

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AS LEADERS IN SCHOOL-BASED  
ENVIRONMENTS

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By

Samantha Ann Harding

Director: Dr. Lori Unruh  
Program Coordinator  
School Psychology Graduate Program

Committee Members: Dr. Candace Boan-Lenzo, Psychology  
David Scales, Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

### PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AS LEADERS IN SCHOOL-BASED ENVIRONMENTS

Samantha Ann Harding

Western Carolina University (October 2014)

Director: Dr. Lori Unruh

School psychologists have been encouraged to become leaders in their schools for decades. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and traditional views held by other educators, most school psychologists have been unable to assume leadership positions within their schools. To assist with the development of a leadership model specific to the field of school psychology, Shriberg (2008; 2010) completed some of the first research about leadership within the field of school psychology by surveying school psychologists about various aspects of leadership as related to their discipline. The survey that was developed for the current study was modeled after the survey that was used in Shriberg's (2008; 2010) research. Participants in this study included 96 school-based school psychology practitioners (84.4% female and 15.6% male) from North Carolina and South Carolina who completed a survey that asked various questions about their leadership opportunities, leadership effectiveness, and beliefs about leadership within the field of school psychology. Results indicate that these school psychologists believe that they are only moderately effective as leaders within their schools, despite there being opportunities for them to serve as leaders. Additionally, participants emphasized that strong communication skills, effective interpersonal skills, a strong school psychology skill set, effective problem-solving skills, and acting as an advocate for children are all important to being an effective leader within

the schools. Significant differences were found between participants' responses based on their highest completed degree. It is hoped that data from this study will assist school psychologists in bridging the gap between ideal school psychology standards and their current practices within school systems.

## CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **History of School Psychology**

School psychologists have traditionally provided individual-level services within schools that focus on the assessment of children's academic difficulties and needs (Braden, DiMarino-Linnen, & Good, 2001). Additional individual-level services that school psychologists have customarily performed include recommendations of academic and behavioral interventions for students who are experiencing difficulties and evaluation of the supplemental services that are provided to students (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). In recent years, however, the roles of school psychologists have been expanded in order to make full use of their skill sets (Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

Practicing school psychologists are now encouraged to act as leaders in their schools to reach more students at the systems-level, in addition to their provision of individual-level services in an attempt to prevent student difficulties before they occur (Braden et al., 2001; Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Systems-level services are provided to all students within a classroom, school, or even school system. This contrasts with traditional individual-level services which only reach one student at a time. This paradigm shift requires school psychologists to proactively work with all students to address students' academic and behavioral difficulties before they significantly affect their functioning (Ikeda, Neessen, & Witt, 2008).

The following activities are examples of systems-level services in which school psychologists are encouraged to demonstrate their expertise and provide guidance to other school members: conducting academic and mental health screenings, assisting with planning and

providing professional development opportunities for parents and teachers, collecting and interpreting various types of school data (e.g., standardized tests, curriculum-based assessments, classroom observations, local achievement norms), promoting safe and effective learning environments for all students, advocating for students' needs, and participating in decision-making groups within their schools and communities (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010a; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). These proactive services that assist the general population of students require additional skills than those that are employed for individual-level, reactive services that school psychologists are accustomed to providing at their schools. It is argued that one of the most important skills that school psychologists can employ within systems-level services is leadership (Braden et al., 2001; Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). By acting as leaders within their schools, school psychologists can ensure that they are reaching all students' needs in an appropriate and proactive manner.

### **Early Influences on School Psychology**

The field of school psychology emerged around the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of the need for educational specialists with a background in psychology who could provide services to children with various needs (Braden et al., 2001). Many social reform movements arose during this time period and increased the demand for school psychologists. These reform movements increased efforts to expand general child services and protections to improve children's lives and futures (Fagan, 1992). Children were no longer only valued for their contribution to the labor force - they became regarded as a critical part of the future of society (Braden et al., 2001; Fagan, 1992; Fagan & Wise, 2007).

One of the reform movements that acted as a driving force behind the need for school psychologists was the enactment of compulsory schooling laws. These laws require that every



individual citizen attain a certain level of education. Compulsory schooling laws were passed between 1890 and 1930 across the United States, drastically changing the public school environment by loosely guaranteeing free public education to all children (Fagan, 1992). Despite the passage of these laws, states often failed to uphold compulsory schooling requirements for children with disabilities, minorities, and children from poor families (Winzer, 2007). Over time, states tightened their adherence to compulsory schooling laws so that the number of children that enrolled in school and the variability within the student population sharply rose. Children from diverse backgrounds and children with physical, intellectual, behavioral, and/or educational needs were gradually given the opportunity to attend public schools (Braden et al., 2001).

The newfound variability within schools and classrooms led to the development of special education classes which served children with various disabilities (Fagan, 1992). These early “special classes” were a far cry from the special education classes that are offered today. “Special classes” were often created to simply segregate students with disabilities from the regular education classroom. This meant grouping together children with diverse emotional, behavioral, intellectual, physical, and/or educational needs (Winzer, 2007). Due to the great variability within these “special classrooms” and the resulting poor services provided, many students with disabilities dropped out of the public school system. Other children with disabilities were forced out of the public school system because they could not conform to a school’s behavioral standards (Jacob, Decker, & Hartshorne, 2011; Winzer, 2007).

During that time, school psychologists were used to determine if children were eligible to attend public schools and if so, which classroom they should be placed in based on their abilities (Braden et al., 2001; Fagan, 1992). Although compulsory schooling laws had been passed,

children could still be denied an education if their needs exceeded what the school was willing to offer. Children were required to meet an established set of standards in order to attend school within a certain district (Jacob et al., 2011). Criteria for attending school often included certain adaptive behaviors and intellectual capabilities, such as being toilet trained, ambulatory, and holding the mental age of at least five years. Once children were admitted into a school, school psychologists worked to identify students who were eligible for special education classes in which they could be provided with supplemental services that attempted to meet their needs (Braden et al., 2001; Fagan, 1992). Despite their availability and qualifications for this task, school psychologists were still in need of a systematic technique for identifying students with academic and behavioral difficulties.

The development of intelligence quotient or IQ tests simultaneously occurred during this period of great social change. As a result of their reliability and popularity at the time, IQ tests quickly became essential to the process of identifying children in need of special education services (Farrell, 2010). It was decided that these intelligence assessment tools should only be used by professionals who were trained within the field of psychology to ensure that they were properly administered and interpreted. Since intelligence assessments could only be used by trained professionals, school psychologists were given an exceptional opportunity to employ their qualified skill sets. Intelligence testing and trained school psychologists soon became crucial components to special education decisions in public school systems (Farrell, 2010; Reschly, 2000). This further established the need for school psychologists within the schools and assisted with the creation of a specialized niche for the field of school psychology. It was important for the longevity of the profession that early school psychologists construct this niche as soon as possible in order to prove their usefulness within schools (Farrell, 2010). The demand

for intelligence testing has grown over time and continues to be dominated within educational settings by school psychologists.

After years of inappropriate and sometimes no educational services, children with disabilities were finally given the right to a free and appropriate education by the federal government in 1975. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Pub. L. No. 94-142) which assured that all states would provide children with disabilities a free and appropriate education, no matter the severity of their impairments (Jacob et al., 2011; Sullivan & Castro-Villarreal, 2013). Later, this law was amended to replace the term “handicap” with “disability” which changed the name of this act to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, better known as IDEA. Several amendments were also added to IDEA in 2004 which maintained the concept of inclusive education for students with disabilities and increased focus on improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Jacob et al., 2011; Sullivan & Castro-Villarreal, 2013).

With the passage of these federal laws, all children now have the opportunity to earn a free and appropriate education, regardless of their needs or disabilities (Jacob et al., 2011). This means that school psychologists are now focused on providing services to children based on their individual needs, rather than the needs of their school system. School psychologists no longer have to evaluate and exclude some children from earning an education based on the admissions standards of their school systems. Instead, it is now school psychologists’ ethical obligations to act as advocates for all children and their diverse needs (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010b).

## **Current School Psychology Practice**

The current role of school psychologists continues to primarily focus on the assessment and evaluation of students with diverse needs (Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2012). In fact, modern day school psychologists devote approximately half of their time (an average of 47%) conducting psychoeducational assessments for special education evaluations (Castillo, Curtis, & Gelley, 2012; Fagan & Wise, 2007; Reschly, 2000). The amount of time school psychologists have spent completing special education evaluations has not significantly changed within the past decade. The remaining portion of their time is typically allotted to developing and delivering individual-level interventions (23.2%), consultation activities (16.2%), and counseling (8.8%) (Castillo et al., 2012). Although school psychologists also report promoting effective academic curriculum/instruction (12%), promoting school-wide social emotional supports (10.8%), and promoting and delivering early intervening activities (13.2%), these services are not necessarily mutually exclusive from the other services that they provide. It seems that school psychological services have preserved their original responsibility of assessing and evaluating children to determine the educational placement that will most appropriately respond to their individual needs.

