5-2024

The Professional Roles and Functions of School Psychologists in Alternative vs Traditional Education

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THE PROFESSIONAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN ALTERNATIVE VS TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

A Dissertation Presented
by
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Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2024

School Psychology Program

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ABSTRACT

THE PROFESSIONAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN ALTERNATIVE VS TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

May 2024

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Alternative Education Settings (AES) are unique environments that serve students whose educational and/or social-emotional needs are not being met in traditional schools. Students frequently enter AES with a range of mental health diagnoses, previous traumas, and behavioral/academic challenges. AES also serve many students from systemically marginalized and oppressed backgrounds, who are placed in these settings at higher rates than privileged peers. Considering these patterns, it becomes critical that AES provide effective student support, rather than serve simply to contain students based on disciplinary factors and convenience.

School psychologists, with training in mental health and education, are well-positioned to provide these supports, but little is known about the professional roles and responsibilities of school psychologists within AES. The current study surveyed 422 school

psychologists, 56 from AES and 365 from traditional school settings, regarding their frequency of engagement in consultation, intervention, assessment, and social justice activities. T-tests were conducted to examine differences in job functions across settings.

Overall, school psychologists reported engaging in consultation activities more often than any other practice. Direct intervention activities were reported least often overall. Comparisons between AES and traditional settings indicated that school psychologists in AES engaged in assessment activities significantly less often than those in traditional settings. There were no significant differences in how often school psychologists engaged in consultation, direct intervention, or social justice activities across settings. These findings add to the current literature on school psychology and alternative education, of which there is relatively little. Findings indicate that assessment may be relatively less emphasized in alternative education settings, suggesting that those working in AES may wish to seek training that also emphasizes other practice domains or activities (e.g., counseling approaches). Findings also suggest that more emphasis is needed on social justice work across the entire field. Finally, despite differences, many similarities were noted between alternative and traditional settings. Thus, given the comprehensive nature of school psychology graduate training, school psychologists may already be well-equipped to provide services in alternative settings. Additional training opportunities specific to individual work settings, rather than alternative settings broadly, may be more desirable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am immensely grateful for my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Stacy Bender, for her guidance and continuous support, throughout this dissertation project and my many years at UMB. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Brian Daniels and Dr. Caroline Fernandes, who provided instrumental support, feedback, and reassurance throughout the process. This accomplishment would not have been possible without all of you, and I cannot express enough appreciation.

I would also like to thank my doctoral cohort, who I've been lucky to work alongside for the past four years. Thank you for being such wonderful peers, colleagues, and friends. You have all motivated me to learn and grow as a person, scholar, and practitioner, and have been such an important source of support both within and outside of the program.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my father, sister, and brother for a lifetime of continued love, patience, and encouragement as I navigate graduate school and life. Thank you for reading my work (or at least pretending to), giving advice, listening to me complain, and helping inspire me to achieve more than I thought possible. I would not be here today without all you have done for me.

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, students experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties within traditional K-12 school environments are placed in alternative education settings (AES), or school settings designed to serve students whose needs are not met within traditional school environments (Carver et al., 2010; Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Lehr et al., 2009). These difficulties are not solely academic in nature; the most common criteria for entry into alternative schools are chronic, severe, or unsafe behavioral concerns, with schools frequently citing disruption, suspension, and expulsion as reasons for alternative placements (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr et al, 2009). Alternative schools also serve high numbers of students with social, emotional, and/or behavioral (SEB) challenges, who may struggle with behaviors and emotions that are difficult for traditional schools to support (Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Lehr et al., 2009). These SEB difficulties are often linked to mental health diagnoses such as mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and/or suicide attempts (Nowicki, 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2014). Furthermore, a high number of students in alternative settings report experiencing at least one trauma, including physical and sexual victimization, exposure to violence, neglect, and caregiver loss or disruption, with many reporting multiple traumas (Charak et al., 2019; Nowicki, 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2014). Students placed in alternative education with complex SEB profiles stand to benefit

substantially from specialized mental health services that provide intensive support and facilitate the eventual goal of transition back to traditional educational settings.

School psychologists are uniquely positioned to help provide mental health services in alternative education settings. Their professional training "transects mental health and education, ...making school psychologists an invaluable asset to alternative programs, particularly with respect to triaging, assessing, and collaboratively treating youth" (Goldenson, 2011, p. 8). School psychologists are qualified to provide direct services to students, including assessment, progress monitoring, and individual and group counseling to address SEB challenges that contribute to alternative placement. In addition, school psychologists are trained to provide indirect support through intervention planning, program evaluation, and consultation at both individual and systems levels (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). These services that school psychologists provide can help ensure that alternative placements help students make educational and behavioral progress, rather than serve as "dumping grounds" for student populations already systemically exposed to additional harm (Free, 2017).

However, relatively little is known about the prevalence of school psychologists in alternative education settings, as well as the roles and functions they perform. Although most often found practicing in traditional public schools, school psychologists are expanding their work in non-traditional practice settings, including private school placements (e.g., Goforth et al., 2021; McNamara et al., 2019), and other intensive settings where education is delivered, such as residential treatment and hospital settings (Mautone et al., 2019). In a

survey of alternative education administrators, Lehr and colleagues (2009) found little information on which mental health providers (of any type) are available in alternative school settings and to what degree they are on-site in alternative settings. In other surveys, school psychologists reported spending a relatively small amount of time working in "private schools," but this category likely includes schools beyond the scope of alternative education. This survey was, furthermore, unable to compare differences in roles and responsibilities of school psychologists across settings (McNamara et al., 2019). Based on this limited research, it is difficult to know what role school psychologists play in supporting youth in alternative settings and how their roles might differ from work in traditional education settings. A clear picture of role differences is crucial for providing graduate training and professional development opportunities, especially given that school psychologists' roles are expanding beyond public schools (McNamara et al., 2019). This development of additional roles and a push for employment beyond public schools will help school psychologists better meet their students' needs, including those at alternative schools.

