CHAPTER 1

# Introduction to the Field of School Psychology



It is fitting for the first chapter of this introductory book about school psychology to provide a general exploration of this exciting field. If you are investigating this field or are new to it, you probably have some basic questions, and this chapter is an attempt to answer some of them and to provide an orientation to this book. The chapter begins with a discussion of the various definitions of school psychology and how these definitions inform and shape the field. We then briefly lay out our vision of school psychologists as data-driven problem solvers, which is something we return to often and emphasize throughout the book. General characteristics of school psychologists are described, including such aspects as the locations and number of individuals who work in the field, professional organizations to which school psychologists belong, and level of training necessary to become a school psychologist. To help provide a more direct introduction to the field, we present vignettes of individuals who work in school psychology. These vignettes show the diversity, strength, creativity, and challenges within the profession. Some aspects of entry into the field are described, including graduate training and credentialing. School psychology is differentiated from some of the more closely related fields in psychology and education. Finally, we include a guide to using this book and an overview of some of the "big ideas" on which the book was developed.

## DEFINING SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

At the beginning of a book introducing readers to the field of school psychology, it is reasonable to consider the following questions: "What is school psychology?" and "What is a school psychologist?" Individuals who have worked in this field for several years might assume that the meaning and definition of school psychology are self-evident. However, a closer look at the development of the field, the evolution of a professional identity, and some of the controversies regarding issues that to outsiders appear to be straightforward

show us that in order to define school psychology, we must examine it closely and consider the importance of what is in a definition.

## Previous Definitions

It is interesting to look through the literature from past decades to see how the defining characteristics of school psychology have evolved over time. In their 1961 book *The School Psychologist*, White and Harris stated, "In our view school psychology is that branch of psychology which concerns itself with the personality of the pupil in interaction with the educational process," and argued that the field "encompasses not only the learning process, as part of education, but also the personality of the learner as a member of school society, as a member of a family unit, and as a member of the community" (p. 1). A few years later, in her landmark book *The Psychologist in the Schools*, the original treatise on problem solving as the professional aspiration of school psychologists, Susan Gray (1963) posited that school psychologists had two primary roles: one as *data-oriented problem solvers* in schools and the other as *transmitters of psychological knowledge and skills*. Later, Bardon and Bennett (1974), in their book *School Psychology*, wrote:

> The specialty in psychology concerned with how schooling affects children in general and with the pupil in interaction with a specific school is called school psychology. The specialty includes knowledge about research and theory dealing with what happens between children and others when they are together in schools; more than that, school psychology deals with how school for a child in Jackson Junior High is different than school for a child in Wilson Junior High. (p. x)

## Current Definitions

In contrast to these notable statements from the 1960s and 1970s, which defined the field by focusing on what school psychologists *do* or should do rather than on what the specialty *is*, the most current definitions of school psychology tend to be more direct in defining the essential characteristics of school psychology. In the "About School Psychology" section of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) website (*www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/who-are-school-psychologists*), there is a section titled "Who Are School Psychologists," in which the following definition is provided:

> School psychologists are uniquely qualified members of school teams that support students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach. They apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior, to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. School psychologists partner with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community.

Another definition or description of school psychology is provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) in their description of specializations (*www.apa.org/ed/graduate/specialize/school*):

> School Psychology, a general practice of Health Service Psychology, is concerned with children, youth, families, and the schooling process. School psychologists are prepared to intervene at the individual and system levels, and develop, implement

and evaluate programs to promote positive learning environments for children and youth from diverse backgrounds, and to ensure equal access to effective educational and psychological services that promote healthy development.

Because these definitions are from the two most influential entities representing the field of school psychology in the United States, they have particular importance. What do these definitions have in common? First, they indicate that school psychology is a profession concerned with both the mental health and education of children and youth. Second, they indicate that school psychologists provide services to children, youth, and their families and work within a team/systems context. Formulating definitions of school psychology and subsequent efforts to refine these definitions have been exceedingly difficult at times. These issues are not trivial. Professional identity and activities are shaped in great measure by how a specialty is defined. The short answer to "What's in a definition?" is "More than you might think!"

## SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AS DATA-DRIVEN PROBLEM SOLVERS

Throughout this book our focus is on a vision of school psychologists as data-driven problem solvers. What we are referring to with this phrase—*data-driven problem solvers*—is an approach to *doing* or *practicing* school psychology that is grounded in the logic of the *problem-solving model*. Generally speaking, the problem-solving model is a scientific and practical method for making things better. We usually talk about this method in terms of four sequential phases or stages: (1) clearly identifying the undesirable situation (i.e., the problem), (2) analyzing the conditions that cause or maintain the problem, (3) developing plans to change the conditions that might remedy the problem, and then (4) implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of these plans (Pluymert, 2014). While this model is not specifically stated in the definitions of school psychology provided previously, we believe a problem-solving approach is foundational for our professional identity and critical in moving the field of school psychology forward.

We also emphasize throughout this book that the usefulness of a data-driven problem-solving approach to school psychology is best understood within the context of three other major movements in education: evidence-based practice (EBP), response to intervention (RTI), and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). The EBP movement emphasizes the identification, dissemination, promotion, and adoption of practices (e.g., assessment, intervention) that have demonstrated research support (e.g., Burns, Riley-Tillman, & Rathvon, 2017; Weisz & Kazdin, 2017). The basic requirement for identifying an EBP is that its evidence base must be of sufficient quality to support its use in practice (see Davis, 2019, for an overview of how such determinations are made). The EBP movement has been viewed as having the potential to significantly improve the quality of school psychology services, as it allows us to move beyond just making predictions about children's lives to actually making a difference in their lives (VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2018). RTI, on the other hand, is a movement that has grown out of special education but has the potential for much broader applications (Glover & Vaughn, 2010). RTI refers to the process of providing an EBP that is matched to student needs and then using student response data to make decisions about the effectiveness of that specific EBP when applied in this particular situation (Burns, Jimerson, VanDerHeyden, & Deno, 2016). RTI therefore relies on EBP but is not synonymous with it. The MTSS movement relates to these other movements by integrating EBP and RTI within a multilevel approach for

addressing the learning and social–behavioral needs of *all* students (Kilgus & von der Embse, 2019; Stoiber, 2014). MTSS can be understood as a service delivery heuristic that helps practitioners to efficiently organize and tune (up or down) the use of EBP and RTI according to two key factors: (1) the scope of students receiving services and (2) the intensity of services provided to those students. Thus, MTSS incorporates EBP and RTI but is not identical to them.

