

**Decision Item #23: ELIMINATE SELECT PSYCHOLOGIST FUNCTIONS AND REDUCE ALLOCATION ACCORDINGLY**

**Background:** The 2001-2002 budget for Student Services includes an allocation of 35.7 psychologists. As described in the budget narrative, "school psychologists promote mental health and facilitate learning through a continuum of comprehensive services to children, parents, school staff, and the larger community."

Psychologists perform the following functions:

**PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT:** Individual student assessments of cognitive ability, adaptive behavior, academic skills, social-emotional/behavioral skills, language and communication skills, sensory and perceptual-motor skills, vocational development, environmental influences.

**CONSULTATION:** Consultation with parents, staff and community providers, design and development of procedures for preventing disorders, improving educational systems/promoting mental health and learning, direct consultation with teachers on teaching strategies, participation with other education staff in planning programs.

**CRISIS INTERVENTION:** Includes support to students and staff during day to day crises and support to students, staff, and parents during identified critical incidents.

**INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING:** One to one psycho-educational intervention designed to help students cope with a given situation.

**GROUP COUNSELING:** Psycho-educational intervention designed to help students cope with a given situation.

**CASE MANAGEMENT:** Coordination of multi-disciplinary services to student, liaison with community providers, record keeping.

**AFFECTIVE EDUCATION:** Psycho-educational intervention or instruction of a curricular topic that is educational in nature: i.e. protective behaviors, depression, alcohol or other drug issues, violence.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Provision of in-service education and other staff development activities, participation in staff development, service on committees responsible to develop and plan education, research, program planning and evaluation, and supervision of school psychologists in training.

Psychologists are allocated to individual schools based on a formula that considers overall enrollment, special education enrollment, and poverty.

**Decision Item #23: ELIMINATE SELECT PSYCHOLOGIST FUNCTIONS AND REDUCE ALLOCATION ACCORDINGLY (cont.)**

**Background:** (cont.) The District produces an annual report summarizing psychologist services, based on a random sample time study. This report provides a summary of psychologists' time spent for each functional area. Using the 2000-2001 report, we identified the following allocation of FTE and costs by function:

Function	Psychologists		
	% of Time	FTE Allocation	Cost Allocation
Affective Education	6.99%	2.5	\$ 156,249
Assessment	24.71%	8.8	\$ 552,348
Consultation	25.81%	9.2	\$ 576,936
Crisic Intervention	5.83%	2.1	\$ 130,319
Case Management	14.43%	5.2	\$ 322,557
Group Counseling	3.19%	1.1	
Individual Counseling	8.59%	3.1	
Professional Development	10.55%	3.8	\$ 235,826
Total		35.7	\$ 2,235,320

Psychologist functions are also broken down into categories according to who is served. Following is that breakdown for 2000-2001:

	Affective Education	Assessment	Consultation	Crisis Intervention	Case Management	Group Counseling	Individual Counseling	Professional Development	Total
Adult Staff	0.00%	0.04%	3.58%	1.90%	0.24%	0.00%	0.30%	0.87%	6.93%
Class of students	2.47%	0.04%	0.15%	0.09%	0.07%	0.04%	0.00%	0.30%	3.16%
District-wide	0.00%	0.08%	3.62%	0.32%	0.43%	0.00%	0.00%	4.45%	8.90%
Group of students	1.50%	0.04%	1.06%	0.42%	0.26%	2.36%	0.02%	0.37%	6.03%
Individual Students	1.26%	23.11%	13.95%	2.27%	9.13%	0.24%	7.64%	0.73%	58.33%
School-wide	1.76%	1.41%	3.35%	0.84%	4.30%	0.55%	0.63%	3.84%	16.68%
Total	6.99%	24.72%	25.71%	5.84%	14.43%	3.19%	8.59%	10.56%	

The functions provided by psychologists can be divided into three categories - Health Safety functions, mandated functions and discretionary functions.