Although school psychologists' roles and responsibilities have appeared to maintain stability throughout the course of the profession, there have been changes to the techniques that are used to assess students and the ways in which the resulting data is used. The process of assessment now employs both traditional cognitive evaluations and functional behavioral assessments which are used to inform intervention design, implementation, and evaluation (Reschly, 2000). Due in part to IDEA, there has been an increased emphasis on linking assessments to interventions for students, instead of simply using assessments to place students

in the appropriate educational setting (Jacob et al., 2011; Reschly, 2000). School psychologists are ideal personnel to perform functional behavioral assessments and develop interventions based on students' assessment data due to their wide range of skills (Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

Functional behavioral assessment uses the ecological model to gain a better understanding of all of the factors that may be influencing children's behavior. Instead of viewing the problematic target behavior as residing within the individual, functional behavioral assessment re-conceptualizes the target behavior as a consequence of various external factors which influence the individual's actions (Tilly, 2008). This closely follows fundamental components of the ecological model which states that individuals are inseparable members of larger systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Following the ecological model and applying functional behavioral assessments allows school psychologists to understand how children affect and can be affected by their environments. Considering the numerous ways in which students' environments can influence their outcomes, school psychologists must understand how systems work and how to intervene effectively within these larger systems to make an impact on their students (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

In addition to the ecological model, school psychologists have also incorporated the problem-solving model into their practices. The problem-solving model is a systematic, logical process driven by data-based decision making whose end goal is to establish problem solutions (Christ, 2008). Each facet of school psychologists' work can be impacted by the problem-solving model since it is a broad analytical process that involves four simple steps: identifying the problem; understanding the characteristics of the problem and why it is occurring; identifying potential problem solutions; and evaluating these solutions dependent upon the student outcomes (Christ, 2008; Tilly, 2008). Considering the wide applicability of this problem-solving model,

school psychologists are now being trained to not only help students within special education classrooms, but to assist students within regular education classrooms as well (Christ, 2008).

Another educational model that has influenced the roles of school psychologists is response to intervention (RTI). This model emphasizes the need for alternative methods to determine special education eligibility that involve using students' responses to evidence-based interventions as opposed to traditional discrepancy models in which the discrepancy between students' IQ and academic achievement scores are used to identify learning disabilities (Sullivan & Castro-Villarreal, 2013). RTI ensures that students receive high-quality instruction and evidence-based interventions for their difficulties prior to entering the special education classroom. If RTI is executed correctly within a school system, school psychologists should be able to assist with the development and implementation of interventions for students at all levels within the RTI process. However, since most school systems have only recently begun to implement RTI, it is not likely that RTI procedures have caused dramatic change within the roles of school psychologists (Merrell et al., 2012).

There are three tiers of instruction within RTI that are designed to meet students' levels of need. It is recommended that approximately 80% of students should have their educational needs met in Tier 1 which involves evidence-based universal instruction in the general education classroom. In Tier 2, students who are not performing well within Tier 1 (approximately 15% of the student population) are provided with supplemental instruction in small groups. Tier 3 involves individualized instruction for students who do not respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 instructional practices. Only about 5% of the student population should require Tier 3 instruction, and based on their progress over time, students within Tier 3 may be recommended for special education services (Sullivan & Castro-Villarreal, 2013).

The introduction of the problem-solving model, the ecological model, and RTI to the practice of school psychology has encouraged the expansion of school psychologists' roles. With the application of these models, they can now reach all students within the school population and they are no longer limited to only serving students who have or are suspected to have a disability. This is a major expansion upon the traditional role that school psychologists' once held that only included administering intelligence assessments to individual students. School psychologists can use these models to reach more students in less time by addressing school-wide problems that affect many students within their schools rather than only those that affect small groups of students (Christ, 2008). Despite the usefulness of these models, many school psychologists are still unable to meet the ideal expectations that are held for their service delivery.

### **Implications of this New Role**

Over the course of its history, school psychology has evolved to encompass much more than its founders originally envisioned. School psychologists are currently viewed as problem-analysts who are able to provide services to children at all levels within the school population (Reschly, 2008). This includes the provision of services to students at the individual level (assessing and implementing intensive interventions for a single student), group level (targeted services delivered to small groups of students), or systems level (universal services that influence all students within the school population).

In addition to reaching students at all levels within the school population, school psychologists have also been given the responsibility to address student difficulties within a preventive approach (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Previously, school psychologists focused on assessments and developing interventions for existing difficulties within individual students.

However, it is now recommended that student difficulties be addressed before they become severe enough to warrant a teacher referral (Braden et al., 2001; Tilly, 2008). This can most easily be accomplished through the use of school-wide screenings, or systems-level assessments that are designed to identify students who are at-risk or are already experiencing difficulties (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006; Tilly, 2008). Not only does this prevent future difficulties for students, this process also reduces the number of assessment referrals that school psychologists receive because students' difficulties are addressed before they significantly affect their functioning.

Preventive services have also been endorsed by federal legislative and policy changes such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). NCLB and IDEA mandate increased accountability for educators through the use of evidence-based practices that should result in measurable positive outcomes for students (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008). These acts gave rise to many of the important functions that are essential and required within the practice of school psychology today. The main components of NCLB and IDEA focus on the idea of preventing student achievement difficulties. This includes increased accountability standards, the use of evidence-based practices, and application of the problem-solving model which has been identified as one of the best techniques for producing improved student outcomes (Batsche, Castillo, Dixon, & Forde, 2008; Curtis et al., 2008). Through the systems-level implementation of these techniques, educators hope to prevent negative student outcomes and achievement difficulties for all students within their schools.

Although providing leadership during the implementation of systems-level services may require additional time and effort for school psychologists within the first few years of



implementation, these services will reduce long-term caseloads and diminish the severity of students' future difficulties (Elliott, Huai, & Roach, 2007). Early and effective identification of students' academic or behavioral difficulties through school-wide screenings, for example, will allow educators to intervene before the students' difficulties cause sufficient distress to warrant a referral to the school psychologist. Systems-level services are therefore, in theory, a desirable method for school psychologists to proactively assist students, prevent future difficulties, and reduce the number of teacher referrals that they receive. By acting as leaders during the implementation of these services, school psychologists can help to ensure that students are receiving the services that they need in an appropriate and timely manner.

School psychology practitioners have been encouraged for many years to become more involved at the school-wide level (Braden et al., 2001; Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Researchers and leaders within the field of school psychology advocate for this change because of the benefits that would be presented to practitioners and members of their schools alike (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Braden et al., 2001; Shapiro, 2006; Splett, Fowler, Weist, McDaniel, & Dvorsky, 2013). Guidelines and standards for best practices within the field of school psychology even urge practitioners to act as leaders in systems-level, preventive services. For instance, *School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice III* (2006) contends that school psychologists must participate in systems-level services since they hold the knowledge to assist in the organization of schools and classrooms to promote learning and prevent future difficulties (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). In fact, the *Blueprint* also suggests that, "there has never been a greater need for school psychologists to take leadership in ensuring quality mental health services for children" (p. 9).

## **Barriers to Role Expansion**

Ideally, school psychologists could serve as leaders in their schools without sacrificing the time and effort that must be put into individual-level services. However, there appears to be little overlap between this idealized view of school psychologists and the typical practices of school psychologists. The average practicing school psychologist spends approximately half of his or her time involved in traditional assessment and intervention procedures (Castillo et al., 2012; Fagan & Wise, 2007; Reschly, 2000). This does not leave much opportunity for practitioners to engage in systemic change in addition to the other services that they are expected to provide.

The ideal school psychologist is envisioned to hold various roles which may include: completing assessments and interventions for individuals and groups of students; enhancing the development of cognitive and academic skills for all students; providing mental health services to students; engaging in consultation and collaboration with parents, teachers and other educators; creating connections between the community and their school; participating in professional development opportunities; researching new interventions and assessment practices; evaluating intervention integrity and effectiveness; and participating in systems-level services such as universal screenings, establishing a supportive and safe learning environment, and participating in the development of policies in school-wide practices (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010a; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). The two main barriers to school psychologists being able to provide this level of comprehensive services are time constraints and perceptions of other school personnel.

## **Time Constraints**

Unfortunately, one of the easiest roles for school psychologists to eliminate from their list of responsibilities is participation in systems-level, preventive services. This may be due to multiple factors, but one of the main contributors is the amount of time school psychologists have to engage in these activities (Splett et al., 2013). Assessment procedures occupy the majority of time school psychologists are afforded. This reduces the amount of time practitioners can give to other activities and reinforces the idea of school psychologists acting reactively instead of proactively.

One of the main contributors to practitioners' time constraints are the heavy case loads that they must face as a result of the adverse school psychologist-to-student ratio in their districts. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends that the number of students should not exceed 1,000 to 1 school psychologist (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010a). Additionally, it is recommended that when a school psychologist engages in comprehensive and preventive services (e.g., consultation, counseling, behavioral interventions) the ratio should not exceed 500 to 700 students for each school psychologist. Unfortunately, school psychologists are typically unable to meet these recommendations set forth by NASP.

A recent study that was completed by the NASP research committee found that the average ratio of students to practicing school psychologists across the United States is 1,383:1 (Castillo, Curtis, Chappel, & Cunningham, 2011). This far exceeds the suggested ratio of students to school psychologists for practitioners that wish to engage in comprehensive and preventive services. As a result of their working conditions, most practitioners are pressed for time which does not allow them to expand their current roles to include leadership within

systems-level and preventive services. Instead, they are confined to focusing their services on children who are already experiencing difficulties, rather than attempting to engage in preventive services which would provide superior long-term benefits (Braden et al., 2001).

### **Traditional Views Held by Other Educators**

Another factor that may act as a barrier to service expansion is the traditional view held by many educators that school psychologists only perform individual assessment and intervention procedures (Farrell, 2010). This view has undoubtedly been influenced by the roles that school psychologists have historically occupied. Since the profession needed to establish a clear niche at its origins, assessment and intervention became the main role of school psychologists. As a result, many educators have come to perceive school psychologists strictly as assessment providers.

The traditional view of the field of school psychology drastically under-represents the skill sets of today's practitioners. They are now able to perform a wide variety of roles and functions, but are under-utilized because many administrators, teachers, and other educators do not realize the full extent of school psychologists' capabilities (Farrell, 2010). School psychologists are rarely called upon to serve as leaders in their schools because many educators are unaware of the contribution today's practitioners could make. Many school psychology practitioners do not even recognize how they could contribute to systemic change since the concept is fairly new to the field of school psychology (Ervin & Schaughency, 2008).