In the United States, AES are rapidly changing and evolving based on special education laws, school discipline policies, and increasing student social-emotional needs, contributing to wide variation in what is considered an AES. There is also variability in the demographics and characteristics of students who are educated in alternative settings, although there are troubling patterns of which demographic groups of students are most represented in alternative school populations. These students would often benefit from structured mental health supports. School psychologists are well-positioned to provide services based on their expertise in domains related to both education and mental health. The

following sections will review literature related to the historical and current state of alternative education, the student populations of alternative education settings, best practices for supporting student needs in alternative education, and how school psychologists can provide services within alternative education settings, ultimately highlighting the gaps in the current understanding of how school psychologists are practicing within AES.

History of Alternative Education Settings

Alternative education settings exploded in popularity during the 1960s and 70s, after the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) permitted the funding of education settings outside of the traditional K-12 environment (Kumm et al., 2020; Tissington, 2006). The signing of ESEA was intended to ensure that all students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, had equal access to education, and allowed for federal funding of alternative education as a method of preventing school failure. During this time, families and educators alike sought alternative settings that were more inclusive, more experimental, and more equitable. These included options such as Freedom Schools, created by marginalized groups in response to the racially oppressive public education system, and the Free School Movement, which created schools where students were encouraged to explore their own educational goals based on curiosity (Lange et al., 2002). Unfortunately, the early idealism of the alternative school movement was short lived, as alternative education became increasingly narrow in scope. Beginning in the 1980s, alternative education saw a marked shift toward schools focused on academic remediation or behavioral disruption, rather than a focus on providing innovative and exciting curriculum (Lange et al., 2002; Tissington, 2006).

The shift in focus and continued increase in the number of students served in alternative education settings was fueled by a variety of contextual factors at the societal level. For one, updated special education laws, such as the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; US Department of Education, 2004), mandated the inclusion of many students with individualized learning needs, leading some educators and families to seek specialized settings to meet these needs. Other factors included the increase in suspensions and expulsions resulting from zero-tolerance policies, which mandate predetermined punitive and exclusionary consequences in response to specific behaviors such as fighting, weapons possession, and drug use (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Zero-tolerance policies left many students unable to return to their traditional school environments. These factors, among others, highlighted the necessity of creating alternative settings for the education of students who, for various reasons, were not supported in their traditional K-12 setting.

Current estimates of the number of students served in alternative education and number of alternative schools available across the United States are either unavailable or difficult to determine. A 2010 report found over 10,000 alternative schools nationwide, serving over 600,000 students at that time (Carver, 2010). This number appears to have dropped since then, with more recent estimates falling to only 369,000 students attending academic or disciplinary alternative schools in the 2015-2016 school year (Nowicki, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics reported 8,845 schools falling outside of the "regular" type category (including special education schools, vocational education, and alternative education; NCES, 2020), though it is unlikely that these statistics capture the true

number of alternative education settings and students served. There are various reasons behind why these results may be inaccurate, including broad variation in what is considered an AES, the high mobility of students, and lack of available data on some types of alternative education (e.g., residential programs).

Contemporary Perspectives and Definitions of AES

Despite, or perhaps because of, the rise in popularity of alternative education, there is considerable variety in what is considered an "alternative education setting." The United States Department of Education (2002, p. 55) defines alternative education very broadly as "public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs." However, as most responsibilities regarding the education of youth are left to individual states, each state is also permitted flexibility in defining and developing their own alternative education programs, leading to predictable variation in who is served, where they are served, and what services are provided (Porowski et al., 2014). Despite variation, alternative educational settings are commonly conceptualized as schools that "serve students who are at risk for school failure within the traditional education system," particularly those students perceived as having behavioral challenges (Lehr et al., 2009, p. 19; Porowski, 2014; Smith & Thomson, 2014). These alternative settings are "designed to provide specialized instruction to students who require more

intensive supports than can be offered in a traditional school" (Griffiths et al., 2019, p. 1495), in which students can end up either by choice or mandatory placement (Lehr et al., 2009).

Given that this description is still quite broad, alternative settings are often further categorized by either the student populations they serve or the purpose of the school. For instance, Raywid (1995) described alternative settings as falling into three primary categories based on the goal of the school: academic or choice-based programs to assist in credit recovery; disciplinary settings for students who have been expelled, suspended, or are currently incarcerated; and therapeutic settings to help address social, emotional, and/or behavioral concerns of students. Raywid (1999) later revised this classification into three broad types of alternative schools based on whether they aimed to change the student, change the school, or change the education system. Other authors classify alternative education settings into different categories such as self-contained alternative schools, day treatment and residential schools, alternative to expulsion disciplinary schools, and juvenile corrective schools (e.g., Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Kumm et al., 2020). Definitions of alternative education settings also vary in whether they include or exclude specialized settings that serve only students with disabilities, and whether they include internal alternative programs (i.e., alternative programs contained within a traditional school) or solely alternative schools that function separately (i.e., separate buildings). In practice, the lines between these types of alternative settings and programs are often blurred, as schools support a wide variety of needs and students in a variety of situations.

