall, the principals in this study identified a number of influences which affected the role of the school psychologist. While past research by Benson and Hughes (1985) and Landau and Gerken (1979) suggested that principals are one of the greatest influences on the roles and activities of the school psychologist, the findings from this study differed. Many of the influences that the principals in this study reported were ones that were determined by external forces, not by the principal. It appeared that the principals did not feel in control of determining the activities of the school psychologist. In fact, most of the principals seemed to respect what the school psychologist was doing but did not report close collaboration with or influence over the school psychologist.

The principals did not identify themselves as influential in defining the role of the school psychologist. Therefore, it is likely that they do not perceive themselves as being influential in advocating for change of the role of school psychologist. However, it is possible that their influence may be subtle and that their expectations of the role of school psychologist may be contributing to the maintenance of the role of assessor.

Many of the principals acknowledged that there were other factors that limited expansion of the role but that they thought the school psychologists were effective, while having to work within those limitations. The influences that these principals reported came from both within and outside of the school. Internal influences that were reported included: student need and the influence of the special services departments. The activities of the school psychologist, as reported by these principals, seemed to be perceived as delivered mainly through school central office special service departments. The feeling that the school psychologist was not really a part of the school was a theme mentioned by some of the principals. In schools in which the school psychologist was only present a few days a week, the principals discussed ways in which they felt the school psychologist was not perceived to be a part of the school community by other school members (e.g. teachers, students, administrators). An external influence that was reported is the impact of legislation and regulations. The literature also shows that legislation and policy are influences on the activities and roles of a school psychologist (Benson & Hughes, 1985; Reschly, 2000). School psychologists have had to conduct testing, and adhere to timelines, in order to follow the law. The principals in this study were well aware of the influence of the laws and agreed that federal and state legislation was a major influence on what the school psychologist does.

Past research showed that principals desired more time from a school psychologist and this was a consistent finding in this study as well. In this study, many of the principals noted that lack of time was a major barrier to expanding the role of school psychologist. Some principals felt that this was a barrier that could not be changed. Other principals envisioned the position of school psychologist in some innovative ways,

such as the addition of another school psychologist to share the work load or to conduct some of the non-Child Study Team activities and to work in collaboration with the existing Child Study Team.

Most of the principals desired more time from the school psychologist, even those who had a full-time person. Only a couple of the principals were satisfied with the amount of time they got from their school psychologists, regardless of how much time that was. The majority of the principals in this study reported that they would like to have the school psychologist for more days or the addition of another school psychologist. These principals also reported that there was an unmet student need.

### *Envisioned Role*

Some of the principals in this study reported visions of an expanded role of school psychologist and suggested how that position may evolve from what it currently is today. In terms of the envisioned position, the thoughts of the principals in this study were consistent with the recommendations of The Invitational Conference on the Future of School Psychology (Futures Conference) in 2002 which suggested a shift from the individual model to a systems-level model of school psychology (Curtis et. al., 2004). The principals in this study put an emphasis on making the role more of a preventative, rather than reactive, one. The principals imagined more training and psycho-education by the school psychologist. They identified a number of people in the school system that would benefit from psychological training and expertise. Some of these groups included: teachers, parents and students. Principals even discussed the topics that they see a need

for training for parents and teachers including issues confronting the 21<sup>st</sup> Century student, such as peer pressure, tests, parenting skills, child development, managing behavior and changing family dynamics. It appears as though school psychologists are not as involved in this as principals would like and has the potential for implications and benefits for the students. Since the teachers are the “front-line,” these principals suggested educating them about some of the psychological and behavioral issues that they could then apply to the management of their classrooms and the delivery of their teaching services. It was generally felt that there was a need for providing emotional, behavioral and mental health support services to students and that training and psycho-education for the other stakeholders in the students’ lives would be beneficial and desired. It is also a way to reach a larger population of students in the schools and to meet more of the students’ needs.

#### *Implications for School Psychologists*

The principals in this study were asked to make recommendations and suggestions to a school psychologist about how to expand his/her role in a school. The principals offered specific suggestions about how to work with a principal to provide additional services. First, they made the recommendation that a school psychologist should decide what he/she wants to be doing in the schools and then to develop a plan. Once the plan is developed, the school psychologist can approach the administration with his/her recommendations of how to implement the plan.

Principals also recommend that school psychologists manage their time and their schedule to maximize their opportunity for visibility in school when students and teachers are present. This may include writing reports during off-hours or taking lunch at an alternate time in order to walk around the lunch room. One principal suggested having open office hours so that teachers feel that they can come and ask questions and utilize the position as a resource. It was also suggested that the school psychologist be flexible and offer training programs in the morning or in the evening to accommodate more families' schedules.