The traditional view of the role of school psychologists is further supported by the limited contact that school psychologists often have with other school personnel. Teachers have been surveyed about their perceptions of school psychologists, and the results indicate that they believe that a school psychologists' main role is to assess children who may need special

education (Farrell, Jimerson, Kalambouka, & Benoit, 2005; Gilman & Medway, 2007).

Unfortunately, this assumption is correct in that school psychologists do tend to spend the majority of their time performing assessments related to special education decisions (Merrell et al., 2012). Despite their accurate knowledge of school psychologists' main role, teachers report that they are only "somewhat knowledgeable" of school psychological services (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). On the other hand, administrators and special education teachers report that they are "pretty knowledgeable" of school psychological services which can be considered significantly more knowledgeable than the reports of regular education teachers (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Gilman & Medway, 2007).

Additionally, administrators' reports of satisfaction with school psychological services are significantly higher than the reports of regular education teachers. In fact, teachers report that they view school psychological services as significantly less helpful to children than both administrators and special education teachers have reported (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Gilman & Medway, 2007). In an attempt to explain these findings, researchers have suggested that regular education teachers' dissatisfaction with school psychological services may be a result of their infrequent contact with practitioners (Gilman & Medway, 2007). Many regular education teachers only interact with their school psychologist during student referrals for special education. These limited interactions may provide regular education teachers with only limited knowledge of the various roles that school psychologists can fulfill.

Special education teachers report spending more time with school psychologists than regular education teachers have reported (Gilman & Medway, 2007). It is possible that this explains the discrepancy between regular education teachers' and special education teachers' reports of their use of school psychologists' recommendations. Regular education teachers place

less importance on their school psychologists' recommendations, and state that they only "occasionally" use the recommendations laid out in school psychologists' reports. In contrast, perhaps as a result of their increased contact with school psychologists, special education teachers report that the school psychologists' recommendations are important to their own educational practices.

Teachers and administrators agree that they are generally satisfied with the number of assessments that school psychologists are conducting. Although other educators are satisfied with the number of assessments that school psychologists perform, surveyed school psychologists have repeatedly indicated that they would prefer to perform fewer assessments in order to make room for other services (Splett et al., 2013). In spite of practitioners' desires, school psychologists continue to mainly engage in assessment activities related to special education evaluations (Merrell et al., 2012).

It is important that school psychologists educate other school members about the variety of services that they can perform in order to expand their roles. Administrators may be currently satisfied with school psychological services because they are fulfilling their traditional function of evaluating children for special education, but they must be informed of the other roles that school psychologists can perform so that practitioners are given the support that they need during their transition from individual-level to systems-level service provision. Additionally, practitioners must find a way to improve relations with regular education teachers since teachers are often the ones called upon to provide interventions to students in the classroom. It is essential that school psychologists are supported by all members of the school system in order to ensure that they can provide the comprehensive and preventive services that students need.

## **Methods for Service Expansion**

The noticeable discrepancy between the role of ideal school psychologists and the role of practicing school psychologists does not appear to be improving (Shapiro, 2006; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Splett et al., 2013). School psychologists still spend the majority of their time involved in activities related to special education evaluation and assessment. Although many believed that school psychologists' roles would steadily progress towards the ideal with the implementation of RTI, there have not been any clear, significant effects as a result of RTI's widespread implementation (Merrell et al., 2012). Perhaps there will be a noticeable change in school psychologists' roles as RTI becomes more widely adopted over time, but there is currently no evidence to suggest that RTI has dramatically affected the roles and functions of practicing school psychologists.

Many studies have attempted to explain this discrepancy by asserting that school psychologists do not have the time to engage in leadership activities because of their cumbersome case loads. Unfortunately, school systems are not currently hiring additional school psychologists for their districts to disseminate these large case loads (Farrell, 2010; Splett et al., 2013). It appears that school psychologists will have to work within their current means to engage in the systems-level, preventive-focused leadership services that they are being called on to provide. Practitioners must strive to provide these services because until they are able to fulfill their ideal roles, many students may not receive the appropriate and timely services that will help them succeed.

In order to effectively provide these services, school psychologists need to become leaders in systemic change within their schools (Braden et al., 2001; Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). School psychologists are ideal candidates for

systems-level leadership positions because of their frequent contact with all stakeholders (e.g., teachers, parents, students, administrators). Exposure to all of these groups allows school psychologists to become visible service-providers within their schools and communities. Additionally, school psychologists hold knowledge and skills that permeate each step within the systemic change process. They hold valuable knowledge of evidence-based interventions, developmentally appropriate services and programs, and a unique understanding of the principles of student-centered learning (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). School psychologists also excel within the problem-solving process, consultation and collaboration procedures, evaluation and progress monitoring measures, and use systematic decision-making techniques at all levels of service provision (Curtis et al., 2008; National Association of School Psychologists, 2010a).

School psychologists are also urged to act as leaders in prevention and intervention programs that promote wellness, social and mental health, and life skills for all children (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Since they are experts in child development and understand the various factors that affect student learning, school psychologists are viewed as potential candidates for introducing and coordinating these programs within their schools (Branden-Muller & Elias, 1991; Strein & Koehler, 2008). In order to successfully do this, they will need to employ effective leadership skills that will inspire other school members to work together to improve students' outcomes. Strong leadership and a collaborative environment are necessary to conduct these systems-level services and accomplish school-wide goals. This is especially true within schools that have no established structure for implementing preventive and systems-level services (Strein & Koehler, 2008).

Additionally, school psychologists are regarded as ideal leaders for systems-level services since they are experts in data collection and interpretation. They are capable of



researching and selecting evidence-based interventions that could be realistically implemented within their schools (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). They also must frequently analyze data to evaluate students' and their schools' progress towards academic and behavioral goals. Not only are school psychologists expected to hold this expertise, they are also obligated to actively share their knowledge with teachers, parents, and administrators in order to promote school-wide improvement (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010b).

As a result of their frequent interactions with all stakeholders, school psychologists are in a great position to initiate home and community partnerships in order to strengthen communication channels between parents, teachers, and the community (Esler, Godber, & Chistenson, 2008; Lay, 2010). Additionally, school psychologists can participate in teams and committees that develop goals for students or promote the school's academic mission. Other methods through which school psychologists may assume a leadership position in their schools is through training and skill development for teachers, parents, and administrators (Ho, 2002). These professional development opportunities are essential for stakeholders who directly interact with students. Since school psychologists are often unable to directly interact with each student, training and skill development ensures that the stakeholders correctly deliver interventions and other services to their students (Ross, Powell, & Elias, 2002). Effective communication and collaboration with other educators, students, parents, and community members is crucial to developing partnerships and resources that can benefit student learning (Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

In addition to the active methods through which school psychologists can demonstrate leadership, there are also ways in which they can lead by providing an example to others. School psychologists are compelled to act as advocates for students, families, communities, and the educational system to ensure that the welfare and rights of all children are protected (National

Association of School Psychologists, 2010b; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). By advancing the awareness of the needs of all children, school psychologists may inspire others to assist with the reduction of barriers to learning.

### **Leadership Research**

As school psychologists are being encouraged to take greater leadership roles in school systems, it is important that there is a clear understanding of what constitutes an effective leader. Considering the vast amount of research on the subject, there are many different definitions of leadership available. One definition of leadership is the ability, “to create the conditions for people to thrive, individually and collectively, and achieve significant goals” (Pendleton & Furnham, 2011, p. 2). This definition is extremely relevant to the educational system because of its emphasis on the achievement of goals and fostering conditions that are necessary for individual stakeholders and the entire system to thrive. This characterization of leadership supports the idea that a leader may function at both the individual and systems-level to impact others. School psychologists must provide services in both of these realms within their school settings. They are available to all stakeholders within the school system and understand each group’s individual needs. School psychologists are therefore extremely qualified to assume leadership positions within their schools (Ho, 2002; Ross et al., 2002; Shriberg, Satchwell, McArdle, & James, 2010).

### **General Leadership Research**

Much of contemporary leadership research outside of the field of school psychology has focused on an approach that greatly contrasts to older views of leadership. Older models of leadership were based on compliance – workers received plans from the leader and carried them out with no questions. Newer models of leadership are instead based on empowering others,

involvement by all members (including the leader), and building conditions in which people enjoy their work and work harder as a consequence (Pendleton & Furnham, 2011). These new models emphasize teamwork, commitment, and inspiration to work together towards group goals.

Two of the most researched and supported modern leadership theories include transactional leadership and transformational leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The main difference between these two theories is their approach to what leaders and followers offer to one another. Transactional leadership involves the appropriate exchange of resources between the leader and their followers so that both parties are satisfied and agree to work together (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes the common needs between the leader and their followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Within this form of leadership, the leader and followers encourage each other to gain higher levels of motivation and morality in order to accomplish common goals (Burns, 1979). Although these two theories originally stood in contrast to one another, now many believe that they are two separate concepts that must be used simultaneously to produce the greatest effect (Howell & Avolio, 1993; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Several characteristics and behaviors of transactional and transformational leaders have been identified through research. Transformational leaders tend to be charismatic, have the ability to communicate a vision that others desire to follow, take risks, ask for followers' ideas, listen and react to followers' needs, and act as a mentor to their followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transactional leaders attend to the more business aspects of leadership than transformational leaders do. Transactional leaders establish clear expectations and set up rewards processes for followers who meet those expectations. Additionally, transactional leaders

may manage their followers through an active or passive context. Active leaders identify and prevent problems before they occur while passive leaders do not take action until after the issues arise (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). It is important to remember that effective leaders do not need to fully embody all of these characteristics in order to succeed (Pendleton & Furnham, 2011). However, these characteristics and behaviors of leaders (in addition to others within general leadership research) have been recognized for their contribution to leader effectiveness.

