



**Washington State Association of
School Psychologists
Self-Advocacy
Toolkit**

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WSASP Guiding Principles

Mission

Uniting school psychologists to support all students through advocacy, leadership and professional development.

Vision

School psychologists are an integral and dynamic force in fostering student success.

Values

- Social Justice*
- Problem Solving
- Whole Student Focused
- Collaborative Communication
- Integrity
- Advocacy
- Courageous Leadership
- Continuous Improvement

**WSASP endorses and operates from the National Association of School Psychologists' (NASP) [definition of social justice](#)*

Land Acknowledgement

WSASP acknowledges the commitment of all Pacific Northwest Tribes to the resurgence of their traditional ways and their respect and protection of all peoples, not only those who are living, but also those who have gone before and who are yet to be born. We pay our respect to the elders both past and present and to a valued resource the Tribes have defined as their children. They are the Tribes' future. They are the future for us all. We raise our hands to all sovereign Tribes who have stewarded these beautiful lands throughout the generations. We ask each of you to show gratitude to the Tribal Nations where you are currently located.

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Welcome to WSASP's Self Advocacy Toolkit!

Your Government and Public Relations (GPR) Committee has compiled our favorite and most effective tools to promote the role of school psychologist in our day-to-day work. The information will provide reminders for communication essentials, develop an advocacy message, and provide a framework for implementing change, no matter how big or small.

WSASP recognizes and thanks the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) for their ongoing professional and legislative advocacy training. Much of this content was received at NASP's Public Policy Institute (PPI) over several years. We would like to specifically acknowledge and thank Kathy Cowan, NASP Communications Director; Anastasia Skalski, Ph.D., NASP Director of Public Policy; and Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, Ph.D, NASP Director of Government Relations.

We can all learn from each other, so please share your advocating successes with us! Share on the WSASP Facebook Page or in the WSASP Facebook Group, tag us on Twitter (@wsasp_media), or send an email to gpr@wsasp.org.

Happy advocating!

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Know What You Want & Finding Your Opportunity to Act

Your first step in advocacy is knowing your vision and mission. What do you care about? What needs to change? Why should others matter? Being able to articulate your 'ask' is a critical foundation for the next steps in self-advocacy.

Examples:

- Moving to online protocol administration
- Obtaining a larger office space
- Finding time to do small group or individual SEL interventions
- Participating in MTSS or PBIS teams

Once you have your 'ask,' start looking for opportunities to speak up. Does your school building or district have a relevant strategic plan or theme for the year? Is your department making changes in their budget or policy? Finding a way to connect your 'ask' with larger actions can help to make it a reality, and foster buy-in from others.

Examples:

- A School Improvement Plan goal to reduce discipline referrals by 8% could be linked to providing SEL interventions
- Dyslexia screening implementation could be linked to participating in building MTSS team

Identifying and Building Strategic Relationships

Key decision-makers are folks who have significant control/influence over policy, practice, priorities, resource allocation, and decision making. They may be someone that you already know and have an ongoing relationship with, or they may be someone new to you. Key decision-makers can include other practitioners or professionals, elected officials, and advocates.

Examples:

- If your 'ask' is at the district level, it is more important that you have people that understand the role of the school board and the superintendent, and their specific ability to direct school policy.
- If your 'ask' is at the building level, understand the different committees, office staff, or administrators that may influence the outcome.

Stakeholders are folks who maybe not have decision-making power, but will still be impacted by the outcome. You may consider building strategic relationships with internal and external stakeholders, such as teachers and other student support personnel, or parents, community organizations, or even the media.

Relationships with key decision-makers and stakeholders may come from organic and collegial shared experiences, or through planning and organization as part of a coalition. Once you establish a relationship, it is useful to keep lines of communication open with others to support future collaboration efforts in the future.

Gathering Data

Every good school psychologist knows the importance of collecting data when communicating a need, or identifying a problem to solve! The kind of data that you'll need to collect will depend on your 'referral concern,' just as with all other things we do in our work. Below is a list of resources to help you locate data to support your "ask."

State Data

[Annie E. Casey Foundation: Kids Count Data Center](#)

- Provides state-level statistics for many child-related topic or concerns
- Easy to navigate and visually appealing

[US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights: Civil Rights Data Collection](#)

- Provides state, district, and school-level statistics for key social justice issues
- Provides trend analysis in student characteristic data
- Data is typically four to five years old

District Data

With OSPI's recent website redesign, more data has been made available for public viewing, and much easier to find! All of the pages below are accessible from the [Data and Reporting Website](#).

[Washington State Report Card](#)

- Provides district or school demographics and performance

[OSPI Data Portal](#)

- Provides data about PreK-12 students, transportation, school facilities, school accountability, educators, district finances, and school directory and contact information

[OSPI Special Education Data Collection](#)

- Washington Annual Performance Reports
- District Data Profiles
- Data Collection Summaries (including LRE data, dispute resolution summaries, disciplinary incidents of students with IEPs, special education personnel FTE, and more!)