#### *Implications for School Psychology Training Programs*

The data from this study may be used to influence school psychology training programs. A major finding in this study was that principals envision the school psychologist to be a valuable resource to the staff and families of the school community. This is an area of potential for growth for school psychologists. The principals identified the need for stakeholders to be educated about students' mental health and behavioral issues. In addition, it may be valuable for them to learn about the ways in which childhood is changing for today's student.

Training programs could place a greater emphasis on preparing school psychologists for the role of training and psycho-education. School psychology students may need to broaden their areas of expertise to include potential areas of interest to today's student, such as the implications of economic and familial changes on the youth, as well as increased academic pressures. It may also require a specific professional development

component that keeps school psychologists abreast of current issues impacting today's students.

In addition to supporting the role of the school psychologist as trainer and educator, training programs may need to increase the amount of training and practical experience having to do with collaborating with principals and other stakeholders in the school setting. The principals in this study whose school psychologist worked collaboratively with the teachers and administrators identified the positive relationships as a facilitator in the effectiveness of the school psychologist. On the other hand, some principals, who had less contact with their school psychologists, identified disconnect and lack of collaboration as impacting how they perceived, or understood, the role of the school psychologist.

#### *Limitations of the Current Study*

The small sample size of ten principals and the geographical homogeneity of the participants may limit the generalizability of this study. All ten principals were principals at elementary schools in Central/Northern New Jersey. Therefore, the results do not allow for definitive conclusions about the perceptions of school psychological services. These principals, however, did have a range of number of years of experience as principals and did work in schools of varying sizes.

Another potential inherent limitation in an interview study is that the participants may give responses that they believe are expected by the researcher. As a precaution, the researcher did not disclose that she was a school psychologist prior to, or during, the

interview. If disclosed to the principal, it was not until after the conclusion of the interview.

### *Implications for Future Research*

While the results of this study are for a small, well-defined population, it is possible for future studies to be conducted with other populations to generate more general claims. Future studies could examine a larger number of participants from various geographical locations. Further, the study could be conducted with principals from middle and high schools and comparisons could be made among the different grade levels.

It is also important to note that the time or number of days that the school psychologist spends at the school was an influence on some of the principals' responses or reported knowledge of what the school psychologist does. In one instance, the school psychologist was split among three schools and the principal made a point to say that she did not know all of the activities in which the school psychologist was involved, as she was not the direct supervisor. On the other hand, one principal whose school psychologist was there full-time, and collaborated with another school psychologist serving as a school counselor, had a working knowledge of specific cases and families with whom the school psychologist was working. Future studies could examine the impact of various structures of the position (e.g. full-time on-site versus split among multiple schools).

This current study generates suggestions and recommendations that have implications for school psychologists and training programs, as well as future studies that could

contribute to a greater understanding of the role definition of the school psychologist. In particular, this study specifically explored principals' perceptions of the current and desired activities of the school psychologist, as well as the influences and potential barriers on the expansion of the role. More research in this area will be important to help further refine the role definition of the school psychologist as a provider of services to help meet the increasing mental health needs of students in schools.

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## APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

## Principals' Attitudes About School Psychological Services: A Qualitative Study

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in a research study being conducted by Laura Greene, a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The purpose of this study is to obtain elementary school principals' perceptions of school psychological services. These findings will be used to increase knowledge about the roles and functions of school psychologists.

By consenting to participate in this study, I agree to be interviewed by the investigator, Laura Greene, for approximately one hour. I give permission for the interview to be audio taped and for the contents of the recording to be reviewed and transcribed by the investigator. I understand that the investigator may utilize another person to perform the transcriptions. I understand that all identifying information will be disguised on the hard copy transcription of the interview and that confidentiality will be a priority. I understand that all audio tapes, notes and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location. I understand that I have a right to request and be provided with the results of this study upon its completion.

I understand that there are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I have the right to discontinue my participation at any time, with no penalty. In addition, I may choose not to answer any questions with which I am not comfortable, and I may ask for the audio tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview. I understand that no payment will be received as compensation for participation in this study.

I understand that I will be asked to offer my opinions about school psychological services at my school. I understand that the potential benefits of this study are that its findings may be used to increase knowledge and awareness about principals' perceptions of school psychological services and to potentially influence recommendations for improving school psychological services.

Initials\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I may contact the investigator or the advisor of this project, at any time, if I have any questions, concerns or comments regarding my participation in this study.