General leadership research has revealed many traits and behaviors of effective leaders within all social and work domains. Overall, effective leaders tend to demonstrate high levels of emotional balance, adjustment, confidence, dominance, sociability, creativity, responsibility, achievement striving, and ethical conduct. Additionally, successful leaders tend to display moderate to high levels of conscientiousness, openness, and extraversion – all of which facilitate social confidence and strong interpersonal skills. However, characteristics such as arrogance, hostility, passive aggressiveness, compulsiveness, and abrasiveness have been identified as destructive qualities that undermine leadership potential (Pendleton & Furnham, 2011).

### **Leadership Research within the Field of School Psychology**

Despite school psychologists' impressive credentials, they often do not, or sometimes cannot, act as leaders within their schools. This may partly be due to the lack of formal power that school psychologists hold within the schools. Practitioners' roles and responsibilities are not always agreed upon across schools, which may make it more difficult for other faculty and staff members to view them as leaders (Shriberg et al., 2010). In combination with school psychologists' already hectic work schedules, this may help prevent practitioners from assuming leadership positions within their schools.

Even if they were able to undertake a leadership position, school psychologists would have to wade through the generations of leadership research and theory to determine how they should function as leaders. There are no leadership models that exist specific to the field of school psychology, so they would have to examine research within other fields to determine the model that would best serve their situation (Shriberg et al., 2010). Unfortunately, leadership theory is controversial and there is a vast collection of theories describing how leaders arise, their characteristics, their actions, and any other imaginable features that they may possess (Pendleton & Furnham, 2011). This extensive research should be used to construct a leadership model that is specific to the field of school psychology – a model that will bear in mind the various roles and functions that school psychologists fulfill.

The lack of leadership research within school psychology was first recognized by Shriberg who carried out the first-known study to explore effective leadership within the field. Shriberg (2008; 2010) has surveyed school psychology leaders and practitioners in an attempt to define the construct of effective leadership within school psychology. Shriberg (2010) used a qualitative survey to ask elected leaders within the field about their views of effective leadership. When he asked for their personal definition of leadership, 52.7% of respondents mentioned “facilitating change/promoting positive outcomes” within their definition. Shriberg also asked these respondents to describe qualities and characteristics of school psychologists who exhibit leadership. The most common qualities that were described include: competence, team skills, overall knowledge and expertise, personal character, interpersonal skills, confidence in performing job-related tasks, internal motivation, organizational skills, verbal/written communication skills, and creativity. Within this survey, Shriberg also asked respondents to list situations in which leadership is expected from school psychologists. The most common

situations included classroom/academic interventions, behavioral interventions, crisis intervention, knowledge of special education law and processes, assessment/evaluation, and mental health issues.

Shriberg (2008) also completed a study in which he surveyed school psychology practitioners about competencies held by effective school psychology leaders. The top five characteristics that were identified as being important to effective school psychology leaders include: treating others with respect, being widely regarded as ethical, being widely regarded as competent, holding strong working relationships with teachers, and working well in teams. Other characteristics that were found to be important included being a creative thinker and problem-solver, working successfully with a wide range of personalities, having strong verbal communication skills, working towards positive outcomes for students and families, being knowledgeable of special education laws, and advocating for children and families.

Shriberg's (2008; 2010) leadership research within the field of school psychology has provided the foundation for other researchers to perform their own studies within this area of interest. His results have highlighted several important themes within school psychology leadership. First, school psychologists understand the importance of leadership within their field. Although not all practitioners may engage in leadership activities, they do tend to believe that leadership is an effective way to produce better outcomes for students and school systems. Additionally, school psychologists describe successful and positive results as guiding schools, systems, and individuals to a better place (Shriberg et al., 2010). This emphasizes the importance of systems-level services in addition to individual-level services within schools. This demonstrates that school psychologists are aligned with the *Blueprint III's* (2006) desired outcomes of building the capacity of systems and improving competencies for all students.

Shriberg's results also indicate that school psychologists believe others expect them to lead within certain situations in their schools (Shriberg et al., 2010). In order to advance leadership within the field of school psychology, it is essential that stakeholders need and expect school psychologists to act as leaders within certain contexts. Effective leaders must be able to willingly guide their followers in order to accomplish group goals. Without stakeholders' support, school psychologists could not serve as effective leaders within their schools.

## CHAPTER TWO: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School psychologists have been criticized for decades for their seemingly motionless position in the midst of great change within their schools (Shapiro, 2006; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Splett et al., 2013). Practitioners are urged to shift their focus from individual-level services to providing leadership at the systems-level within their schools (Braden et al., 2001; Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Individual-level services are now described as traditional, reactive, and ineffective for ensuring a free and appropriate education for all students. School psychologists are instead encouraged to provide leadership within systems-level services in their schools so that they may affect greater numbers of students at once and engage in services that will prevent students' future difficulties (Braden et al., 2001; Ikeda et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, many school psychologists are unable to achieve these ideal expectations because of their professional time constraints and the traditional views of school psychologists that are held by other educators (Farrell, 2010; Splett et al., 2013). Teachers, administrators, and even many school psychologists underestimate the capabilities of today's school psychology practitioners. Since it does not appear that the time constraints of school psychologists will be lessened any time soon, practitioners will have to work within their current means to provide systems-level services in addition to the individual-level services they are expected to maintain. For this to happen, school psychologists must employ effective leadership skills that will inspire other school members to work together to improve students' outcomes (Braden et al., 2001; Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2006).



Although there is substantial leadership research available, very little of this research focuses on leadership within the field of school psychology. Shriberg (2008; 2010) is the main contributor to this area of research. He has attempted to identify leadership within school psychology by surveying leaders within the field about their own active roles and abilities. Through the data he collected from these surveys, Shriberg (2010) identified how leadership is defined within school psychology, the top characteristics and skills of effective school psychology leaders, and the areas in which leadership is most often expected from school psychologists.

Although this provided some important information about leadership within the field of school psychology, further research must be completed to verify Shriberg's findings. The present study is considered a conceptual replication of Shriberg's (2008; 2010) past research on perceptions of leadership within the field of school psychology. However, it is important to note that Shriberg's sample included school psychologists from all over the United States, while this study's participants included only school-based school psychologists who are currently practicing in North Carolina and South Carolina.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

### **Participants**

For this study, a web-based survey was distributed to all members of the North Carolina School Psychology Association (NCSPA) and the South Carolina Association of School Psychologists (SCASP) in spring of 2014. Only school psychologists who selected that they were currently practicing in a school-based environment were allowed to participate in this study. Participants who indicated that they worked at a “private practice” or “college/university” were excluded from the analysis because they did not meet the survey requirements. The study consisted of 110 participants, but data from 14 of those participants were excluded from the analysis as a result of incomplete data or unfulfilled survey requirements. This resulted in a total of 96 participants whose data could be included in the analysis, 81 of which were female (84.4%) and 15 of which were male (15.6%).

Of the 96 participants whose data was included in the analysis, 19.8% responded that they were less than 30 years old, 38.5% responded that they were 30-39 years old, 14.6% responded that they were 40-49 years old, 13.5% responded that they were 50-59 years old, 12.5% responded that they were 60-69 years old, and 1% responded that they were older than 69 years of age. The vast majority of participants indicated that they were White (95.8%). Only 2.1% of participants indicated that they were Black or African-American, 1% indicated that they were Asian, and 1% selected “Other” and responded that they were European-American.

Participants were gathered from North Carolina and South Carolina school-based environments – 49% stating that they were from North Carolina and 51% from South Carolina. When asked to indicate their highest completed degree, 88.5% of participants selected Master’s

degree or Specialist degree, and 11.5% selected Doctoral degree. Participants were also asked to provide their primary work setting. Twenty-six percent of participants indicated that they primarily work in a rural setting, 52.1% indicated that they primarily work in a suburban setting, and 17.7% indicated that they primarily work in an urban setting. Additionally, 4.2% of participants responded with “Other” when asked for their primary work environment and explained that they worked in a combined environment (e.g., both rural and suburban, both suburban and urban, all three types combined). Participants were also asked to report their years of experience: 31.3% selected less than 5 years, 25% selected 5-10 years, 13.5% selected 11-15 years, 4.2% selected 16-20 years, 11.5% selected 21-25 years, and 14.6% selected more than 25 years of experience. The final piece of demographic information that was collected from participants was the school psychologist-to-student ratio in their districts. Only 13.5% of participants responded that their school psychologist-to-student ratio was less than 1,000 students per school psychologist. The majority of participants (58.3%) indicated that their school psychologist-to-student ratio was 1,001-2,000 students per school psychologist. Other participants indicated that their ratio was 2,001-3,000 students per school psychologist (19.8%) or greater than 3,000 students per school psychologist (3.1%), while 5.2% of participants selected “I don’t know”. This demographic information can also be found in Appendix A.

### **Materials**

The online survey provider Qualtrics was used to create a survey for this research. The *Perceptions of Leadership in School Psychology Survey* (see Appendix B) is a survey that was designed to gauge school psychologists’ perceptions of leadership within the field of school psychology. The survey questions were developed to closely resemble those found in Shriberg’s (2008; 2010) *School Psychology Leadership Survey* which is considered to be one of the first and

only surveys targeting this area of research. However, several items were altered because the full text version of Shriberg's survey could not be located.

The survey first provided participants with an overview of the survey questions, information about informed consent (see Appendix C), and who to contact if they had any questions about the research or survey results. The survey was completed only by school-based practicing school psychologists in North Carolina and South Carolina. All others (e.g., private-practice, university faculty) who attempted to participate in the study were disqualified from participating and were provided with a message that informed them as to why they could not participate (see Appendix D).