For the purposes of this study, alternative education settings are conceptualized consistent with Griffith and colleagues' (2019) description of alternative settings as designed to provide students with "more intensive support than can be offered in a traditional school" (p. 1495) in order to prevent school failure (Lehr et al., 2009; Porowski et al., 2014). Conceptually, this designation includes both internal (i.e., alternative programs housed within traditional schools) and external alternative education settings (i.e., off-site alternative schools), as well as those designed to serve solely students with disabilities, provided they are designed to serve students who may experience school failure as a result of inadequate supports. This excludes other types of non-traditional education settings with different goals (e.g., gifted programs, charter schools, religious schools). This project will explore alternative education settings across three primary types of alternative schools, including instruction focused, voluntary alternative settings (e.g., credit recovery programs), disciplinary schools (e.g., education provided in juvenile justice settings), and therapeutic schools (e.g., educational programs providing counseling services; Aron, 2006; Caroleo, 2014; Foley & Pang, 2006).

Characteristics of Students Attending Alternative Schools

The wide array of alternative schools across the United States, unsurprisingly, serve a variety of students. Despite the variability, there are patterns in what kinds of students are typically served within alternative education settings, compared to the student populations of traditional education settings. The following section will review the characteristics of students who are often placed in alternative education settings, including the demographics

of student populations, historic and current social-emotional challenges, and common processes for placement.

Demographic Patterns

Research has consistently demonstrated that there are demographic patterns in which students attend or are placed in alternative education settings. For instance, recent systematic reviews of research reported racial and/or ethnically marginalized students frequently made up more than 50% of student populations; some of the student populations were described as over 90% ethnic and/or racial minorities (Ballard & Bender, 2021; Johnson et al., 2012). Perzigian and colleagues (2017) found that there were statistically significant racial and/or ethnic differences across different types of education settings, with Black or African American students and Latinx students being disproportionately enrolled in behavior-focused and academic remediation alternative settings. Similarly, a recent government report (Nowicki et al., 2019) found that Black and Latinx students were overrepresented in alternative education settings, and nearly 75% of students who transferred to alternative schools during the 2015-2016 school year were Black or Latinx. This research clearly suggests that students from racially and ethnically marginalized backgrounds are systematically attending AES at higher rates than their White peers.

In addition, students from low-income/economically marginalized (LIEM) backgrounds are also represented in higher numbers within alternative education settings. The reviews noted above found that research conducted in alternative education settings reported a high number of students from economically marginalized backgrounds, as measured by free or reduced lunch status (Ballard & Bender, 2021; Johnson et al., 2012). Henderson and

colleagues (2019) found that students in alternative education were more likely to have non-employed caregivers than students in traditional schools, resulting in household socio-economic instability. It appears that alternative education settings are likely serving higher numbers of students facing economic hardship than traditional education environments.

Another consistent pattern is the overrepresentation of students with special education disabilities in alternative education settings. Nowicki and colleagues (2019) found that boys with disabilities were overrepresented by 10% in disciplinary alternative schools (and by nearly 15% in juvenile justice education settings), compared to their representation in traditional schools. In particular, students classified as having an emotional disability (as defined under special education law) are disproportionately represented within alternative education enrollment numbers, particularly within behavior-focused alternative settings (Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Kumm et al., 2020; Perzigian et al., 2017). Other commonly served categories include students classified with Learning Disabilities (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia) and Other Health Impairment (e.g., Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder; Perzigian et al., 2017). Many alternative settings are explicitly designed to serve students with educational disabilities, such as self-contained programs for students with emotional disabilities or autism; thus, the schools serve solely those populations. Students with disabilities are entitled to high-quality special education services and to be educated in the least restrictive environment possible (U.S. DOE, 2004), making it important that alternative schools ensure service standards comply with special education law to prevent further marginalization.

Although these demographic factors are described separately in the previous paragraphs as being overrepresented in alternative education, the reality is these demographic factors are inextricably linked. Students of color, particularly Black students, are more likely to receive special education services, especially under the category of emotional disability, as are students from lower SES backgrounds (Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). Students of color and students with disabilities are also more likely to be economically marginalized (Drake & Rank, 2009; Hughes, 2013). This intersectionality, or the overlapping effects of interlocking systems of identity-based discrimination and oppression (Crenshaw, 1990), means that alternative schools likely serve students experiencing the combined oppressions of racism, classism, and ableism simultaneously as they attempt to navigate their education. This navigation can become even more difficult in the context of trauma and mental health challenges experienced by many students in alternative education settings, described below.

Mental Health of Students in Alternative Education

Research has shown that students placed in alternative education settings are likely to have experienced historical traumas that make them vulnerable to social-emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties. In one report describing visits to seven different alternative schools, each school described high rates of trauma experienced by their student populations, including family loss, sexual abuse, exposure to violence, and/or foster care placement (Nowicki et al., 2019). Other research suggests a clear link between restrictive placements and childhood trauma. One study found that 94% of youth placed in juvenile justice facilities (which often double as disciplinary alternative education settings) reported at

least one trauma—the average number reported was 5.4 (Rosenberg et al., 2014). Another similar study found that nearly all justice-involved youth reported experiencing adversity, with almost 20% reporting multiple traumas (Charak et al., 2019). A study of youth receiving their education in a residential treatment setting reported that all had experienced exposure to child abuse and neglect (Day et al., 2017). These traumatic experiences are often linked to higher rates of mental health diagnoses. Nowicki et al. (2019) reported that mood disorders, PTSD, suicide attempts, and other mental health disorders were common in the alternative schools within their sample. Rosenberg and colleagues (2014) found that nearly half of students educated in a juvenile justice facility reported diagnoses of PTSD or depression (47.5% and 49.4%, respectively).