Taken together, the RTI, EBP, and MTSS movements are all complementary and play important roles in applying the data-driven problem-solving approach we are advocating for school psychology. To draw an analogy, we could say that if EBP, RTI, and MTSS are like *vehicles* for getting efficient and effective services into schools, then the problem-solving model is akin to the *fuel* that powers these vehicles. We therefore think it is safe to say that, as our profession evolves, there may arise more and different movements (vehicles) within education that help school psychologists better realize our potential to benefit others. Yet we expect that, no matter how much things change, the most fundamental driving force (fuel) within our field will remain the same: the problem-solving approach will be the bedrock of school psychology. We return to these foundational concepts—and most especially the problem-solving approach—throughout this book as we discuss the various aspects of school psychology practice.

## SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN THE WORKFORCE

Another way to obtain a snapshot of the field of school psychology is to look at who school psychologists are and where they are employed. Details on school psychologists and their work settings are presented in Chapter 6. Here we provide some basic information regarding numbers of school psychologists and their roles. Because the practice of school psychology is governed by various credentialing bodies within the individual states and provinces, and because membership in professional organizations is voluntary, there is no unitary list or registry of school psychologists.

Perhaps the most direct way to make inferences regarding the basic characteristics of school psychologists is to look at available data from national organizations. However, even this method is fraught with challenges because the actual percentage of school psychologists who join professional organizations is unknown, and many school psychologists belong to two or more professional organizations that represent the field (e.g., APA *and* NASP).

Based on information provided on the NASP website, there are over 25,000 members in the association. On the basis of our own experiences and conversations with practicing school psychologists, we estimate that 60–65% of school psychologists in the United States are members of NASP; the figure for school psychologists in Canada is somewhat less. If we are correct, then a reasonable estimate of the number of school psychologists in the two nations ranges from 39,000 to 43,000. This estimate is consistent with other recent estimates of U.S. school psychologists. For example, Fagan (2014) noted that a "reasonable figure" for school psychologists within the United States is in the 30,000–35,000 range, and Charvat (2008) estimated that there were approximately 35,400 credentialed school psychologists in the United States in 2008, with 28,500 of these individuals being practicing school psychologists. In addition, data from the 41st Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA; U.S. Department of Education, 2019) indicated that in 2016 there were 35,975 full-time-equivalent psychologists providing services in

the schools to youth ages 3–21 who are served in special education programs under IDEIA. Of course, this figure does not take into account individuals who are trained as and identify as school psychologists who are not working in a school setting. The number of school psychologists working in the schools has been increasing over time. For example, in the 30th Annual Report to Congress, it was reported that there were 30,561 full-time school psychologists in fall 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and, as reported in the 20th Annual Report, there were 23,385 full-time school psychologists in fall 1995 (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Using APA Division 16 data is less informative in terms of estimating the number of school psychologists. In October 2018, we were informed by the division's leadership that there were approximately 1,640 members in Division 16. This figure is obviously not a proxy figure in any respect for the total number of school psychologists in the United States because it is widely understood that far fewer school psychologists join APA than NASP, and it is unknown how many individuals are members of both organizations. One reason that APA Division 16 has far fewer members than NASP is that a doctoral degree is required for full APA membership, and a large majority of practicing school psychologists do not have doctoral degrees.

Internationally, the number of school psychologists is also something of a puzzle, and it is even more difficult to ascertain than the number within the United States. While the leadership for the International School Psychology Association estimates that there are 600 members across 40 countries in their organization, the number of school psychologists internationally is much higher than this. Jimerson, Stewart, Skokut, Cardenas, and Malone (2009) estimated that there were 76,122 school psychologists in 48 countries, including 32,300 in the United States and 3,500 in Canada. After the United States, Turkey had the next largest estimated number of school psychologists (11,327), followed by Spain (3,600), and then both Canada and Japan (3,500 each). Jimerson and colleagues noted that estimates for school psychologists for the three countries with the largest number of children (India, China, and Indonesia) could not be obtained, and in Indonesia there was no evidence of school psychology practice. Unfortunately, more recent data on numbers of school psychologists across the world are not available at this time but our guess is that it is likely the numbers have increased at least somewhat since this 2009 publication.

Although we use the term *school psychologists* very generally to make these worldwide comparisons, it is worth noting that the role of school psychologists outside of the United States and Canada (who are also referred to in some nations as "educational psychologists") may differ considerably from the role of school psychologists in the United States and Canada. Particularly in the United States, the role of the school psychologist has been strongly linked to the public laws (e.g., IDEIA) for education of students with disabilities. In most other nations, this is not the case. That being said, many of the basic core functions of school psychologists in terms of consultation, intervention, and assessment are likely similar across many countries (Oakland, 2007; Oakland & Jimerson, 2014; more information on the practice of school psychology worldwide is available at the International School Psychology Association website at *www.ispaweb.org*).

With respect to demographic characteristics of school psychologists, as discussed in Chapter 6, the field is currently dominated by White females who are trained at the specialist level. While the field is very slowly becoming more diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, the percentage of women in the field has increased more substantially over time. In commenting on the shift in gender composition of school psychologists since about the 1970s, Reschly (2000) stated that the increased proportion of women in the field during

this time period constituted "the clearest changes in school psychology during the past two decades" (p. 508). Across a period of about 30 years, the representation of women in school psychology grew at a rate of about 10% per decade (Reschly, 2000). In more recent years, the percentage of school psychologists who are women has been relatively stable (Goforth, Farmer, Kim, Naser, et al., 2021).

## BEING THERE: THREE STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Although the general professional definitions and descriptions of school psychology are extremely important and have broad impact on how the field is perceived both within and outside of the field, they give us only a small glimpse of what school psychologists do in their day-to-day work. Definitions cannot capture the diversity of roles that school psychologists fill, nor can they adequately convey how each practicing school psychologist is in a unique situation and setting and has a unique perspective on the field. In addition, general definitions cannot possibly convey the wealth of experience, passion, and personal commitment that individual school psychologists bring to their work. Perhaps a better way to illustrate what school psychology looks like at the point of actual practice is to present a glimpse into the professional lives of several school psychologists in the following vignettes.