Participants were asked five five-point Likert-style (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree) multiple choice questions that gathered information about their views of the importance of leadership to the field of school psychology, their knowledge of a leadership model that is specific to the field, the degree to which they feel that they have the opportunity to act as leaders within their schools, the degree to which they feel that other school members understand school psychologists' leadership abilities, and their perception of their own leadership effectiveness within their current work setting (1=Very Effective, 2=Moderately Effective, 3=Only Marginally Effective, 4=Moderately Ineffective, 5=Very Ineffective).

Participants then answered three similarly formatted questions in which they were provided with a list of phrases and a box in which they dragged and dropped their top five answers from the list of phrases provided. In the first question, they had to drag and drop the five phrases that they felt best defined leadership within the field of school psychology. The next question asked them to select the top five most important characteristics and skills of school

psychologists who act as effective leaders. The final question in this format asked participants to select the top five areas and situations where leadership is expected from school psychologists.

The survey then asked the participants to provide some basic demographic information in the format of multiple-choice questions which included their gender, age, and race/ethnicity. Participants were also asked to provide the state in which they currently worked, the highest completed degree that they held, their primary work setting (rural, suburban, urban, or other), how many years of experience they have working as a school psychologist, and the school psychologist-to-student ratio in their area. The survey involved a total of 17 questions and it was estimated that participants needed about 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

### **Procedure**

The presidents of the North Carolina School Psychology Association (NCSPA) and the South Carolina Association of School Psychologists (SCASP) were contacted via email to request their permission to send the survey out to NCSPA and SCASP members. Once they agreed, an email message (see Appendix E) was created that was sent out to members of both organizations, providing them with information about the research, informed consent, who to contact if they had any questions, and a link to the web-based survey.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The participants were grouped into the following categories: gender (female, male); age (younger than 30, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, older than 69); state (North Carolina, South Carolina); highest completed degree (Master's/Specialist, Doctoral); primary work setting (rural, suburban, urban, other); years of experience (less than 5, 5-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, greater than 25); and school psychologist-to-student ratio (less than 1,000, 1,001-2,000, 2,001-3,000, greater than 3,000, I don't know). Results were calculated by obtaining frequencies and percentages for each of the survey questions, and by performing chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to analyze any differences that existed in responses to the five Likert-style multiple choice questions (i.e., importance of school psychologists acting as school leaders, knowledge of a leadership model that is specific to the field, opportunity to act as a leader, other school members' understanding of the ability of school psychologists to function as effective leaders, rating of participants' own leadership effectiveness) between individuals within the different groups.

Across the comparisons, two significant differences were found. These significant differences were found between participants within the "highest completed degree" group. Within the "highest completed degree" group, significant differences between participants' responses were found for the items, "Other school members understand the ability of school psychologists to function as effective school leaders"; and "How would you rate your leadership effectiveness within your current work setting?" More detailed analyses were conducted for these two areas. For all other Likert-style questions, since no other significant differences were found, data has been collapsed across demographic characteristics.

There were no chi-square goodness-of-fit tests completed to determine the relationship between race and the five Likert-style questions because of the small number of participants that identified as Asian, African-American, and European-American. Since these groups were only comprised of one or two participants, it is unfair for this study to attempt to make comparisons based on race.

### **Significant Findings**

Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were performed across all Likert-style questions to determine if there were any significant differences between groups' responses to the items. Only two significant differences were found across the chi-square goodness-of-fit tests.

#### **Others' Perceptions of School Psychology Leadership**

In response to the statement, "Other school members understand the ability of school psychologists to function as effective school leaders" 1% of participants selected "Strongly Agree", 50% selected "Agree", 13.5% selected "Neither Agree nor Disagree", 30.2% selected "Disagree", and 5.2% of participants selected "Strongly Disagree". These frequencies take into account all participants, regardless of their groupings.

A significant difference [ $\chi^2(4, N = 96) = 11.06, p = .03$ ] was found in participants' responses to this statement based on the highest completed degree that they hold. Phi ( $\phi$ ) was used to calculate the effect size of this finding, and can be interpreted using the following guidelines:  $\phi \approx .01$  is small;  $\phi \approx .09$  is moderate;  $\phi \approx .25$  is large (Pearson, 1900). The effect size for this particular finding was very large ( $\phi = 0.34$ ). Participants with a Master's or Specialist degree were less likely to strongly agree with this statement than participants with a Doctoral degree. However, participants with a Doctoral degree did not reach a consensus within their responses.

For the statement, “Other school members understand the ability of school psychologists to function as effective school leaders “, participants with a Master’s or Specialist degree responded in the following manner: no participants selected “Strongly Agree”, 43 participants (50.6%) selected “Agree”, 13 participants (15.3%) selected “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, 24 participants (28.2%) selected “Disagree”, and five participants (5.9%) with a Master’s or Specialist degree selected “Strongly Disagree”. In contrast, participants with a Doctoral degree provided the following responses: one participant (9.1%) selected “Strongly Agree”, five participants (45.5%) selected “Agree”, no participants selected “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, five participants (45.5%) selected “Disagree”, and no participants with a Doctoral degree selected “Strongly Disagree”.

### **Ratings of Own Leadership Effectiveness**

When asked, “How would you rate your leadership effectiveness within your current work setting?” 9.4% of participants responded with “Very Effective”, 58.3% responded with “Moderately Effective”, 28.1% responded with “Only Marginally Effective”, 2.1% responded with “Moderately Ineffective”, and 2.1% responded with “Very Ineffective”. These frequencies take into account all participants, regardless of their groupings.

A significant difference [ $\chi^2 (4, N = 96) = 11.20, p = .02$ ] was found in participants’ responses to this statement based on their highest completed degree. The effect size for this finding was very large ( $\phi = 0.34$ ). Participants that hold a Doctoral degree were more likely to respond that their leadership is “Very Effective” within their current work setting than participants with a Master’s or Specialist degree. Additionally, participants with a Doctoral degree were much less likely to rate their leadership ability as ineffective, as compared to participants with a Master’s or Specialist degree.



When asked to rate their own leadership effectiveness, participants with a Master's or Specialist degree responded in the following manner: five participants (5.9%) selected "Very Effective", 52 participants (61.2%) selected "Moderately Effective", 24 participants (28.2%) selected "Only Marginally Effective", two participants (2.4%) selected "Moderately Ineffective", and two participants (2.4%) selected "Very Ineffective". Participants with a Doctoral degree provided the following responses: four participants (36.4%) selected "Very Effective", four participants (36.4%) selected "Moderately Effective", three participants (27.3%) selected "Only Marginally Effective", and no participants with a Doctoral degree selected "Moderately Ineffective" or "Very Ineffective".

### **Non-Significant Findings**

#### **Importance of Acting as Leaders**

In response to the statement, "It is important for school psychologists to act as school leaders", 53.1% of participants selected "Strongly Agree", 38.5% of participants selected "Agree", 8.3% of participants selected "Neither Agree nor Disagree", and no participants selected "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree". No significant differences were found in participants' responses to this statement within any groups. The majority of all participants clearly supported the importance of school psychologists acting as leaders.

#### **Model Specific to the Field**

In response to the next statement, "There is a leadership model specific to the field of school psychology that provides clear expectations for how practitioners should lead in the field", 3.1% of participants selected "Strongly Agree", 31.3% selected "Agree", 34.4% selected "Neither Agree nor Disagree", 29.2% selected "Disagree", and 2.1% selected "Strongly Disagree". No significant differences were found in participants' responses to this statement

within any groups. The responses to this item were extremely variable indicating that there is not agreement among school psychologists and many appear to not know if a specific model exists within their field.

### **Opportunity to Act as a Leader**

When presented with the statement, “I have the opportunity to act as a leader within my school(s)”, 26% of participants responded with “Strongly Agree”, 53.1% responded with “Agree”, 10.4% responded with “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, 7.3% responded with “Disagree”, and 3.1% responded with “Strongly Disagree”. No significant differences were found in participants’ responses to this statement within any groups. The majority of all participants clearly indicated that they have at least some opportunity to act as a leader.

### **Phrases that Best Define Leadership within School Psychology**

Two frequencies were calculated for the question in which participants were asked to select the top five phrases that best define leadership as applied to the field of school psychology: the frequency with which each phrase was selected as being in the top five and the frequency with which each phrase was selected as the number one definition. These frequencies were calculated using all participants’ responses, with no regard to their groupings. A full listing of these items and their corresponding frequencies are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Item Selection for the Question: “Which of the Following Phrases Best Define Leadership as Applied to the Field of School Psychology?”*

Definitions	Frequency in Top 5 n=96 (percent)	Frequency as #1 n=96 (percent)
Advocate for children’s needs	<b>73 (76%)</b>	<b>46 (47.9%)</b>
Effective problem-solving skills	<b>77 (80.2%)</b>	<b>20 (20.8%)</b>
Goal-oriented	14 (14.6%)	-
Holds a formal leadership position	5 (5.2%)	2 (2.1%)
Holds a vision for their school	6 (6.3%)	1 (1%)
Influences others	9 (9.4%)	2 (2.1%)
Internally motivated	4 (4.2%)	-
Maintains visibility	16 (16.7%)	-
Open-minded	12 (12.5%)	1 (1%)
Promotes positive outcomes	29 (30.2%)	2 (2.1%)
Respected by others	21 (21.9%)	2 (2.1%)
Strong communication skills	<b>68 (70.8%)</b>	<b>5 (5.2%)</b>
Strong personal character	13 (13.5%)	1 (1%)
Strong school psychology skill set	<b>31 (32.3%)</b>	<b>6 (6.3%)</b>
Widely regarded as competent	26 (27.1%)	2 (2.1%)
Works effectively in teams	<b>72 (75%)</b>	<b>4 (4.2%)</b>
Works with confidence	4 (4.2%)	2 (2.1%)

*Note.* Top five items are bold-printed for both “Frequency in Top 5” and “Frequency as #1”.