Previous research also suggests that students in alternative education settings display higher rates of health risk behaviors, such as substance use and abuse. Studies have found that students were more likely to be considered moderate or high substance users compared to their counterparts in traditional settings (Henderson et al., 2019; Johnson et al.; 2019; Johnson et al., 2013). Students in alternative education have also been found to engage in higher rates of sexual risk taking, including earlier sexual activity and less protection use, than peers attending traditional school settings (Henderson et al., 2019; Johnson et al.; 2019). Given this, students are more susceptible to negative health outcomes related to these substance use and sexual risk-taking behaviors (Johnson et al., 2012; Sussman et al., 2014).

The social-emotional challenges noted above are often significant contributors to why students are first placed in alternative education settings. Incidents resulting in alternative

placement tend to be highly severe, chronic, or unsafe. In a national survey of school districts, schools most commonly reported transferring students to alternative settings based on fights, alcohol/drugs use or possession, disruptive verbal behavior, academic failure, chronic truancy, and/or weapons possession (Carver et al., 2010). In the majority of cases, these challenging behaviors have been reported by schools to be unresponsive to interventions within the traditional education setting, leading to a recommendation for alternative placement from an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or special education team, a juvenile court, or social services (Kumm et al., 2020; Yu & Monteiro et al., 2020). Given these complex social-emotional needs, it is important for students to receive adequate supports that help facilitate success; however, there is a lack of knowledge related to how students are supported, and what role school psychologists play in providing these supports.

Supporting Students in Alternative Education

As noted above, students frequently enter alternative education settings with a broad range of educational disabilities, mental health diagnoses, previous traumas, and behavioral challenges. Alternative education settings also serve many students from systemically marginalized and oppressed backgrounds, who are placed in these settings at higher rates than their privileged peers. Considering these patterns, it becomes critical that alternative education settings are structured in ways that provide effective student support, rather than serve as settings that simply contain students based on disciplinary factors and convenience (Hoge & Rubenstein-Avila, 2014) and act as “one of the unacknowledged mechanisms through which schools perpetuate inequality” (Free, 2017, p. 503).

However, evidence for the effectiveness of alternative education settings is mixed. To help support students in alternative education settings, and ensure that students are supported rather than harmed, a variety of researchers and organizations have compiled best-practice recommendations for serving students within alternative education settings. The research exploring the efficacy of alternative education settings is outlined below, followed by a description of the best practice recommendations and the research regarding the frequency and efficacy of recommendation implementation.

Alternative Education as Intervention

Students who attend alternative schools are frequently placed there under the assumption that these settings will help improve outcomes, behavior, and/or provide the necessary supports for academic success. Although the philosophical assumptions behind alternative schools are different across the various types of settings (e.g., disciplinary vs therapeutic), the general goal is to provide environments which help address the challenges that resulted in alternative placement and increase students' adaptive functioning. However, it is unclear the degree to which alternative schools are accomplishing these goals, if they are effective in improving student outcomes, and if school psychologists are playing a role in addressing these concerns.

The efficacy of alternative placement as an intervention for improving student outcomes appears to vary based on the type of setting examined, and which outcomes are measured. Studies of behavior focused alternative middle and high schools found that students within alternative settings performed significantly lower on standardized reading

exams, had lower attendance, and earned fewer credits compared to a matched sample from traditional schools. However, both studies also found that students attending behavior focused alternative schools earned fewer office discipline referrals, and were not suspended significantly more often, despite more challenging behavior (Afacan et al., 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2016). An older meta-analysis of alternative education schools (Cox et al., 1995) found small effects on academic performance, school attitudes, and self-esteem, but no effect on "delinquency." A more recent meta-analysis of the efficacy of disciplinary alternative settings found no significant improvements in disciplinary sanctions, academic performance, and truancy (Novak, 2018). These studies convey mixed results and are limited in number, indicating that more robust research is needed in examining the effect of alternative placement on student outcomes. Ultimately, these findings also suggest it is likely that alternative education settings should be doing more to facilitate positive outcomes.

Other research suggests that positive outcomes may depend more on the evidence-based practices implemented within the alternative setting, rather than the overall setting itself. Behavioral interventions implemented in alternative education settings have been found to have at least moderate effects on behavioral and emotional outcomes (Aspiranti et al., 2021). Effective interventions across previous research have included interdependent group contingencies (Hawkins et al., 2017), social skills instruction (Samalot-Rivera & Porretta, 2013), and self-monitoring (Caldwell & Joseph, 2012), among others. These promising results suggest that alternative education settings have the potential to implement high quality, evidence-based interventions to support their students emotional and behavioral health, which can help address the challenges experienced by many students in attendance.

Best Practice Recommendations

Broadly speaking, the factors described above, including challenges with academics, mental health, behavior, and systemic marginalization, suggest that students in alternative education could benefit from access to structured, evidence-based practices and supports within their education environments (Gagnon & Barber, 2015). These supports and interventions are often more intensive than those provided in traditional education settings and have been shown to be effective in increasing positive outcomes. However, it may be difficult for schools to know which supports and interventions are most important and effective, and how to develop systems-level structures that help organize these supports.

To help this process, a variety of research and guidelines exist that outline "best practices" for use within alternative education settings (See Table 1). Among these, Tobin and Sprague (2000) recommended that alternative schools have a low student-teacher ratio; have highly structured classrooms with behavioral classroom management; positive behavior management; adult mentors at school; individual behavioral interventions based on functional behavioral assessment; social skills instruction; high-quality academic instruction; and involvement of families. These eight core recommendations, which were based on a review of evidence-based practices for supporting students with behavioral difficulties, have continued to provide the foundation of alternative education best practices and are seen as crucial to ensuring positive student outcomes.