### Julie—20-Year Professional in the Field

Julie has been working in the field of school psychology for more than 20 years. She graduated with her specialist-level degree in 1999 and went right to work as a school psychologist. Her first position was in a moderate-size district in the southeastern part of the United States. The vast majority of her career to date has been spent in a larger district in the Southeast, although she recently relocated to the western United States and started a position with a new district. Approximately 10 years after graduating with her specialist-level degree, Julie went back to school to become a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA). She completed her practicum hours toward her BCBA in placements specializing in autism spectrum disorders and then worked for just over a year following certification as a BCBA for a private company serving clients with autism spectrum disorders. She then returned to the schools and worked first as a school psychologist and then as a behavior consultant (serving one-third of the schools in the district—15 schools!) before moving to the western United States where she has returned to a school psychologist position.

In her current role, Julie is serving as the school psychologist in two schools: a middle school (grades 6–8) with approximately 500 students and a district charter school (grades K–8) with approximately 300 students. She describes the district in which she is working and both of her schools as "high need." In the charter school, approximately 12% of the students receive special education services. Her experience with the charter school is that it has attracted families that are dissatisfied with their local schools and are seeking another option, leading to a student population with a broad range of skills and needs. She shared that the charter school allows for a great deal of flexibility for the academic and social–emotional needs of students, and she believes that many more students attending the charter school would likely be identified as requiring special education services if they were attending their local schools. Approximately 20% of the students attending the middle school receive special education services. Like many of the

middle schools in the district, her middle school has severe needs programs for students with intellectual disabilities and students with emotional disabilities. She estimates that one-third of the students at the middle school are Latinx even though the area in which the district is located is predominantly White. The middle school primarily serves a lower socioeconomic status (SES) population—however, there are pockets of higher-income families. The charter school is less diverse in terms of race/ethnicity but is highly diverse in terms of family income and background, with some students living on farms or other rural areas, some in low-income housing, some in multigenerational homes, and others in single-family homes in affluent areas of the region.

Julie is contracted in her current district for 197 days a year, which is a 10-month contract. School psychologists are expected to work 8 hours a day for a 40-hour week, but she estimates that she spends a minimum of 50 hours per week on work-related tasks, with some of that work occurring at home. In her previous position, school psychologists worked a 12-month contract with teacher holidays and 2 weeks off during the summer, but relatively little work was required outside of the contracted hours. Although her previous district had no year-round schools, the evaluation load was high and evaluations were completed in the summer months, as well as during the school year.

In Julie's state, the role of the school psychologist varies significantly based on location and need. In her current district, school psychologists are looked to as the special education team leader for their schools. Julie's role is varied, although she did note that she spends more time in meetings than in her previous positions (and more time in meetings than she would like). She estimated that she completes one to two evaluations per week (in her previous district, she completed an average of 120 evaluations per year) and that, like her previous district, she completes the cognitive, social–emotional, and achievement portions of the evaluations. She spends approximately 4 hours a week providing counseling services to students whose individualized education programs (IEPs) require psychological services as a related service, conducts a number of functional behavioral assessments and assists in monitoring implementation of behavior support plans, and engages in daily consultation with teachers and others at her schools to best address the needs of the students.

Julie's previous district received a state grant to improve services for students with autism through teacher training and coaching, and she was highly involved in implementing this project during her last 4 years with the district. In both her previous and current districts, she is involved in assessing students for autism spectrum disorders. Julie shared that her current district does not yet have an autism evaluation team or systematic approach for providing supports to teachers who are working with students with autism spectrum disorders. Julie also noted that she spends a good deal of her time on mental health-related issues, which can present significant challenges.

As is the case throughout many western states, the suicide rate is higher in Julie's area than the national average. She estimates that she typically conducts one to two suicide risk assessments each week. She also attends weekly meetings at the middle school with the school-based counseling team (which includes the school counselors, social workers who are available part time at her school, school psychologist, and district support staff) in order to coordinate school and community resources for students and allow for consultation among mental health staff.

When asked about changes she has seen in the field over time, Julie noted a couple of trends. Like so many in the field, she has been surprised by the increase in numbers of students with autism spectrum disorders and the urgent need for specialized supports for these students in the schools. In her previous district of approximately 40,000 students,

there were just a handful of classes for students with autism spectrum disorders in the early 2000s. Fifteen or so years later, that number had increased to over 100 classes for students with autism spectrum disorders. She noted that this growth in the number of children identified with autism spectrum disorders is one reason she went back to school to obtain her BCBA credential and that this training has helped her feel much better prepared for meeting the needs of these students.

Other changes Julie has noticed over the years include an increase in mental health needs and severity of behavioral concerns among students, and a greater involvement of school psychologists in meeting these needs. Unfortunately, during this time she has also seen an increased shortage of special education teachers and school psychologists. Julie reported feeling encouraged that school systems around the country seem to be embracing the need for mental health services and are continuing to move toward intervention-based models, like MTSS, in which youth can be provided supports based on need rather than looking to special education eligibility as the sole criterion in determining which students receive support. Julie shared that early in her career she struggled with feeling pressured to identify students as needing special education so that they could receive services, while at the same time feeling uncomfortable in some situations with the quality and effectiveness of the special education services being provided.

In terms of the biggest challenges facing her schools and district, Julie again noted the need for more mental health services both in her schools and in the surrounding community. In addition to not having enough resources in the schools to meet the needs of youth, the community in which her district is located has a shortage of mental health practitioners—the closest psychiatric inpatient services for youth under the age of 12 are 5 hours away. Services for students with autism spectrum disorders (such as applied behavior analysis therapies) are also in extremely short supply in her community.

When asked about the top three things she likes about her job, Julie shared that she (1) loves the field of school psychology, as it allows for the integration of education and psychology, including mental health and behavior; (2) enjoys working in the school environment; and (3) continues to be inspired by the success of students when true collaboration among professionals takes place. When asked about her top three dislikes, Julie stated that she (1) dislikes situations and systems in which there is a lack of clear policies and procedures and, as a result, lack of consistency; (2) finds the inequities between schools and districts in funding and provision of services difficult to accept; and (3) experiences the ongoing struggle that most school psychologists face in establishing boundaries and finding a work/life balance.