As seen in Table 1, the category that participants most frequently selected in their top five responses was “effective problem-solving skills”. Seventy-seven participants (80.2%) selected “effective problem-solving skills” as being in their top five phrases that best define leadership in school psychology. Other items that were frequently selected in participants’ top five phrases include: “advocate for children’s needs” which 73 (76%) participants selected, “works effectively in teams” which 72 (75%) participants selected, “strong communication skills” which 68 (70.8%) participants selected, and “strong school psychology skill set” which 31 (32.3%) participants selected. Items that were most frequently selected as the number one phrase that best defines leadership within the field of school psychology include: “advocate for children’s needs” which was selected by 46 (47.9%) participants, “effective problem solving skills” which 20 (20.8%) participants selected, “strong school psychology skill set” which 6 (6.3%) participants selected, “strong communication skills” which 5 (5.2%) participants selected, and “works effectively in teams” which 4 (4.2%) participants selected.

### **Characteristics and Skills of Effective Leaders**

The frequencies with which items were selected in the top five and as the number one answer were also calculated for the survey question in which participants were asked to select the top five most important characteristics and skills of school psychologists who act as effective leaders. These frequencies were calculated using all participants’ responses, with no regard to their groupings. The items that were most frequently selected in participants’ top five characteristics and skills include: “effective problem-solving skills” which 65 (67.7%) participants selected, “advocate for children’s needs” which 58 (60.4%) participants selected, “effective interpersonal skills” which 47 (49%) participants selected, “strong communication

skills” which 44 (45.8%) participants selected, and “possesses knowledge and expertise” which 41 (42.7%) participants selected.

The items that were most frequently selected as participants’ number one characteristic/skill include: “advocate for children’s needs” which 38 (39.6%) participants selected, “effective interpersonal skills” which 15 (15.6%) participants selected, “effective problem-solving skills” which 15 (15.6%) participants selected, “flexible” which 6 (6.3%) participants selected, “strong communication skills” which 3 (3.1%) participants selected, “strong school psychology skill set” which 3 (3.1%) participants selected, and “works effectively in teams” which 3 (3.1%) participants selected. A full listing of these items and their corresponding frequencies are presented in Table 2 (see below).

**Table 2**  
*Frequency of Item Selection for the Question: “What Would You Consider to be the Top Five Most Important Characteristics and Skills of School Psychologists Who Act as Effective Leaders?”*

Characteristics and Skills	Frequency in Top 5 n=96 (percent)	Frequency as #1 n=96 (percent)
Advocate for children’s needs	<b>58 (60.4%)</b>	<b>38 (39.6%)</b>
Aware of own limitations	15 (15.6%)	1 (1%)
Creative	6 (6.3%)	-
Effective interpersonal skills	<b>47 (49%)</b>	<b>15 (15.6%)</b>
Effective problem-solving skills	<b>65 (67.7%)</b>	<b>15 (15.6%)</b>
Empathetic	8 (8.3%)	-
Flexible	29 (30.2%)	<b>6 (6.3%)</b>

Good listener	17 (17.7%)	2 (2.1%)
Holds a vision for their school	6 (6.3%)	1 (1%)
Internally motivated	7 (7.3%)	2 (2.1%)
Motivates others	13 (13.5%)	1 (1%)
Open-minded	8 (8.3%)	1 (1%)
Organized	17 (17.7%)	-
Possesses knowledge and expertise	<b>41 (42.7%)</b>	2 (2.1%)
Respected by others	17 (17.7%)	-
Strong communication skills	<b>44 (45.8%)</b>	<b>3 (3.1%)</b>
Strong personal character	8 (8.3%)	2 (2.1%)
Strong school psychology skill set	19 (19.8%)	<b>3 (3.1%)</b>
Widely regarded as competent	12 (12.5%)	-
Works effectively in teams	40 (41.7%)	<b>3 (3.1%)</b>
Works with confidence	3 (3.1%)	1 (1%)

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*Note.* Top five items are bold-printed for both “Frequency in Top 5” and “Frequency as #1”.

### **Areas and Situations in which Leadership is Expected**

Frequencies for the top five items and the most frequently selected number one item were also calculated for the question that asked participants to select the top five areas and situations in which leadership is expected from school psychologists. These frequencies were calculated using all participants’ responses, with no regard to their groupings. The items that were most frequently selected in participants’ top five areas and situations include: “special education

eligibility” which 63 (65.6%) participants selected, “assessment” which 58 (60.4%) participants selected, “behavioral interventions” which 53 (55.2%) participants selected, “knowledge of special education laws” which 45 (46.9%) participants selected, and “academic interventions” which 39 (40.6%) participants selected. The items that were most frequently selected as participants’ number one area/situation include: “assessment” which 29 (30.2%) participants selected, “special education eligibility” which 14 (14.6%) participants selected, “academic interventions” which 13 (13.5%) participants selected, “data analysis” which 8 (8.3%) participants selected, “advocacy for children's needs” which 7 (7.3%) participants selected, “behavioral interventions” which 7 (7.3%) participants selected, and “problem-solving” which 7 (7.3%) participants selected. A full listing of these items and their corresponding frequencies are presented in Table 3 (see below).

**Table 3**  
*Frequency of Item Selection for the Question: “What Would You Consider to be the Top Five Areas and Situations Where Leadership is Expected from School Psychologists?”*

Areas and Situations	Frequency in Top 5 n=96 (percent)	Frequency as #1 n=96 (percent)
Academic interventions	<b>39 (40.6%)</b>	<b>13 (13.5%)</b>
Advocacy for children’s needs	22 (22.9%)	<b>7 (7.3%)</b>
Assessment	<b>58 (60.4%)</b>	<b>29 (30.2%)</b>
Behavioral interventions	<b>53 (55.2%)</b>	<b>7 (7.3%)</b>
Conflict resolution	3 (3.1%)	-
Consultation	32 (33.3%)	2 (2.1%)

Crisis intervention	20 (20.8%)	-
Current issues in education	2 (2.1%)	-
Data analysis	36 (37.5%)	<b>8 (8.3%)</b>
Knowledge of special education laws	<b>45 (46.9%)</b>	2 (2.1%)
Knowledge of specific disabilities	29 (30.2%)	4 (4.2%)
Leader of team meetings	16 (16.7%)	2 (2.1%)
Mental health issues	22 (22.9%)	-
Problem-solving	27 (28.1%)	<b>7 (7.3%)</b>
School-wide interventions	11 (11.5%)	1 (1%)
Special education eligibility	<b>63 (65.6%)</b>	<b>14 (14.6%)</b>
Staff development	2 (2.1%)	-

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*Note.* Top five items are bold-printed for both “Frequency in Top 5” and “Frequency as #1”.



## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate school psychologists' perceptions of leadership as it applies to the field of school psychology. The vast majority of participants in this study agreed that it is important for school psychologists to act as leaders within their schools (53.1% "Strongly Agree" and 38.5% "Agree"). These findings are consistent with the literature which also states that it is important for school psychologists to act as leaders, and has urged them to do so for decades (Braden et al., 2001; Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

Although the vast majority of participants agree that it is important for practitioners to act as leaders within their schools, significant differences were found between participants' responses based on their highest completed degree. Participants with a Doctoral degree were more likely to report that their leadership is very effective within their current work setting than participants with a Master's or Specialist degree. This may be because participants with a Doctoral degree act as leaders more often in their schools, and as a result, rate their leadership ability more positively. It is not likely that a practitioner would rate their leadership ability as "very effective" if they are not engaging in leadership on a regular basis. Participants with Master's or Specialist degrees may simply be providing less leadership within their schools than participants with Doctoral degrees, rather than there being a difference in their leadership effectiveness. The current study did not survey participants about the amount of leadership that they engage in within their schools, so this interpretation should be taken with caution. Future studies must distinguish between the amount of leadership that school psychologists provide and the quality of leadership that practitioners provide.

There was also a significant difference in how participants responded based on their highest completed degree to the statement, “Other school members understand the ability of school psychologists to function as effective school leaders”. Participants with a Master’s or Specialist degree were less likely to strongly agree with this statement than participants with a Doctoral degree. However, participants with a Doctoral degree did not reach a consensus within their responses – 45.5% selected “Agree” and 45.5% selected “Disagree”, while only 9.1% selected “Strongly Agree”. Participants’ responses within each group were much more variable for this item than other items within the survey.

The great variability within participants’ responses may indicate a wide range of success within practitioners’ ability to help other school members understand school psychologists’ ability to lead. Due to the variability in responses to this item, it is not clear whether participants in this study indicated that they experience difficulty acting as leaders within their schools as a result of other school members’ views of their roles. Although it was not clear within the present study, the traditional views of other educators have commonly been identified as a barrier to service expansion within the literature (Farrell, 2010; Splett et al., 2013). It is important that school psychologists work closely with other school members to help them understand the various roles that practitioners can fulfill.

Despite the disagreement that was found over perceptions of school psychologists’ ability to lead, the majority of participants agreed that they have the opportunity to lead in their schools (26% “Strongly Agree” and 53.1% “Agree”). This may suggest that other school members do not automatically think of their school psychologist as a leader within their schools, but they are open to the idea of having a school psychologist provide leadership. Practitioners should help other school members understand the expansive skill sets that they hold, and offer their

assistance within situations that call for leadership in their schools. To ensure that other school members will follow their advice, practitioners must slowly build trust and respect with individual stakeholders over time. School psychologists must take the time to establish these relationships and open communication channels between varying school members so that all of their stakeholders' needs can be met in a reasonable manner. Only after practitioners are fully integrated into their school system will they be able to provide the effective leadership that is needed from them.