Table 1
Best Practice Recommendations for Alternative Education

Recommendation	Tobin & Sprague (2000)	Guntherson et al. (2011)	McGee & Lin (2017)	NAEA (2018)
Low student/teacher ratio	X		X	
Highly structured classrooms with behavioral classroom management	X		X	
Positive behavior management/positive climate/PBIS	X		X	X
Adult mentors at school	X	X	X	
Individualized interventions and learning plans	X	X	X	X
Social Skills Instruction	X		X	
High-quality academic instruction	X	X	X	X
Family Involvement	X	X	X	X
Data-based decision making and assessment/evaluation		X	X	X
Strong Vision and Mission				X
Competent, qualified, and passionate staff and leadership		X		X
Transition Planning and Support				X
Collaboration		X	X	X
School counseling/social work				X
Digital and virtual learning				X
Consistent policies and procedures				X

Other authors have expanded or re-organized these best practices to help guide alternative education settings in how to support student success. McGee & Lin (2017) organized the eight core recommendations into a multi-dimensional framework that includes four components: precondition, which focuses on the process of preparing the learning environment (e.g., small class size, structured behavior supports); planning, which focuses on

collaboration and effective teaching (e.g., social skills instruction and high quality academic instruction); delivery, which focuses on individualized interventions (i.e., positive behavior management, functional behavior assessments); and collaboration, which focuses on working together to ensure progress (i.e., adult mentors, family involvement). At the center of this framework lies data-based decision making, which informs alternative education programming through the collaboration of stakeholders and continuous evaluation of student progress. As noted by other authors (Nelson et al., 2009; Flower et al. 2011), these best practices can also be organized and implemented within the multi-tiered framework of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, helping to provide a continuum of social, emotional, and behavioral supports to students in alternative education settings.

In an international literature review examining effective alternative education programs, Guntherson and colleagues (2011) recommended that effective alternative education program should be: based on trusting caring relationships, effective at assessing needs of students, person-centered, purposeful (i.e., outcomes-focused), personalized and appropriate, flexible and accessible, staffed with skilled and trained personnel, monitored and assessed, and supported by the wider family and community. Incorporating many similar recommendations, the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2018) released an updated version of the Exemplary Practices in 2018, which outline standards of quality and program evaluation for alternative programs across the United States. This guide provides recommendations based on research-based, field-tested best practices to help guide alternative education settings in providing the best services possible to the students across fifteen topic areas: vision and mission, leadership, climate and culture, staffing and

professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transitional planning and support, family/caregiver involvement, collaboration, program evaluation, school counseling, school social work, digital and virtual learning, policies and procedures, and non-traditional education plans. Within each of these topic areas, the Exemplary Practices describe several indicators of quality programming that alternative education settings can strive to incorporate. By meeting these standards, alternative education settings can better support the unique needs of their students.

Despite the numerous guidelines available, it is unclear how often or how effectively these supports are being utilized within alternative settings. A review of research from alternative settings (Flower et al., 2011) found that relatively few schools were implementing any of Tobin & Sprague's (2000) best practices. The highest number of recommendations implemented in any setting was four, ranging from one to four. Ten of the included articles did not describe implementing *any* of the best practice recommendations. The most frequently implemented best practice was a low student-to-teacher ratio, with highly structured classroom management and positive behavioral supports also being mentioned relatively frequently. Additionally, it is not always clear "*how* or *why* these characteristics make [Alternative Education Programs] successful" (Guntherson et al., pg. 10) and what impact they have on student outcomes. Overall, there is limited research available evaluating the implementation of best practice recommendations in alternative education settings.

Notably, the role of school psychologists in implementing these guidelines is overlooked, despite some guidelines acknowledging the importance of other types of mental

health professionals in implementing best practices. However, many of these best practice recommendations can be directly supported by school psychologists working within alternative education settings. For instance, school psychologists receive extensive training in collaboration and consultation, which is well aligned with the recommendation of family-school collaboration (NASP, 2020a; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). School psychologists also receive extensive training in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), data-based decision making, and behavioral and academic interventions, each of which is recommended across numerous best practice guidelines (McGee & Lin, 2017; NASP, 2020a). Given the fit between school psychologists' skills and the best practice guidelines for alternative education settings, it appears that school psychologists would be a good fit to support students' and families' needs in these settings and help facilitate the transition process when necessary.

School Psychology and Alternative Education

Clearly, students served in alternative education settings stand to benefit substantially from structured mental health and academic supports within their school environments, and there are a variety of ways that these supports can be provided according to guidance in the field. However, it remains unclear who provides these services, how often, and how these supports are structured. School psychologists, based on their training in assessment, intervention, and consultation, are well prepared to translate and implement best practice guidelines (e.g., McGee & Lin, 2014; NAEA, 2018; Tobin & Sprague, 2000) to help support students within alternative settings. In addition, school psychologists' training in advocacy and focus on social justice makes them valuable in supporting students who are systemically marginalized and face historical and current mental health challenges, particularly when

considering or placing a student in an alternative education setting (Diaz et al. 2023). Described below are the general domains and activities in which school psychologists are trained and qualified and how their training can help implement best practice recommendations for supporting students in alternative education.

School Psychology Domains of Practice

In recent decades, the field of school psychology has emphasized the broadening and expansion of practice far beyond the traditional role of special education evaluator and interventionist (Fagan, 2014). The most current Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services (i.e., practice model), released by the National Association of School Psychologists (2020a), outlines 10 domains of practice that are considered the "core components" of services provided by school psychologists. Of these 10 domains, two permeate all services (data-based decision making, consultation and collaboration), two involve student-level direct services (academic interventions and supports, mental and behavioral health services), three involve systems-level indirect services (family, school, and community collaboration, services to promote safe and supportive schools, school-wide practices to promote learning), and three form the foundation of service delivery (legal, ethical, and professional practice, research and evidence-based practice, and equitable practices for diverse populations; NASP, 2020a). Clearly the scope of school psychological services has the potential to encompass far more than the assessment of students referred for special education services.