For students currently interested in school psychology as a career, Julie recommended taking the time to find out as much about the field as possible before committing to a program. She also noted that positions and even school placements vary a lot and, if new graduates are in positions that they are not enjoying, it is worth asking for a change of assignment or looking for another position that may be a better fit. She also noted that it is easy for students and early-career professionals to be overwhelmed by the breadth of the field and advised that it is important to realize that no school psychologist is an expert in everything. She shared that while there are basic skills in which all school psychologists need to develop proficiency, it makes sense to further develop skills in areas of specific interest (e.g., for Julie this was applied behavior analysis and autism spectrum disorders), while also developing relationships with colleagues to allow for collaboration across areas of expertise. As such, she encouraged school psychologists to be intentional with their professional development and to look for opportunities that will truly advance their skills.

Overall, Julie reported being very satisfied with her career and happy that she had made the decision to go into school psychology. She reported truly enjoying working with middle school students—a population that is definitely not for everyone!

### Laura—Agent for Change

Laura is currently in her 11th year working as a school psychologist after graduating with her educational specialist (EdS) degree. During her initial years of employment, she worked in a school district in a medium-size city in Texas. For the past 5 years she has been working in a district in a small (but not rural) community in Texas. She is the only school psychologist in her district, which has a student population of about 1,750 and includes four schools (preK–early elementary, later elementary, middle and high school). The student population in the district in which Laura works is predominantly White (approximately 75%) with about 20% of students who are Latinx and about 5% who are Black. She estimates that about 30–40% of the students are from low-SES backgrounds and about 7–8% speak a language other than English.

Laura received her bachelor's degree in psychology and entered graduate school immediately after finishing her undergraduate degree. Like many people, she was not aware of the field of school psychology until later in her college years. In her senior year, Laura took an elective course from a faculty member who was a school psychologist and this person encouraged her to look into school psychology programs given her interests in working with youth and counseling. Laura has never looked back and is happy she found the field of school psychology.

When asked to describe her typical day, like many school psychologists, Laura said that her days do not ever look the same. She indicated that at the beginning of her career this used to bother her as she likes to plan out her days, but she knows that this is just how the job is—and is now comfortable with (and enjoys) the variability in her position. She estimated that about 50% of her time is spent in testing and report-writing activities. She completes all initial evaluations in her district. Her district employs a diagnostician who conducts many of the reevaluations, but Laura still does the reevaluations for students with an emotional disturbance or autism classification. She reported that there is a lot of testing to do—so much that last year the district contracted out for some of the assessments due to the number of referrals. About 20% of Laura's time is spent in counseling activities—and all of these students receive counseling as a related service as part of their individualized education program. She is not able to provide counseling to students who are solely in regular education due to the demands on her time and the needs of students who are receiving special education services. She has 22 students on her counseling caseload and noted that anxiety-related issues are the most common presenting problem she sees. She primarily uses cognitive-behavioral strategies with these youth. She also works with students on social skills and adaptive coping skills more generally.

In addition to the testing and counseling activities that make up the majority of Laura's time, there are a variety of other tasks that fill in the remainder of her hours. About 10% of her time is spent on crisis/threat assessments, 5% on supervising practicum students, 5% in meetings, and 5% doing paperwork—including that for billing Medicaid, which reimburses the district for many of the evaluations conducted and some of the counseling. Laura indicated that while she does not mind testing for learning disabilities (LD), she would like to do a little less of this and have more time to engage in consultation with teachers. She also noted that, at least in her area of Texas, school psychologists are not typically involved in MTSS and RTI activities and that she would definitely like to

be part of this process. She noted that the schools have these teams—but the school psychologists are not involved. Overall, she expressed a desire to have more time to develop and implement interventions, as well as more time to meet with students, including those who are not receiving special education services.

When asked about changes seen in the field over time, the biggest thing Laura noted was that there were increasingly more students to serve and not enough school psychologists. This directly relates to the biggest challenges she sees facing her schools—which she reported to be the "mental health epidemic" with more and more youth having mental health diagnoses and those diagnoses having a significant impact on their school functioning. She noted that while mental health issues in the schools have always been there, they have become much more prominent in recent years and there are significant challenges in being able to help all of the students who need services given both the shortage of school psychologists and the lack of funding to expand school psychology services broadly and mental health services specifically. In Laura's district, they are fortunate to have a partnership with a local mental health agency (supported through a grant) in which mental health providers at the agency can work with up to 30 students who the district refers. Without this partnership, many students who need services would go without.

When asked about what she likes most about her job, Laura reported that her favorite thing is being able to build relationships with students and being able to see them grow and make progress. She noted that regardless of how stressful her work week might have been, she is always able to look back and feel good about helping at least one student. She also indicated that she really enjoys the school schedule. Her expected working hours are 8:00 A.M.–4:00 P.M. (although she reported that she usually gets to work around 6:30 A.M. so she can get work done before everyone else shows up—she said this is by choice and she is a morning person) and that she is contracted to work 197 days. She has 7 weeks off in the summer and takes that time to enjoy being with family, although she sometimes babysits on the side to make a little extra money.

Regarding dislikes, Laura reported that she becomes annoyed or frustrated when people do not understand what she does and thinks she just sits in her office all day. She indicated that she believes if people understood more about everything a school psychology job involves, they would have a better appreciation of school psychologists. She reported that while she absolutely loves what she does and enjoys going to work every day, she feels like the work of school psychologists goes unnoticed and unappreciated and worries about the impact this may have on those in the field. As an example of this, she noted that at the time of her interview even NASP has School Psychology *Awareness* Week rather than *appreciation* week. Her hope is that the field can move past people needing to become aware of what school psychologists do and focus instead on appreciating all the hard work they put into supporting the youth in our schools. (It is worth noting that starting in 2020, NASP changed the name of this annual event to National School Psychology Week, dropping the "awareness" piece.)

When asked about recommendations she has for students considering going to graduate school for school psychology, Laura said she would tell them that if they want a job where they are able to do something that makes a difference on a daily basis and if they want to work with children, this is a great field to go into. But if they want a job that is less behind the scenes or they are not able to handle high stress, deadlines, and the need for flexibility on a daily basis, this probably is not the job for them. For graduate students specifically, she emphasized that it is important to get the most out of their program—to seek experiences, ask questions, and so on. She said when interning with

field supervisors, students should make sure they get the real story that goes beyond the textbook and really embrace these learning opportunities.

Overall, Laura reported that during her 11 years working as a school psychologist, she has never dreaded going to work and has started every day knowing she might impact a child's life. She said while not every student will tell her verbally that she has made a difference, the moments when students do make it all worth it. She emphasized that school psychologists have a great opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students and school may be the only place some youth feel like they belong and are cared about. Laura said that for all these reasons, she loves her job and cannot ever see herself doing something different. She summarized by saying, "If you want to be an agent for change, this is a great field to be in."

