

July 2021

School Psychologist Services in Wilson, NC: A Successful Model

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It's a typical Friday morning in Wilson County Schools for the School Psychology Department. The school psychologists are busy discussing updates, new initiatives, and ways to overcome various challenges regarding how to best meet students' needs. There are 26 schools in the Wilson County Schools' system in rural Wilson County with a student population of approximately 10,500. Similar to many counties in North Carolina, the recommended school psychologist to student population ratio has not yet been achieved. Despite that fact, our staff of six full-time school psychologists continually press on to provide comprehensive services daily.

Critical thinking skills are truly crucial now more than ever working through the challenges of a global pandemic and its impact on our students and educational system. How do we "catch up" on our evaluations that became halted in time on March 13th with the closing of NC public schools? You think outside the box. Our school psychology department set up a Saturday testing clinic beginning in November 2020 to offer our parents an option to accommodate their schedules, as well as the various learning environments they have chosen for their children such as virtual or hybrid face to face, and to address their concerns about bringing their children to a school environment with other students and staff present. This has allowed for flexibility in the department to provide more comprehensive services during the pandemic while also attacking a daunting backlog of evaluations.

It is a deliberate and orchestrated balance daily for our school psychologists between providing specialized services such as evaluations to providing a wider array of comprehensive services at a broader systems level. Our staff actively engage in a notable variety of comprehensive services. Currently, our staff is involved with several district-wide and school initiatives. Some of our involvement includes, but is not limited to: counseling, standard treatment protocol planning, social/emotional learning and equity planning, crisis planning, assisting in transition planning for special populations, addressing school attendance, participating in specialized teams (i.e., behavior, autism, MTSS, and hearing impaired), provision of professional development to staff, and development and planning of recruitment and retention within our profession.

Our school psychologists also continue to grow through a variety of professional development opportunities provided by the North Carolina School Psychology

Association (NCSPA), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), as well as other specialized training, such as Traumatic Brain Injury certification, in addition to district-paid memberships for NCSPA. Flexibility has also been provided for other leadership opportunities regarding public education that extend even beyond Wilson County.

The crucial keys to make this balance of special education needs and other areas of comprehensive needs work effectively is truly teamwork, trust, and commitment within the school psychology department. Working together cooperatively for the greater good of the school district; having a cultivated environment of mutual trust amongst the psychologists; and having commitment amongst the psychologists in their dedication to serving our students' needs has been the recipe for *a successful model* of providing comprehensive school psychological services within Wilson County Schools.