Broadly speaking, the services provided by school psychologists, within these ten domains, are often divided into three broader categories of service: consultation, intervention, and assessment. A fourth category, social justice and advocacy, which is embedded throughout the other three categories, has also been increasingly recognized as critical to the role of a school psychologist (Ballard et al., 2021; Oyen et al., 2020). Together, these form the primary areas of professional practice within school psychology.

Consultation and Collaboration. Consultation in the field of school psychology is defined as: "a process for providing psychological and education services in which a specialist (consultant) works cooperatively with a staff member (consultee) to improve the learning and adjustment of a student (client) or group of students" (Erchul & Martens, 2010, pg. 12). Consultation is considered an indirect service, in which school psychologists help consultees (e.g., teachers, families) build skills, thereby increasing the consultees' capacity to address students' needs, rather than the school psychologist directly intervening with the student. Using a consultation model, school psychologists can efficiently increase all students' access to supports through building the skills of other educators and caregivers. Although a number of specific consultation models can be used, consultation in school psychology across models emphasizes a preventative orientation, cooperative partnerships, reciprocal interactions, an ecological/systems perspective, empowerment, enhancement of well-being, and a problem solving-framework (Erchul & Young, 2014).

The specific types of consultation services provided by school psychologists can vary, but according to research, consultation activities as a whole generally represent a large portion of work time. On the most recent survey of NASP members, 64% of school

psychologists reported spending “quite a bit” or “a great deal” of time engaged in teacher consultation; 31% reported spending the same amounts of time on systems consultation (Farmer et al., 2021; Goforth et al., 2021). Consultation with families and caregivers is another important function of school psychologists, which is associated with numerous positive effects (e.g., Smith et al, 2021). The focus of consultation sessions can also vary, but school psychologists are often asked to consult regarding a variety of SEB challenges, academic interventions, classroom management, and universal interventions (Erchul & Young, 2014). These consultation services play an important role in helping support all students.

In the context of alternative education, it is unclear what consultation and collaboration activities school psychologists are primarily engaging in. Yu and Monteiro (2020) have suggested that school psychologists’ skills in consultation and collaboration are helpful for supporting students who are placed in alternative education settings, for those considering placement, or transitioning between placements. Miller and colleagues (2005) suggest that school psychologists can use their consultation skills at the systems level within alternative education to help influence “system reform, applying principles and practices of organizational change and capacity building” (pg. 553). Diaz and colleagues (2023) emphasize the role that school psychologists can play in consulting and collaborating with families when an alternative placement is being considered. However, despite the apparent usefulness of these consultation skills, there is no literature that informs how school psychologists currently utilize these skills in alternative education settings. Additionally,

there is a lack of research on how school psychologists' consultation and collaboration skills are applied differently in alternative settings compared to traditional settings.

Intervention. Direct intervention is another primary function of a school psychologist. Direct intervention involves services provided first-hand to a student by the school psychologist. These interventions are generally divided into two categories: academic interventions and mental health interventions (NASP, 2020a). Academic interventions can include implementing or designing classroom interventions to support students who require academic support, such as reading fluency practice. Mental health interventions include services provided to students who are experiencing challenges with social, emotional, or behavioral functioning, such as counseling or crisis intervention. Both can be provided to individual students, to targeted groups of students, or at a class or school-wide level, consistent with a three-tiered model of support.

Recent surveys suggest that school psychologists spend a varying amount of time engaged in direct student interventions. In the most recent NASP membership survey, 47% of school psychologists reported spending "quite a bit" or "a great deal of time" providing mental and behavioral health services; 36% and 22% reported spending that amount of time engaged in crisis response and academic interventions, respectively (Farmer et al., 2021; Goforth et al., 2021). In a previous survey (McNamara, 2019), school psychologists reported engaging in mental and behavioral health services an average of "somewhat" frequently. Seventy-two percent of school psychologists reported engaging in individual counseling focused on behavior and/or mental health, and 44% reported conducting group counseling focused on behavior and/or mental health (McNamara, 2019). Relatively fewer school

psychologists reported conducting individual and group services related to academic skills (45% and 18%, respectively; McNamara, 2019). These direct intervention services are designed to assist students in developing adaptive skills and increasing academic, social-emotional, and behavioral functioning.

The survey statistics described above primarily reflect the intervention practices of school psychologists practicing in traditional school environments. This limited research does not reveal how school psychologists engage in intervention within alternative settings. Goldenson (2011) suggests that direct therapy interventions, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy and Motivational Enhancement Therapy, could be implemented by school psychologists to support students in alternative education settings, in addition to participation in wrap-around and multisystemic interventions, among others. Other authors have noted that counseling interventions in alternative education could target individual factors (i.e., group counseling on substance use), academic factors (e.g., academic remediation), and familial factors (e.g., family education; Mullen & Lambie, 2013). Importantly, these sources offer suggestions but do not indicate how often these various intervention practices are actually implemented by school psychologists within alternative settings. As such, there is a gap in the research about school psychologists' responsibilities related to direct intervention within alternative settings, and how this compares to the responsibilities of those practicing in traditional environments.