### Yolanda—Champion of the Underserved

Yolanda's career as a school psychologist has spanned 31 years and various positions at two different school districts, as well as a university. However, her introduction to the American school system started off a little rocky. Growing up in the Texas desert, Yolanda's first language was Spanish. Kindergarten was not offered in public schools in Texas but Yolanda's parents placed her in a private kindergarten to get an early start on school. After just a few months, Yolanda "dropped out" of kindergarten—feeling ignored by teachers because she did not speak English. The following year she returned to school to start first grade and had a somewhat better experience. However, in fourth grade, her father decided to close his business and the family moved to Mexico where Yolanda stayed through her early college years. Yolanda was grateful for this move, which allowed her to get a "fabulous" education—much better than she believes she would have been able to receive had her family stayed in Texas. Yolanda started a social work program in Mexico, but after attending a summer internship in California focused on learning disabilities, she instead decided to pursue a career in education. She made a permanent move back to the United States and completed an undergraduate degree in education. She then worked as a teacher for 8 years prior to completing her master's degree (with school psychology certification). She then moved to a school psychology position in her district and continued her own education, eventually completing her doctoral degree.

Yolanda's initial job as a school psychologist was in a large urban school district in the western United States. At the time Yolanda was working in this district in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a large influx of families entering the area from the southeastern Pacific countries. The number of youth entering the district who did not speak English grew substantially. In the time she was there, the number of different languages spoken by families in the district rose to about 25 (she believes that currently over 50 different languages are spoken in this district). Yolanda and her colleagues learned a lot about culture and language, often, as she put it, "learning the hard way" and making some mistakes along the way. For example, the district teams did not fully appreciate at the time the varying cultural views on disability and were not prepared for some families to feel shunned within their culture when their child qualified for special education services. But the teams and individuals were responsive to what they were learning and worked to meet the needs of the families within their districts. Yolanda was fortunate to be part of a strong bilingual evaluation team that built culturally responsive practices into the system.

After 8 years in this district, Yolanda made the move to the Midwest. She worked at a university as an assistant professor for 2.5 years but missed the schools and so moved back to working full time as a school psychologist while continuing to teach as adjunct

faculty at the university. Yolanda reported that she was hired by this district because the director wanted her to change the role of school psychologists in this district—to expand from a purely evaluator role to one of coordinator in overseeing services and providing support for youth and teachers. New changes in the special education law and the integration of interventions prior to evaluations facilitated the expansion of the school psychologist's role. School psychologists were in charge of student assistance teams, were part of leadership teams in schools, and provided professional development. Referrals for special education decreased as school psychologists worked within a positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) framework and as MTSS was embraced. But over time circumstances in the district changed, presenting challenges for school psychologists, teachers, and others.

The district where Yolanda worked experienced significant turmoil when the primary employers moved their manufacturing plants out of the area, leading to a tremendous loss in jobs and a substantial decrease in the district's student numbers. When Yolanda began her job, the district had 36 schools; currently the district has six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. A staff of five school psychologists work in this district. The families in the district are almost all low income (over 90% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch) and are predominantly Black. Yolanda noted that "families with financial means" in the area send their children to schools outside of their zoned district. She also noted that it has been challenging for the district to recruit school psychologists given the intense needs of students in the district, as well as the low pay.

The needs of the students in the district grew substantially following widespread exposure to lead in the environment, which severely impacted youth and their families given the toxic properties of lead exposure—especially on children's cognitive and behavioral development. There were huge increases in referrals for special education, increases in challenging behaviors, and decreases in parents' abilities to support their children. Yolanda said the district now has about a quarter of their youth in special education (a dramatic increase from when she started). She sees more learning problems and more behavior problems (that she believes are a direct outcome of the lead exposure) that are harder to control. Over the past 2 years, she reported that it has been very difficult to evaluate behaviorally uncooperative youth who have been severely impacted by the lead poisoning. She noted the need for "special teams" that are passionate about supporting these youth and their families.

Currently, in Yolanda's district, teams to support youth are school based and each school psychologist has two schools. In addition, given the intense needs of the students, every school has a behavior specialist, a counselor, and a nurse. Many schools also have therapists. However, these staff are all part of "regular education," leaving school psychologists working primarily in special education and conducting evaluations. After the shift in roles when Yolanda first arrived in this district to extend beyond the evaluator role, she has been sad to see the role return to predominantly one of evaluator. This has occurred as the demands for special education evaluations have increased, resulting in school psychologists having little time to engage in other activities. She reports that she does not dislike the evaluator role but feels like it is limited and that school psychologists had more of an impact with an expanded role.

While one might wonder why Yolanda has stayed in this district given the challenges, she reported that she would much rather work in a district like this one than one of the neighboring, more affluent districts where students are "entitled," and wealthy parents often bring their personal attorneys to special education placement meetings. In fact, Yolanda likes her job so much that after retiring several years ago, she quickly

decided that retirement was not for her and returned to the district to continue working full time.

When asked about the challenges facing school psychology, Yolanda reported that the critical shortage of school psychologists is a major one. She believes this shortage has diminished the role of school psychologists, and as schools have attempted to find creative solutions to this shortage, it has made it harder for school psychologists to see "the whole [picture]," which may diminish their effectiveness. She also noted that health issues, due to an increase of environmental hazards throughout the United States, are having a major impact on youth. As an example, she pointed to the issues with lead poisoning in her district. And she discussed the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and how this would impact youth. She noted that increasing health and economic problems in the nation are affecting the students' cognitive processing, emotional health, and behavioral regulation.

When asked about the top three things she likes about her job, Yolanda reported that she "loves working with kids and establishing relationships." She also noted that she enjoys working with school teams and the "incredible" and "dedicated" teachers and staff that are all there to help and support youth. Similarly, she reported that she appreciates being part of committees that work to meet the needs of youth and that she very much enjoys the problem-solving aspect of her job. In terms of dislikes, she reported being saddened when the role of the school psychologist is simply that of an evaluator. And while not necessarily a dislike of the job, she reported concerns about the extraordinarily challenging behaviors she is seeing in youth and being concerned about the health and well-being of youth and school personnel over time.

Yolanda's advice to future school psychologists included (1) be prepared for many different types of roles and develop the skills needed to perform these different roles; (2) take care of your own mental and physical health—do things for yourself and learn how to separate your personal and professional lives; and (3) go out and travel—get to know different cultures and different points of view—and look beyond the traditional middle-class value system that many of us have, to avoid making statements that can be harmful and hurtful to others.