Participants were also asked to rate their own leadership effectiveness within their schools. Overall, few seemed to be extremely confident in their ability to lead since only 9.4% indicated that they are "Very Effective" leaders. The majority indicated that they are at least somewhat effective in their ability to lead since 58.3% responded with "Moderately Effective" and 28.1% responded with "Only Marginally Effective". These results suggest that school psychologists are fairly confident in their ability to lead, but it does not necessarily state that they are actively serving as leaders within their schools. Additionally, practitioners may be hesitant to indicate that they are very effective leaders if they are rarely engaged in leadership. Further research must be completed to determine the amount of time that school psychologists devote to various leadership activities within their schools. Regrettably, this study did not look into this specific research question despite its importance to this field of study.

An additional factor that acts as a barrier to role expansion is the lack of a specific leadership model for the field of school psychology. Little research has been completed to determine the facets of leadership that apply to this field. When surveyed about their knowledge of a leadership model that is specific to the field of school psychology, practitioners did not form a consensus. Only 3.1% of participants selected "Strongly Agree" in response to the statement

that there is a leadership model with clear expectations specific to the field of school psychology, while 31.3% selected “Agree”, 34.4% selected “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, 29.2% selected “Disagree”, and 2.1% selected “Strongly Disagree”. Unfortunately, no such model currently exists for practitioners to use. This may contribute to some practitioners’ lack of confidence in their ability to lead within their schools, and it certainly acts as a barrier to role expansion.

The top five phrases that practitioners most frequently selected that best define leadership within school psychology include: effective problem-solving skills, advocate for children’s needs, works effectively in teams, strong communication skills, and a strong school psychology skill set. These responses are slightly different from the top five that Shriberg (2010) obtained when he surveyed leaders in the field about their definitions of leadership (see Table 4 below). The top five definitions that he obtained included: facilitates change/promotes positive outcomes, competence, vision/big picture view, works effectively in teams/collaboration, and influences others/persuasive.

**Table 4**  
*Comparison between Participants’ Top Five Responses to the Item: “Which of the Following Phrases Best Define Leadership as Applied to the Field of School Psychology?”*

Present Study	Shriberg’s (2010) Study
Effective problem-solving skills	Facilitates change/promotes positive outcomes
Advocate for children’s needs	Widely regarded as competent
<b>Works effectively in teams</b>	Holds a vision for their school
Strong communication skills	<b>Works effectively in teams</b>
Strong school psychology skill set	Influences others

*Note.* Similar items that were obtained in the top five for both studies are bold-faced.

The differences in these results may be explained by the different samples that were used for the research. Shriberg surveyed leaders within the field of school psychology from all over the United States, while the current study only used school-based practitioners within North Carolina and South Carolina. Perhaps different methods must be applied when serving as a leader within a school environment as opposed to serving as a leader/representative for school psychologists. Additionally, Shriberg's results were obtained in 2010, while the current survey was distributed in 2014. The field of school psychology is constantly adapting over time, so differences in the results may also be due in part to the four year period that separates Shriberg's study from the present study during which time the NASP Practice Model (2010a) was introduced.

Participants were also asked to select the top five characteristics and skills exhibited by school psychologists who are effective leaders. The top five characteristics and skills that were most frequently selected include: effective problem-solving skills, advocate for children's needs, effective interpersonal skills, strong communication skills, and possesses knowledge and expertise (see Table 5 below). Many of the items within this question were similar to items that were listed within the question that asked participants to rank definitions of leadership in school psychology. This can be considered a limitation to this study since it has made it difficult to differentiate between the definition of leadership and characteristics and skills that leaders hold.

Shriberg (2010) also found different top characteristics and skills from those that were obtained in this study. Leaders in the field of school psychology reported the following characteristics and skills as being most important to leadership: competence/intelligence, holding content knowledge, team skills/collaboration, strong school psychology skill set, and communication skills. Again, these variances may be attributed to the different samples that

were used between these two studies. However, a common theme has emerged in that school psychologists from both studies seem to feel as though strong communication skills, content knowledge/expertise, and effective interpersonal skills/team skills are all important skills to hold if one hopes to serve as an effective leader. Participants from this particular study also emphasized that a strong school psychology skill set, effective problem-solving skills, and acting as an advocate for children are all important to being an effective leader within the schools.

**Table 5**  
*Comparison between Participants’ Top Five Responses to the Item: “What Would You Consider to be the Top Five Most Important Characteristics and Skills of School Psychologists Who Act as Effective Leaders?”*

Present Study	Shriberg’s (2010) Study
Effective problem-solving skills	Competent/intelligent
Advocate for children’s needs	<b>Holding content knowledge</b>
Effective interpersonal skills	Team skills/collaboration
<b>Strong communication skills</b>	Strong school psychology skill set
<b>Possesses knowledge and expertise</b>	<b>Communication skills</b>

*Note.* Similar items that were obtained in the top five for both studies are bold-faced.

The skills that were listed above and those that have been found to be effective in general leadership research tend to focus on the leader’s content knowledge and their ability to positively interact with their followers. Each of these facets is extremely important to the effectiveness of a

leader. Leaders must understand the system that they are attempting to influence and all of the variables that can affect the system. Additionally, leaders must also be able to positively interact with their followers in a way that motivates them to willingly carry out the leader's instructions. Without the full support of everyone in the system, leaders will struggle to accomplish goals and initiate change.

According to the literature, it seems that the most effective leadership model may be an integrative approach using transactional and transformational leadership principles (Howell & Avolio, 1993; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transformational leaders tend to focus on the relationships that they build with their followers, while transactional leaders attend to the business aspects of leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). A leader that emphasizes both forms of leadership can provide the support and attention that their followers need, while maintaining the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure the success of their system.

This integrative form of leadership is especially relevant to the field of school psychology considering the vast number of stakeholders that practitioners come in contact with on a regular basis. Various stakeholders have differing needs and school psychologists who hold transformational leadership skills could listen to and attempt to meet those needs. Additionally, practitioners are faced with increasing accountability, greater responsibility, and time constraints within their positions. Acting as a leader within their schools would only exacerbate these concerns if they did not learn to efficiently distribute some of the responsibilities that they hold (e.g., interventions, staff development, advocacy, program evaluation). In order to fulfill the system's needs in a timely manner, practitioners must also exemplify the characteristics of a transactional leader who can monitor their followers' work and ensure that the system is operating in an efficient manner.

The field of school psychology needs a model that uses the basic principles of transactional and transformational leadership models, and takes into account the various roles that school psychologists are expected to hold within their school system. It will be important for this model to differentiate between the various needs of the school system's stakeholders as well. School psychologists are ethically obligated to ensure that the system holds student needs before all other needs, so the importance of students' well-being should be highlighted above all in this model.

Although this ideal model for the field of school psychology does not yet exist, many respondents in the current study indicated that they believe there is a leadership model that is specific to the field. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) guides practitioners in the field with the NASP Practice Model (2010a) and with Principles for Professional Ethics (2010b). These two guidelines are published every few years in order to update school psychologists' current practices and skill sets. Perhaps respondents to this survey may have been referencing the NASP Practice Model and Principles for Professional Ethics when they responded that they agreed that there is a leadership model that is specific to the field of school psychology. These two models do not specifically discuss the actions that an effective leader should take within their school system; however, they do provide extensive guidelines as to how school psychologists should practice within their schools. If these models became integrated with the principles of transactional and transformational leadership models, then the field would be closer to attaining a clear leadership model that fits its specific needs.

The survey also asked participants about the most common areas and situations in which school psychologists are expected to act as leaders within their schools. The top five areas and situations that were most commonly selected by participants in this study included: special



education eligibility, assessment, behavioral interventions, knowledge of special education laws, and academic interventions. Participants in Shriberg’s (2010) study were also asked to describe situations where leadership is expected from school psychologists and they most commonly cited the following: classroom/academic interventions, behavioral interventions, crisis intervention, special education law/processes, and assessment/evaluation (see Table 6 below).

**Table 6**  
*Comparison between Participants’ Top Five Responses to the Item: “What Would You Consider to be the Top Five Areas and Situations Where Leadership is Expected from School Psychologists?”*

Present Study	Shriberg’s (2010) Study
Special education eligibility	<b>Classroom/academic interventions</b>
<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Behavioral interventions</b>
<b>Behavioral interventions</b>	Crisis intervention
<b>Knowledge of special education laws</b>	<b>Knowledge of special education laws/processes</b>
<b>Academic interventions</b>	<b>Assessment/evaluation</b>

*Note.* Similar items that were obtained in the top five for both studies are bold-faced.

Participants from both studies indicated that school psychologists are expected to provide leadership within assessment. This is not surprising since currently practicing school psychologists still spend the majority of their time involved in assessment and evaluation

procedures related to special education eligibility (Castillo et al., 2012). The school-based practitioners that participated in this study seemed much more focused on special education evaluation than those from Shriberg's (2010) study. In fact, three of the five top answers from participants in this study were related to special education evaluation, while only two of the answers from participants in Shriberg's study were related to special education. Participants from Shriberg's study placed more emphasis on intervention as an area that school psychologists are expected to provide leadership. Shriberg's participants were leaders in the field of school psychology so they may have been answering his survey about the ideal role that school psychologists should hold rather than the realistic view that school-based practitioners hold.

In spite of these differences, it is interesting to note that participants from both studies focused on areas and situations in which school psychologists can provide leadership at the individual-level, rather than at the systems-level. Shriberg's participants mentioned that school psychologists are expected to provide leadership for crisis intervention which often occurs at the systems-level; however, neither study's participants responded with "school-wide interventions" in their top five answers. Based on these results, it appears that school psychologists are still chiefly responsible for providing leadership within individual-level services that they have traditionally provided. School psychologists must find a way to expand their roles to include leadership at the systems-level in order to initiate school-wide change that focuses on preventive services.