Assessment and Evaluation. Assessment and evaluation remain the services most typically associated with the profession of school psychology (Fagan, 2014). Assessment and

evaluation encompass a broad range of job duties. As described by NASP (2016), assessment involves "the collection of information, which might be in narrative or numeric form, for the purposes of making a decision. Assessment contributes to defining problems, identifying student assets and needs, determining current levels of student functioning, estimating the rate of progress toward well-defined goals, and evaluating program outcomes." Evaluation activities include "the interpretation of information collected during an assessment and its use to guide a decision" (NASP, 2016). These activities are most commonly associated with directly assessing students' cognitive abilities, academic functioning, social-emotional functioning, and/or adaptive skills for special education purposes; however, assessment and evaluation also include collecting data on students' academic and behavioral functioning on a schoolwide level (i.e., universal screening) or evaluating the outcomes of interventions (i.e., progress monitoring). All of these assessment activities are "central to the data-based decision making and accountability practices that permeate all aspects of service delivery" in school psychology (Benson et al., 2019, p. 30).

School psychologists have historically (i.e., over the past 30 years) reported spending an estimated 50% of their time in assessment activities related to special education eligibility (Benson et al., 2019). According to the NASP membership survey, school psychologists report spending more of their time on evaluation tasks than any other task. Eighty-eight percent of school psychologists reported spending "quite a bit" or "a great deal" of time engaged in evaluation related activities (Farmer et al., 2021). This is consistent with surveys from prior years, where respondents indicated they participated in conducting eligibility evaluations "quite a bit," rating it higher than any other activity. Respondents reported

conducting an average of 27.5 initial evaluations for special education and 32.1 re-evaluations (McNamara et al., 2019). Compared to individual evaluations, fewer school psychologists report administering progress monitoring or universal screening (Burns & Rapee, 2021). All of these activities are designed to collect data to identify students who may be in need of further support.

Although school psychologists' assessment and evaluation skills have the potential to be very useful in the context of alternative education, there is again limited information on how these skills are utilized in these settings. Goldensen (2011) suggests that school psychologists have an important role to play in screening students for mental health concerns and performing comprehensive assessments. However, these recommendations were not based on research on prevalence or of activities of school psychologists within alternative settings, only the hypothesized fit between their skills and the needs of students who frequently attended alternative education. As such, there is a need for further research on how often school psychologists engage in assessment and evaluation within these alternative school contexts, and how those practices different in quality or quantity from school psychologists practicing within traditional settings.

Advocacy and Social Justice. Advocacy and social justice work are increasingly emphasized as another critical responsibility of school psychologists (Ballard et al., 2021; Briggs, 2013). In defining advocacy, the NASP Principles for Professional Ethics (2020b) explicitly states that "school psychologists have a special obligation to speak up for the rights and welfare of students and families, and to provide a voice to clients who cannot or do not

wish to speak for themselves" (p. 41). Similarly, the NASP Social Justice Committee defines social justice as "both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting non-discriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth" (NASP, 2021, pg. 1). School psychologists can work to enact social justice across multiple levels within a school, including the individual student level, a school-wide level, and/or at the community level (Briggs, 2013). In many cases, school psychologists function as advocates for others, but school psychologists should also function as advocates with others, empowering individuals and supporting them in creating their own change (Ballard et al. 2021).

Research on school psychologists' engagement in social justice and advocacy work is largely conceptual and does not often identify which advocacy activities school psychologists actually engage in (Oyen et al., 2020). In a study of new practitioners (Jenkins et al., 2018), participants most frequently identified social justice advocacy opportunities as arising during the special education process, teacher education, and intervention implementation. Award-winning advocates interviewed by Rogers and colleagues (2020) described advocacy actions as including acting for the greater good, expanding awareness, speaking up, and building relationships. A survey of school psychologists regarding social justice advocacy identified promoting best practices, conducting culturally fair assessment, and advocating for rights of

children and families as the most realistic social justice actions they could perform in practice (Shriberg, 2011). In a recent NASP survey, participants were asked to rate how often they engaged in social justice activities, with the highest percent reporting “sometimes” (39.2%; Farmer et al., 2021). However, specific work activities were not assessed. These findings describe common elements of advocacy practiced by school psychologists, although they do not describe how these practices are impacted by setting.

Given that alternative education settings serve high numbers of students who are systemically marginalized, struggle with trauma and mental health challenges, and engage in higher rates of health risk behaviors, school psychologists have an especially important advocacy role in alternative education settings. It is critical that school psychologists carefully evaluate alternative placements across various domains of social justice, including procedural (e.g., bias in alternative placement processes), distributive (i.e., restricting alternative education students from certain opportunities), and relational (e.g., stigmatizing and/or isolating students from peers), and function as advocates to work toward equity in their settings (Malone & Proctor, 2019; Parris, 2022). However, there is a lack of research on how school psychologists engage in advocacy and social justice work within these settings, and how advocacy roles might be different across alternative and traditional school settings. Further exploration of how these advocacy roles and responsibilities function in alternative settings is important for training future school psychology advocates.

Current Research on School Psychologists in Alternative Settings

Despite the clear potential for school psychologists to serve effectively in alternative education settings, very little is known about the current role that school psychologists play. In fact, little is known about the prevalence of any type of mental health professional within alternative settings. In a survey of alternative education administrators, respondents indicated that mental health professionals were on-site less than 25% of the time (Lehr et al., 2009). In a more recent report, 18% of alternative schools reported having any psychologists, slightly higher than the 13% percent of traditional schools who reported having any psychologists (Nowicki, 2019). However, it is unspecified if this includes other psychological specialties, including clinical and counseling. In addition, this prevalence does not illuminate the roles and responsibilities of any psychologists within alternative settings compared to non-alternative settings. The same report also found that alternative schools reported far lower percentages of other mental health professionals (i.e., social workers and counselors) than non-alternative schools, suggesting that psychologists may have more mental health responsibilities in alternative settings.