Despite the challenges that Yolanda has faced in her career, she summarized by stating that she loves teaching and loves school psychology. She noted that she would most definitely make the same decision again to enter the field of school psychology. She is on the brink of retirement for a second time but her passion for serving students remains and she still cannot quite decide whether retirement is really for her.

## Tying It Together

The variety, personal investment, challenges, and impact reflected in the professional lives of the three school psychologists featured in these vignettes could easily be duplicated by conducting similar interviews with any three randomly selected school psychologists. It is also noteworthy that professional lives evolve over time. The school psychologists profiled in this section have seen their career paths develop and change, as both the field and their personal interests have evolved. The same could be said for any school psychologist who is committed to making an impact in the field. Although tied together by a collective professional identity and associations, every school psychologist has a unique story, makes unique contributions, and follows a unique path. And yet there is a commonality among them that ties them together and reflects the shared vision and unique identity that defines school psychology. We believe that this vision and

identity stem from a focus on impacting the academic, behavioral, and social–emotional problems of children and youth in educational settings through the effective use of psychological principles and procedures, all through the medium of school psychology. This vision is also clearly tied to the personal commitment and idealism of those individuals who choose to join the field of school psychology. Although school psychologists have differing backgrounds, job descriptions, expectations, and professional ambitions, as a group they share a collective desire to positively influence the lives of youth and their families. It is the incredible power of this collective individual idealism that fuels the impact and potential of the field.

## HOW DOES ONE BECOME A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST?

Having established a definition of school psychology and some of the characteristics of school psychologists, the next question that might be asked by someone exploring the field is "How does one become a school psychologist?" This question is dealt with in extensive detail in Chapter 5, which covers training and credentialing issues. To help us establish our basic introduction to school psychology, a few of the more elemental details regarding the paths that must be traveled to become a school psychologist are covered in this section.

To become a school psychologist, one must have completed a graduate-level program in school psychology and have received a credential (i.e., a certificate or license) to practice in the field in a particular state. The specialist-degree level of training has become the minimum standard of preparation for entering the field. This level of training typically requires approximately 2 years of full-time graduate study beyond a bachelor's degree plus a full-time 1-year school-based internship. NASP standards specify that the specialist standard of preparation requires a minimum of 60 semester credits of graduate study, including a 1,200-hour internship. Because these standards are integrated into NASP's Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential (which is promoted and offered by NASP's National School Psychology Certification Board; *www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/national-certification*), the 60-credit/1,200-internship-hour specialist level of training has become the de facto standard in the field. It is worth noting that while many graduate programs offer a specialist degree by that name (educational specialist [EdS]), others provide an equivalent level of training through a master's degree (master of science [MS], master of arts [MA], or master of education [MEd]) or certificate of advanced study (CAS). It is not the actual degree earned that is important but the hours and experiences that are part of that degree that matter.

Although the efforts of NASP to advocate for minimum training at the 60/1,200 specialist level have created a general standard, it is important to recognize that neither NASP nor any other professional organization actually credentials school psychologists for work in the field. There is no national-level licensing body that provides clearance to work as a school psychologist anywhere. Rather, credentialing of school psychologists is the responsibility of individual states and provinces. For school psychologists to work in public school settings, they must usually obtain a credential, which may be called a certificate or a license, from the educational licensing agency (e.g., the state board or office of education) of the particular state or province where they intend to work. In addition to educational credentialing, some states (e.g., Texas and Louisiana) also credential specialist-level school psychologists through state licensing boards for psychology. Each state sets its own standards for entry into the field in that state, and some states have lower

entry-level requirements than others. However, the NASP-advocated specialist level of training is almost always sufficient for credentialing in any state or province. In addition, increasingly states are accepting the NCSP and granting the state credential/license to anyone who holds this national certification.

For school psychologists who wish to practice outside of a school setting, there is another level of credentialing that is required. To become licensed as a psychologist to practice independently or to practice in settings such as hospitals, clinics, and community mental health agencies with the use of the title "psychologist," one must hold a doctoral degree (i.e., doctor of psychology [PsyD], doctor of education [EdD], or doctor of philosophy [PhD]) in psychology (school psychology, counseling psychology, or clinical psychology) and be licensed by the professional psychology licensing board of a particular state or province. The doctoral level of professional psychology training, which includes a yearlong supervised predoctoral internship, is what is advocated by APA and its various state affiliates. However, the APA position, as well as most state psychology licensing laws, includes provisions for the use of the title "school psychologist" (as opposed to "psychologist" or "licensed professional psychologist") with less than the doctoral level of training and without a psychology license, providing that the work is limited to school settings and is conducted under the banner of a school psychology credential from a state department/office of education.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, there are over 250 institutions of higher education in the United States that provide graduate training in school psychology at some level. Most of these institutions have specialist-level programs only, but a number (approximately 70) have both specialist and doctoral programs, with a smaller number (approximately 25) offering only doctoral programs. Although the specialist level of graduate training has become the standard and typical mode of entry into the field for most school psychologists, a substantial percentage of school psychologists have earned doctoral degrees. A recent estimate is that around 23% of school psychologists have doctoral degrees (Goforth, Farmer, Kim, Naser, et al., 2021).

Individuals who enroll in school psychology graduate training programs have a variety of undergraduate backgrounds, the most common of which are psychology and education. A generation ago, it was not uncommon for individuals entering the field of school psychology to have had backgrounds in education, perhaps some experience as teachers, and in many cases to be midcareer (i.e., in their 30s or 40s), but these background characteristics appear to be less common now. We are not aware of any studies or data that have tracked the age, undergraduate preparation, and background of students entering school psychology programs over the years, but it has been our experience that the trend has been toward students entering graduate school in their early- to mid-20s, more often than not with an undergraduate degree in psychology, and often with limited volunteer or professional experience in psychology or education. We anticipate that as the education and mental health fields become increasingly professionalized, and as higher levels of educational attainment become more common, these trends in school psychology training will continue and become even more noticeable.