Laura Greene (investigator)  
GSAPP, Rutgers University  
152 Frelinghuysen Road  
Piscataway, NJ 08854  
201-920-9215

Susan Forman, Ph.D. (advisor)  
GSAPP, Rutgers University  
152 Frelinghuysen Road  
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[lgreene@eden.rutgers.edu](mailto:lgreene@eden.rutgers.edu)

[sgforman@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:sgforman@rci.rutgers.edu)

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Rutgers University:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
3 Rutgers Plaza  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
732-932-0150 x2104  
[humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

*I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have received a copy for my files.*

I agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I consent to having the interview audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

#### Principals' Attitudes About School Psychological Services: A Qualitative Study

Hello! My name is Laura Greene and I am a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University, studying School Psychology. As a part of my study, I am conducted research about elementary school principals' perceptions of school psychological services. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and providing me with your responses. The interview will last between 45 minutes and one hour. It would be helpful if you could please hold all phone calls as to limit interruptions.

It is important to remind you that all information gathered today will be kept with the strictest confidentiality and all identifying information will be changed to protect you. Also, let me remind you that this interview is voluntary and the interview can be stopped at any time, upon your request. With your permission, I will be tape recording this interview to make sure it is as accurate as possible. I can turn off the recorder at any time, upon your request.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

With your permission, I will begin the interview.

#### **Questions: General**

1. What is your name and title?
2. What is the name of your school?
3. What grade levels attend your school?
4. How many students do you have in your school?
5. How many school psychologists serve your school?
6. Does the school psychologist work in your school or is his/her/their offices elsewhere? Where?
7. Does the school psychologist service only your school or other schools as well? What other schools and how many?

#### **Questions: Current School Psychological Services**

1. In what roles and activities is the school psychologist in your school involved?
2. I would like to identify a number of services that may be provided by a school psychologist. Please tell me if the school psychologist in your school is involved in the following services:
  - a. Consultation
  - b. Academic or learning assessments

- c. Behavioral assessments
  - d. Emotional or personality assessments
  - e. Report writing
  - f. Case management
  - g. Parent education
  - h. Teacher or in-service training
  - i. Individual counseling
  - j. Group counseling
  - k. Family counseling
  - l. Prevention
  - m. Crisis response
  - n. Supervision
  - o. Research
  - p. Program development
  - q. Program evaluation
  - r. Pre-referral intervention
3. Now I would like to show you a card which lists the services I just mentioned. Please take a look at this card and rank the top five activities in which the school psychologist in your school spends the most time.
  4. What are the major influences on the daily activities of the school psychologist in your school?
  5. How effective are the services provided by the school psychologist in your school?

### **Questions: Desired School Psychological Services**

1. In what roles and activities *would you like* the school psychologist in your school to be involved?
2. I would like to identify a number of services that may be provided by a school psychologist. Please tell me if *you would like* the school psychologist in your school to be involved in the following services:
  - a. Consultation
  - b. Academic or learning assessments
  - c. Behavioral assessments
  - d. Emotional or personality assessments
  - e. Report writing
  - f. Case management
  - g. Parent education
  - h. Teacher or in-service training
  - i. Individual counseling
  - j. Group counseling
  - k. Family counseling
  - l. Prevention
  - m. Crisis response
  - n. Supervision
  - o. Research

- p. Program development
  - q. Program evaluation
  - r. Pre-referral intervention
3. Now I would like to show you a card which lists the services I just mentioned. Please take a look at this card and rank the top five activities that *you would like* the school psychologist in your school to spend the most time.

### Questions: Barriers

1. What, if any, are the barriers to having the school psychologist in your school involved in more roles and activities?
2. I would like to identify a number of barriers that may affect the roles and activities of a school psychologist. Please tell me if, and how, these issues are barriers to you and your school in terms of the school psychologist being involved in more roles and activities.
  - a. Stakeholders (support, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, experience)
    - i. school psychologist
    - ii. principal
    - iii. superintendent
    - iv. teachers
    - v. CST
    - vi. parents
    - vii. other
  - b. Resources
    - i. financial
    - ii. time
    - iii. space/room
  - c. Federal or state legislation
  - d. School climate
  - e. Readiness for change (“That’s just the way it’s always been”)
  - f. Individual training of the school psychologist
  - g. Need for additional services in school
3. What resources would you need in order to allow the school psychologist to be involved in additional services?
4. Research over the past few decades has indicated that school psychologists serve primarily as assessors, but desire to be more involved in additional services like consultation and counseling. What could the school psychologist do to overcome the barriers and become more involved in these types of additional services?

### Questions: Closing

1. Is there anything that you think I should have asked that I did not?
2. Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me and provide me with your responses. It has been very helpful and informative.

Consultation

Academic or learning assessments

Behavioral assessments

Emotional or personality assessments

Report writing

Case management

Parent education

Teacher or in-service training

Individual counseling

Group counseling

Family counseling

Prevention

Crisis response

Supervision

Research

Program development

Program evaluation

Pre-referral intervention