Mandated functions:

- ✓ Assessment

Health and Safety functions:

- ✓ Consultation
- ✓ Crisis Intervention
- ✓ Case management
- ✓ Group counseling
- ✓ Individual Counseling

Discretionary functions:

- ✓ Affective education
- ✓ Professional development (assume 4% is time spent developing other District staff and 6% is time spent in professional development)

**Decision Item #23: ELIMINATE SELECT PSYCHOLOGIST FUNCTIONS AND REDUCE ALLOCATION ACCORDINGLY (cont.)**

**Background:** (cont.) As the above chart depicts, almost 3.4 percent of psychologists' time is spent delivering services to staff. An additional 4 percent is spent on delivering professional development services (assuming 5.69 is spent on obtaining professional development) with an additional 7 percent spent on instruction to classes. Approximately 14.4 percent of psychologists' time is in providing instruction to students or services to staff. Based on the total expenditures of \$2.2 million, expenditures for these functions amount to approximately \$320,000.

**Expenditures:** The 2001-2002 budget includes an allocation of 35.7 psychologists, for approximately \$2.2 million for psychologists.

**Revenues:** The District receives categorical state aid reimbursing approximately 30 percent of expenditures for psychologists. The net cost of the current allocation is approximately \$1.56 million. The District also receives Medicaid revenue for psychologists' direct services to special education students. The District has only begun to bill Medicaid for these services, and no prior year actual data for this revenue is available. However, eliminating the functions identified in this item should not affect Medicaid revenue received.

**FTE:** 5.1 FTE would be eliminated, along with the identified discretionary functions.

**Anticipated Savings:** Approximately \$224,000 in savings would result if discretionary functions were eliminated and the allocation were reduced accordingly (assuming an average salary of approximately \$62,614, for expenditure reductions of \$320,000 partially offset by revenue reductions of \$96,000).

**Student Impact:** If psychologists no longer provide staff development, there may be an indirect effect on students through reduced teacher knowledge related to relevant issues. If the psychologists' role as educator were eliminated, there would be an increasing requirement for teachers to teach affective education classes. Currently, teachers and psychologists share responsibility for affective education classes. There are no data to suggest that affective courses are more effective when taught by a psychologist than when taught by a regular teacher. With the exception of positive behaviors curriculum (which is mandated), the District also has the option to discontinue affective education. However, if affective education is effective (for which no data are available), discontinue the curriculum could lead to increased student difficulties in related areas.

**Strategic Priorities:** Staff effectiveness is a strategic priority (3), and psychologists are a key component of student support (2).

**Board Priorities:** NA

**Effectiveness:** Data are not available to determine the effectiveness of staff development or affective education performed by psychologists.

**Decision Item #23: ELIMINATE SELECT PSYCHOLOGIST FUNCTIONS AND REDUCE ALLOCATION ACCORDINGLY (cont.)**

**Redundancies or Availability of the Service Elsewhere:**

Both psychologists and social workers perform some functions (including counseling). It is not possible to determine, however, whether psychologists and social workers are treating the same students. In addition, many professionals contend that the service delivery models are different, and some students may be better served by social workers, while psychologists best serve others.

**Other Considerations:** This analysis presumes that eliminating functions and the corresponding demands on psychologists' time, can lead to a reduction in overall allocation of psychologists by a corresponding amount. It should be noted, however, that there are likely operational differences in how psychologist spend their time, based on the needs of the schools to which they are assigned. Therefore, this reduction in functions and total psychologist FTE's allocated to schools should be accompanied by a reexamination of the allocation formula. For example, if a greater portion of a certain function was performed at one school, that school's allocation would be reduced more significantly than that of a school where psychologists spend more time on counseling students and parents.

Although there is no uniform national or state standard for psychologist to student ratios, the mean in Wisconsin is 1196 students per psychologist – the national mean is 2,195. The MMSD ratio is 627 students per psychologist (placing the District in the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of districts in Wisconsin<sup>6</sup>). If the allocation were reduced by 7.2 FTE, the ratio would be 765 students per psychologist, which is still above the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile for the state.

The principal survey results provide additional information on the appropriateness of psychologist allocations (prior to any adjustments). When asked to rank the importance of over 20 allocations, principals at high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools ranked psychologists as 5, 3, and 3, respectively (with one being the most important).

In analyzing the role of psychologists in providing services to staff, it should be noted that some psychologists may serve as Employee Assistance Program (EAP) representatives, and may include time spent in that function in this category. However, since any employee can serve as a representative, eliminating the function of psychologist services to staff should not affect the EAP program.

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<sup>6</sup> Data source: National Association of School Psychologists survey – results available on the web at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)