## DIFFERENTIATING SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY FROM RELATED PROFESSIONS

In addition to understanding what school psychology is all about and how one becomes a school psychologist, prospective graduate students who are beginning to explore the possibility of a career in this field must also decide whether to pursue school psychology

or some closely related field. As school psychology faculty members, we visit with prospective graduate students on an ongoing basis. Although many prospective school psychologists have a clear idea of what being a school psychologist involves and how school psychology differs from other, related fields, many more do not. Most school psychology trainers have likely sat through meetings with prospective students who assumed that they were considering entering a school counseling training program, for example. Because there are differences not only in the entry-level requirements but also in the typical role and function of various fields, it is important for prospective graduate students to get a clear picture of how school psychology is both similar to and different from other fields in psychology and education.

## Related Fields in Psychology

At the doctoral level of training, there are other areas of professional psychology that overlap considerably with school psychology and that may prepare professional psychologists to work with children, adolescents, and their families. Historically, school psychology has been included with two other fields—*clinical psychology* and *counseling psychology*—as one of the three applied areas of professional psychology. Completing a doctoral program in any one of these three fields will, in part, prepare one to become a licensed professional psychologist and be eligible to work in a variety of clinic, private practice, community, and medical settings. Clinical and counseling psychology programs have not traditionally focused on schools and educational issues as school psychology has, and they do not typically prepare students to work primarily in school settings. However, many clinical and counseling psychology programs focus on working with children, adolescents, and their families and provide a path toward a predoctoral internship and career in a child-focused setting, offering assessment, intervention, and consultation services. Historically, there have been some important differences between clinical and counseling psychology, with the former field focusing more on psychological disorders and psychopathology and the latter on typical developmental and adjustment issues of life. However, these distinctions have become increasingly blurred in recent years, and today it is not uncommon to find clinical psychologists working in college counseling centers and counseling psychologists working in hospitals and community mental health clinics.

Within clinical, counseling, and school psychology, some subspecialties focusing on children, youth, and their families have emerged in recent years, and these subspecialties are usually not specific to one field of psychology. For example, just as APA has a division devoted to school psychology (Division 16), it has separate divisions devoted to child, family, and youth services (Division 37); clinical child and adolescent psychology (Division 53); and pediatric psychology (Division 54). Child and adolescent neuropsychology has also emerged as a strong subspecialty within the division of neuropsychology (Division 40). These specialty areas include doctoral-level psychologists who are graduates of school, clinical, or counseling psychology programs; have received specialty training; and have developed particular expertise and interests in the respective specialty area.

With these related psychology fields and specialty areas, school psychology shares a focus on children, youth, and their families. What makes school psychology unique among these related areas within psychology, however, is the specific focus on schools as practice settings and on educational and learning issues in addition to mental health concerns. Although some overlap exists among these areas, they all have a unique identity.

## Related Fields in Education

Because school psychology is rooted in education as well as psychology, there are professions specific to education with which we share some professional overlap. School counseling is perhaps the best known of these related educational professions. This field grew out of the "mental hygiene" and child guidance movements of the early 20th century, and its focus has evolved from vocational guidance and college placement to the promotion of a comprehensive model of student development, adjustment, and growth at all grade levels. The American School Counselor Association has been in existence since 1952 and currently has more than 27,000 members internationally. Many more school counselors than school psychologists are employed in schools. Within the United States, the national average ratio of school counselors to students is approximately 1:460 (see *https://www.schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios*) whereas the national average for school psychologists is estimated at about 1:1,440 (NASP, 2017b). In terms of differences in training and job focus between the two fields, school psychologists tend to receive more training in individual assessment methods and intervention techniques than do school counselors and have historically focused more on students with disabilities. School counselors are more likely to be assigned to work at a single school, whereas school psychologists are often itinerant and may have responsibility for multiple schools or may work on a district-wide basis. Much of this difference in site-based versus itinerant service models is related to the large differences in professional-to-student ratios.

In addition to school psychologists and school counselors, *school social workers* are also employed in public and private schools. This profession is part of the larger field of social work, and it began in the early 1900s when school social workers had the title of "visiting teachers." Today, school social workers continue to have a focus on interdisciplinary, collaborative care working with school and community personnel to best meet the needs of students. School social workers often provide a range of services, including direct mental health services as well as consultation and resource connection for children and families. (For more information on school social workers, see *https://www.socialworkers.org/practice/school-social-work* and *https://www.sswaa.org*.) It is widely understood that there are fewer school social workers than school psychologists, although an exact professional-to-student ratio is not known.

Although school counseling and school social work are the two best-known professions within education that are closely related to school psychology, there are other professional roles in schools that have much in common with our field. These other roles are not necessarily defined as separate professions but have evolved as specialty positions in education in many school systems. Special education consultants, service coordinators, behavior specialists, or consulting teachers are often employed in larger school districts and have the responsibility of working with teachers, other educators, and parents in developing appropriate educational programs for students, especially those who are placed at risk for negative outcomes or who are otherwise having difficulty in school. Such consultant or coordinator positions are often filled from the ranks of experienced and talented teachers, but sometimes they are filled by individuals with school psychology backgrounds. These roles usually involve extensive indirect intervention through consultation, and they may have a problem-solving or training focus as well. In addition, some schools hire teachers or counselors to serve as educational diagnosticians or educational assessment specialists. These types of positions include an exclusive focus on individual assessment of students with learning and behavior problems and on the surface they seem

quite similar to the role of school psychologists who are in traditional "test-and-place" assessment roles.

Although most school psychologists remain employed with that title, those who have the interest to pursue other roles within schools often find that there are opportunities for career shifts within school systems. Some school psychologists move into educational leadership positions, such as pupil personnel directors, special education administrators, and school principals. Typically, career moves of this type require the individual to obtain additional graduate-level education in order to receive an administrative credential. School psychologists who have particular expertise in research methods, statistics, and psychometrics sometimes move into district-level positions as directors of research services, directors of testing/assessment and analysis, and so forth.

## USING THIS BOOK: A VISION FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

As stated in the preface, this book is designed to provide an introduction and orientation to the field of school psychology. We especially intend for this book to be of interest to graduate students who are beginning to prepare for careers in the field of school psychology. This book is also designed to be an exploratory resource for individuals who are considering careers in school psychology, as well as those who are currently working as school psychologists and are interested in a contemporary guide to this dynamic and exciting field.