School Building Data

School building data can usually be found easily by checking your district or school building website.

Examples:

- School Improvement Plan goals
- District or building resolutions or actions
- Board member input at meetings (check minutes)

Individual Data

It is most likely that data directly related to your role will need to be kept by you. Maintaining data for the work you do over time can demonstrate the importance of your role, and support your “ask.”

Examples:

- Maintain a spreadsheet of annual evaluations and general education ratios
- Documenting types of evaluations and assessments completed (ie. number of academic achievement assessments, FBAs)
- Complete time sampling for different types of work completed (ie. testing, report writing, copying/faxing)
- Pre- and post-assessments for interventions

Communication Essentials

Effective Message Structure

It is recommended that you stick to three talking points during advocacy work. From a neuropsychology point of view, this helps to ensure that the audience will remember all of your take-away points! The three talking points that you should always include are:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Proposing an action or solution (your “ask”)
3. Identify the benefit of implementing your “ask”

Aligning or framing your message with district or building objectives, verbiage, themes, etc. can help make your point more meaningful. Be sure to keep students at the center of your message, and avoid acronyms or technical language when possible. Using social math to communicate statistics can make the information easier to understand and more powerful and relevant to your audience.

Example:

- Instead of 19% of students, say “about one in five students”

- Instead of one school psychologist to 1500 students, say “three times the national recommendation”

Communicating with Power

Promoting the role of school psychologist is not self-absorbed, and is not selfish! School psychologists are in the business of service to our youth, and **advocating for ourselves is putting our students first**. When engaging in verbal and written communication, it is important to avoid behaviors and phrases that may inadvertently undermine the message, especially in situations where you might feel anxious or nervous.

Examples to Avoid:

- Saying “Just” or “Actually”
- Saying “Kind of” “a little bit” or “Almost”
- Apologizing
- Checking for understanding (ie. “Does that make sense?”)
- Disclaimers and qualifying phrases (ie. “I’m no expert, but..”)
- Substituting a question for a statement

Engaging with Stakeholders and Decision-Makers

Perhaps the easiest way to think of engaging with stakeholders and decision-makers is using a tiered model:



Universal and Proactive Strategies

Proactive communication on a continuing basis will help to increase your visibility with staff, parents, and administrators, and provides an opportunity for you to be more involved and accessible. By providing information and resources to your education community, you are seen as a consistent and effective resource, which will be of benefit later on.

Examples:

- Share a short article in a school newsletter
- Provide parent handouts in the school office
- Create a staff webpage
- Provide content for your school's website or social media accounts
- Present at staff meetings
- Present to the school board

[National School Psychology Week \(NSPW\)](#), the second week in November, is a great opportunity to try some of these strategies. NASP provides several templates and resources on their website that can be used for NSPW, but throughout the year as well. The different NASP awards, including [Possibilities in Action Partner Program](#) and [Student POWER Award](#) are great tools to build connections with students, stakeholders, and key decision-makers.

Strategic and Targeted Strategies

Strategic or targeted strategies become important when we have a specific need. Just like with tiered models we use for student services, our targeted communication strategy will be more successful when we have already provided universal communication about our role and effectiveness as school psychologists. Our knowledge of systems, program evaluation, and data-based decision making skills can be used to help solve others' problems at this state.

Examples:

- Protecting school psychologist role or positions
- Program support or implementation
- Reallocation of funding for new or expanded programs

Crisis Strategies

Crisis communication is sensitive and requires an immediate message and immediate response. Stakeholders and key decision-makers need to know who you are and why you matter for action requests and crisis management communications to matter to them. Effective universal and targeted communication strategies previously will help support crisis communications.

During a crisis situation, be sure to refocus on your message development, establish a clear Problem/Action/Benefit message to communicate, and look for ways to make your message as relevant to your audience as possible.

Examples:

- Proposed cuts to school psychologist positions
- Legislative crisis
- School or community crisis

Social Media

Social media can be a powerful professional tool for a school psychologist to use. Social media can provide a direct means of communication to your families and communities, as well as connection with other school psychologists. Many schools and districts also use social media as a professional tool; if you are uncomfortable with your own social media presence, you may wish to provide content for their social media accounts.

Examples:

- Send a weekly link or resource from NASP (or other reputable sources) for a school building's Facebook page. Make it a feature (ie. School Psych Thursday, or Tips From the School Psychologist)
- 'Like' or 'Follow' other school psychologists or school psychology associations (like WSASP!)
- Follow key decision-makers and stakeholders to share ideas, learn about their concerns, and convey key ideas about how school psychologists support students
- Tag others and use hashtags to create connections (ie. #NASPadvocates #WSASPadvocatestoo #waedu #waleg)