### **Limitations**

A potential limitation to this study is that there was very little differentiation made between the items that were provided for participants to select from to define leadership and those that could be selected from to rank top characteristics and skills of effective leaders. This

may be due in part to the lack of research that has been completed in leadership within the field of school psychology, but more must be done to differentiate between these constructs in the future. Additionally, participants were not asked to estimate the amount of leadership that they provide on a regular basis, nor were they asked to describe the leadership activities in which they often participate. It is important to understand the types and amount of leadership activities that school psychologists currently engage in so that recommendations can be made to practitioners for how to improve their leadership effectiveness.

An additional limitation to this study involves the comparisons that were made between Shriberg's (2010) research and the current study. Unfortunately, the original survey from Shriberg's study could not be located so the present study cannot be considered an exact replication of his research. The survey that was developed for this study attempts to recreate Shriberg's (2008; 2010) *School Psychology Leadership Survey* based on the information that he provided in his article and PowerPoint; however, he did not include the exact questions that were used in his study at the time. The questions that were developed for the present study were solely formed based on the information that was provided in his article and PowerPoint, and as a result, cannot be considered duplicates of those found in Shriberg's research.

The differences in wording between the current study's survey and Shriberg's survey could explain some of the differences that were found in participants' responses across the studies. Additionally, Shriberg provided his participants with open-ended questions in which they could respond in their own words, while the current study only provided its participants with questions in which they had to select their answers from specific choices. Comparisons between the studies' samples should be made with caution because of these differences. Further research must be completed in order to truly understand the differences that may exist between

leader perspectives and school-based practitioners' perspectives about leadership in the field of school psychology.

It should also be noted that using chi-square tests to determine the significance of group differences can be considered a limitation itself. Chi-square tests are nonparametric statistical tests that are used specifically for nominal or ordinal data (Howell, 2010). These tests calculate group differences based on the frequency of participants' responses. Unfortunately, since chi-square tests do not rely on making assumptions about the population distribution, they are less powerful than parametric tests which involve estimations of population parameters. In order to reach the same level of power, nonparametric tests typically require more observations than parametric tests. Therefore, nonparametric tests are more likely to produce Type II error – the failure to detect a significant difference that is present. Although parametric tests are typically preferred over nonparametric tests, the present study required the use of chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to measure group differences since ordinal and nominal data was collected from participants.

Much more research must be completed in order to determine an appropriate definition for leadership within the field of school psychology. This is a unique field that requires a specific leadership definition and model for practitioners to follow so that they may lead in the most effective way for their schools. Future studies should focus on determining the most efficient and effective ways for school-based practitioners to serve as leaders within their schools that will not take away from the other roles and functions that they must fulfill. In addition, school psychologists should attempt to inform other educators (particularly those in administration) about the additional services that they are able to provide. Unfortunately, many school psychologists are mainly only able to complete special education evaluations because of

professional time constraints and traditional views held by other educators. It is important that other school members understand the scope of services that school psychologists are able to provide so that they too can help support school psychologists in their role transformation over time.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Demographic Information

		Frequency n=96 (percent)
Gender	Female	81 (84.4%)
	Male	15 (15.6%)
Age	< 30	19 (19.8%)
	30-39	37 (38.5%)
	40-49	14 (14.6%)
	50-59	13 (13.5%)
	60-69	12 (12.5%)
	> 69	1 (1%)
Race/ethnicity	Asian	1 (1%)
	Black or African-American	2 (2.1%)
	White	92 (95.8%)
	Other	1 (1%)
State	North Carolina	47 (49%)
	South Carolina	49 (51%)
Highest degree	Master's/Specialist	85 (88.5%)
	Doctoral	11 (11.5%)
Primary work setting	Rural	25 (26%)
	Suburban	50 (52.1%)
	Urban	17 (17.7%)
	Other	4 (4.2%)
Years of experience	Less than 5 years	30 (31.3%)
	5-10 years	24 (25%)
	11-15 years	13 (13.5%)
	16-20 years	4 (4.2%)
	21-25 years	11 (11.5%)
	More than 25 years	14 (14.6%)
School psychologist-to-student ratio	Less than 1,000	13 (13.5%)
	1,001-2,000	56 (58.3%)
	2,001-3,000	19 (19.8%)
	Greater than 3,000	3 (3.1%)
	I don't know	5 (5.2%)

## Appendix B: Perceptions of Leadership in School Psychology Survey

Question 1:

What is your primary working environment?

- School System
- Private Practice
- College/University

Question 2:

It is important for school psychologists to act as school leaders.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Question 3:

There is a leadership model specific to the field of school psychology that provides clear expectations for how practitioners should lead in the field.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Question 4:

I have the opportunity to act as a leader within my school(s).

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Question 5:

Other school members understand the ability of school psychologists to function as effective school leaders.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Question 6:

How would you rate your leadership effectiveness within your current work setting?

- Very Effective
- Moderately Effective
- Only Marginally Effective
- Moderately Ineffective
- Very Ineffective

Question 7:

From the provided list, which of the following phrases best define leadership as applied to the field of school psychology?

Please select your top five answers from the list in the left-hand column. Drag and drop your selected answers to the box on the right labeled “Top 5 Definitions”.

Items

Advocate for children’s needs  
Effective problem-solving skills  
Goal-oriented  
Holds a formal leadership position  
Holds a vision for their school  
Influences others  
Internally motivated  
Maintains visibility  
Open-minded  
Promotes positive outcomes  
Respected by others  
Strong communication skills  
Strong personal character  
Strong school psychology skill set  
Widely regarded as competent  
Works effectively in teams  
Works with confidence

Top 5 Definitions

Question 8:

What would you consider to be the top five most important characteristics and skills of school psychologists who act as effective leaders?

Please select your top five answers from the list in the left-hand column. Drag and drop your selected answers to the box on the right labeled “Top 5 Characteristics and Skills”.

Items

Advocate for children’s needs  
Aware of own limitations  
Creative  
Effective interpersonal skills  
Effective problem-solving skills  
Empathetic  
Flexible

Top 5 Characteristics and Skills

Good listener  
Holds a vision for their school  
Internally motivated  
Motivates others  
Open-minded  
Organized  
Possesses knowledge and expertise  
Respected by others  
Strong communication skills  
Strong personal character  
Strong school psychology skill set  
Widely regarded as competent  
Works effectively in teams  
Works with confidence

Question 9:

What would you consider to be the top five areas and situations where leadership is expected from school psychologists?

Please select your top five answers from the list in the left-hand column. Drag and drop your selected answers to the box on the right labeled “Top 5 Areas and Situations”.

Items

Top 5 Areas and Situations

Academic interventions  
Advocacy for children’s needs  
Assessment  
Behavioral interventions  
Conflict resolution  
Consultation  
Crisis intervention  
Current issues in education  
Data analysis  
Knowledge of special education laws  
Knowledge of specific disabilities  
Leader of team meetings  
Mental health issues  
Problem-solving  
School-wide interventions  
Special education eligibility  
Staff development

Question 10:

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

Question 11:

Select your age below.

- < 30
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- > 69

Question 12:

Select your race/ethnicity below.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White (Not of Hispanic Origin)
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 13:

In which state are you currently working?

- North Carolina
- South Carolina
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 14:

What is the highest completed degree you hold?

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Specialist Degree
- Doctoral Degree

Question 15:

What is your primary work setting?

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



Question 16:

How many years of experience do you have as a school psychologist?

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- More than 25 years

Question 17:

What is the school psychologist-to-student ratio in your area?

- Less than 1,000 students per school psychologist
- 1,001 - 2,000 students per school psychologist
- 2,001 - 3,000 students per school psychologist
- Greater than 3,000 students per school psychologist
- I Don't Know

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent**

The following survey will ask you various questions about your working environment and your experiences as a school psychologist. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may stop at any time with no penalty. Your responses are anonymous and will be used to gain a better understanding of leadership within the field of school psychology.

This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes for you to complete. Please do not take this survey on a mobile device - you will not be able to answer some of the questions due to their formatting.

If you have questions about this survey or the results obtained, please contact psychology graduate student Samantha Harding ([sharding@email.wcu.edu](mailto:sharding@email.wcu.edu)) or Dr. Lori Unruh ([lunruh@email.wcu.edu](mailto:lunruh@email.wcu.edu)) of Western Carolina University. By clicking continue, you are consenting to participate in this study.

### **Appendix D: Message for Disqualified Participants**

Thank you for your interest in this survey. Unfortunately, we only need participants who are currently working primarily in a school-based setting to respond to this survey. However, if you have questions about this survey or the results obtained, please contact psychology graduate student Samantha Harding ([sharding@email.wcu.edu](mailto:sharding@email.wcu.edu)) or Dr. Lori Unruh ([lunruh@email.wcu.edu](mailto:lunruh@email.wcu.edu)) of Western Carolina University. Thank you for your time.

## **Appendix E: Email Sent Out to NCSPA and SCASP Members**

Dear NCSPA (SCASP) member,

My name is Samantha Harding and I am currently a psychology graduate student at Western Carolina University. I am conducting my thesis project to assess perceptions of leadership within the field of school psychology. I am asking school psychologists who primarily work in a school setting to voluntarily complete my brief survey. The information obtained from the survey will be used to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of effective leaders within the school psychology field.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes for you to complete. Please do not take this survey on a mobile device – you will not be able to answer some of the questions due to their formatting. All of the information that you provide in this survey will be completely anonymous. Your survey responses will never be linked to you in any way and there are no foreseeable risks related to participation in this study. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey or the study in general, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervising faculty member, Dr. Lori Unruh.

To complete the survey, go to: [https://wcu.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_8IHZMGHPiU5iZIp](https://wcu.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8IHZMGHPiU5iZIp)

Thank you,

Samantha Harding  
Psychology Graduate Student  
Western Carolina University  
sharding@email.wcu.edu

Lori Unruh, Ph.D.  
School Psychology Program Director  
Western Carolina University  
lunruh@email.wcu.edu