Chapter 2 of this book provides brief overviews of the historical context of the field, as well as of history and trends in American education. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the data-driven approach to the problem-solving model of school psychology—and its application within an MTSS service delivery framework—upon which this book is based. Chapters 4–7 provide a foundation for the professional practice of school psychology, focusing on cultural and linguistic diversity, training and credentialing issues, employment trends and challenges, and legal and ethical aspects of practice in this field. Chapters 8–12 detail our vision of best practice in school psychology and focus on the wide range of goals that we believe school psychologists should pursue, including assessment, prevention and intervention, facilitation of systems-level change, and involvement as a consumer and producer of research and evaluation. Chapter 13 provides some concluding comments regarding moving the field of school psychology forward and mapping our own future as professionals. Together, the 13 chapters in this book provide a comprehensive introduction to the field of school psychology.

You may have noted that we use the phrase *school psychology for the 21st century* in the title of this book. Our focus on the 21st century was a deliberate choice. In deciding to write this book, we were not interested in simply providing an overview of the history and current status of the field, which have been well documented in other sources. Rather, we were interested in promoting a forward-thinking vision of the exciting and dynamic possibilities within the field of school psychology. We believe that the field of school psychology has much to offer and that its potential is just beginning to be realized. The possibilities of this field making a strong positive impact in schools and other settings, and in the lives of children, adolescents, and their families, are simply enormous. We also recognize that there are still several barriers to achieving this vision. But we believe that through a concerted effort over time, school psychologists can individually and collectively advance the field at all levels, and in doing so, school psychology will make increasingly significant and valuable contributions to promoting

the well-being of youth, caregivers, and the communities where they live, learn, and grow together.

Although each chapter within this book is unique, they were developed through a collective vision. Some of the "big ideas" on which this book and our vision for the field of school psychology are based include the following:

- The general fields of psychology and education, as well as the specific field of school psychology, have given us rich and sometimes challenging historical precedents for the present practice of school psychology. Although it is important to have a strong understanding of these historical elements and how they have shaped the present, we agree with the premise that *the past is not necessarily the future* (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002), and we advocate that the time has come for the field of school psychology to move forward from some of the historical challenges that have limited it in realizing its full potential.

- School psychology practice should be data oriented or data driven. School psychologists should base their decisions on valid data and use effective data collection techniques to inform, monitor, and modify intervention activities (see Chapter 3).

- Within the United States, society has become increasingly diverse and pluralistic with respect to cultural backgrounds; racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities; and the languages of its citizens, and it will continue to become increasingly diverse during the 21st century. School psychologists should practice in a culturally responsive manner so that they can work appropriately and effectively with individuals and groups from a variety of backgrounds and with diverse and intersecting identities (see Chapter 4).

- School psychology has been and should continue to be primarily focused in school or other educational settings. The educational setting is a main focus of our vision and of this book. However, school psychologists have much to offer outside the context of school settings, and we encourage the practice of school psychology in a variety of settings and contexts (see Chapters 5 and 6). We also strongly encourage school psychologists to facilitate and participate in collaborative care with allied health professionals (see Chapter 10).

- Individual psychoeducational assessment of children and adolescents has been and will continue to be an important activity of school psychologists. However, individual assessment activities should do more than simply describe or diagnose problems. Rather, the most useful assessment strategies are those that are part of the problem-solving process and provide a foundation for effective interventions (see Chapter 8).

- School psychologists have historically worked with a limited segment of student populations, primarily those who have or are suspected of having disabilities and those who are otherwise placed at risk for negative outcomes in life. We believe that there will always be a need for school psychologists to focus some of their effort on the small percentage of students who have serious learning, behavioral, and social–emotional problems. We also recognize that longitudinal research points to the chronic nature of such problems and the critical need for *early* intervention/prevention if negative long-term outcomes are to be curtailed. Thus, we strongly contend that school psychologists should use their unique expertise to positively affect *all students in school settings*, not just those who have severe needs (see Chapters 3, 9–11).

- By focusing our scope of practice on *all* students within school populations, school psychologists are well positioned to promote social justice and address the educational and health disparities experienced by minoritized and marginalized youth, families, and communities (see Chapter 4).

- Although assessment activities have had and will continue to have an important place among the school psychologist's varied responsibilities, effective prevention and intervention activities—organized through an MTSS framework—should occupy a significant percentage of school psychologists' time (see Chapters 3, 9, and 10).

- Prevention and intervention activities can occur with individuals and within small groups, classrooms, entire schools, and school district or community-based contexts. School psychologists should engage in prevention and intervention activities, including consultation at each of these levels, so that a larger number of individuals may be positively influenced (see Chapters 3, 9, and 10).

- School psychologists do not typically function in isolation but instead work in consultation and collaboration with others and as part of a system. School psychologists should strive to use their expertise to develop a solid understanding of the systems in which they work and to help facilitate systems-level change as needed (see Chapter 11).

- School psychologists should be savvy consumers of research and should have the skills to engage in research and evaluation activities within their respective settings to help to advance practice (see Chapter 12).

- School psychology is a field with incredible potential for helping to solve the "big" problems facing education. And yet this potential is still largely unrealized. We believe that school psychologists should play an active, important, and essential role in this regard. This book is built on the foundation of a progressive, forward-thinking vision of school psychology, and we are optimistic that, collectively, individual school psychologists can continue to move the field forward through their efforts (see Chapter 13).

In sum, we believe school psychology is a dynamic and exciting field that has incredible—and still unrealized—potential for positively affecting education, psychology, and the lives of children, adolescents, their families, and their communities. It is our hope that this book provides a useful and engaging guide to the field of school psychology that will help to continue moving the field forward.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Individuals who are being introduced to the field of school psychology are often surprised to find that the definition of school psychology is not necessarily clear-cut and has, at times, been a point of controversy. Discuss the power of definitions and how they can shape the field of school psychology and how it is perceived.

2. During the past several decades, the characteristics of school psychologists have changed somewhat. Outline some of these changes, and describe the current characteristics of those who work in the field of school psychology.

3. Interview one or more school psychologists in your area. Find out how they entered the field; what their career trajectory has been; what their responsibilities and roles are; and how they spend a typical day, week, and month in their workplace. Ask them what they like most or find most rewarding about their work as well as what they find to be most frustrating or difficult.
4. One of the first decisions that new graduate students in school psychology make is whether to pursue a specialist-level degree or a doctoral degree. How do the two levels of training differ, and what are the costs and benefits, or pros and cons, of each?
5. Differentiate the training and roles of school psychologists at the doctoral level from that of the two other primary areas of professional psychology: clinical psychology and counseling psychology. Differentiate the training and roles of school psychologists at the specialist level from that in the fields of school counseling and school social work.





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