Previous surveys specifically of school psychologists, conducted by NASP, found evidence that at least some school psychologists are practicing in settings beyond traditional educational environments. Almost 4% of respondents reported working in private schools, and nearly 6% reported working in ‘other’ settings; 85% reported working in traditional public-school settings (Goforth et al., 2021). An earlier survey found that school psychologists reported spending an average of 2.3 hours in private school settings, compared to an average of 38.1 hours in public school settings (McNamara et al., 2019). However, it is

unclear which setting category captures the types of alternative settings discussed in the current study – it is likely that alternative education settings were reported as falling within various categories depending on respondents' perceptions. These statistics likely capture school settings beyond the scope of alternative education. In addition, authors were unable to analyze differences in professional practices based on setting, due to the limited number of respondents working outside of traditional settings.

Current Study

Problem Statement

Alternative education settings are unique educational environments that serve students whose needs are not met in traditional schools. These students often experience higher rates of academic failure; however, they also face significant challenges beyond academics. A large number of students in alternative education settings are from marginalized backgrounds, many have experienced trauma, and many are diagnosed with mental health difficulties. These challenges frequently contribute to unsafe, disruptive, or chronic behavioral challenges that result in alternative placement. These students stand to benefit from access to substantial services and supports.

Despite the need for services and recommendations for how those services should be provided, there is limited information on how mental health supports are provided in alternative education. School psychologists, as professionals with training in services related to consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy, are well-equipped to help support students in alternative education settings. Currently, little is known about the roles and

responsibilities of school psychologists who practice in alternative education settings, and how the role is different or similar to that of school psychologists practicing in traditional settings.

Purpose of the Study

Given (a) the strong need to effectively support students in alternative education settings, (b) the potential role school psychologists could play, and (c) the lack of any clear data regarding school psychologists in alternative settings, the purpose of the current study was to examine the professional roles and responsibilities of school psychologists providing services within alternative education settings compared to those practicing in traditional settings. The current study surveyed school psychologists in both settings to determine whether the frequency and type of engagement in consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy differed based on their work setting. An understanding of role differences is crucial for providing graduate training and professional development opportunities that support alternative education school psychologists, helping them better meet their students' needs.

Research Question and Hypotheses

1. How do the roles and responsibilities of a school psychologist differ between alternative education settings and traditional school settings regarding consultation (e.g., family consultation, teacher consultation)?
    a. It was hypothesized that school psychologists in both settings would engage in high rates of teacher consultation, given the expanding importance of consultation (i.e., indirect services) in the profession (Bahr et al., 2017);

however, it was expected that school psychologists in alternative education settings would engage in more consultation with families and teachers regarding social-emotional needs of the students (versus academic needs), given that the students may have more intensive SEB needs (Gagnon & Barber, 2015).

2. How do the roles and responsibilities of a school psychologist differ between alternative education settings and traditional school settings regarding direct student intervention (e.g., therapy, group counseling)?
    a. Based on the intensive SEB needs of many students in alternative settings (e.g., Lehr et al., 2009; Gagnon & Barber, 2015) and the increased need for direct service delivery described in other non-traditional settings (e.g., outpatient, residential; Mautone et al., 2019), it was hypothesized that school psychologists in alternative education settings would report engaging in significantly different amounts of time related to direct student intervention (e.g., therapy, crisis intervention, group counseling) compared to traditional education environments.
3. How do the roles and responsibilities of a school psychologist differ between alternative education settings and traditional school settings regarding assessment and evaluation (e.g., psychoeducational evaluations, academic assessment)?
    a. Given that they may spend more time on other activities, and that some schools report high percentages of students already with an IEP (e.g., Lehr et al., 2009), it was hypothesized that school psychologists in alternative

education settings would report significantly different amounts of time engaged in assessment than traditional school psychologists, who report spending the majority of their time conducting assessment (e.g., Farmer et al., 2021; McNamara et al., 2019). Furthermore, it was expected that the types of assessment activities reported (e.g., special education vs diagnostic, social-emotional measures vs academic measures) would differ between settings due to high rates of behavioral concerns (Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Mautone et al., 2019).

4. How do the roles and responsibilities of a school psychologist differ between alternative education settings and traditional school settings regarding advocacy and social justice (e.g., student advocacy)?
    a. Given the high numbers of marginalized and vulnerable students educated in alternative education settings (e.g., Nowicki et al., 2019), it was hypothesized that school psychologists practicing in alternative education settings would endorse spending significantly different amounts of time engaged in advocacy work compared to those in traditional settings.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Participants for the current study included a random sample of certified or licensed school psychologists practicing in traditional and alternative school settings (definition of traditional and alternative school settings can be found in the Measures section) across the United States. Eligibility criteria included that the participant had received their training in a graduate level school psychology program (either doctoral or specialist level) and were currently practicing within a K-12 setting. Other mental health specialists (e.g., clinical, counseling, licensed mental health counselors) and school psychologists exclusively working in higher education settings or other non-K-12 settings (e.g., assessment centers, hospital settings) were ineligible to participate.

Overall, a total of 493 responses were collected. Of those, 34 cases were removed for indicating they did not consent to participate and 37 cases were removed due to practice questions being left entirely blank, resulting in an analysis sample of 422 school psychologists. The majority of participants were white (88.7%), female (76.1%), not of Latinx or AMENA origin (78.4%), held a specialist degree (75.6%), and reported having no disabilities (89.5%). These demographics are generally consistent with the most recent trends in the field reported by NASP (Goforth et al., 2021). The sample was fairly evenly distributed across region of the

United States and years of working experiences, with slightly less representation of those working for longer than 15 years. Of this sample, 365 respondents reported working in a traditional education setting (as defined by the current study) and 56 reported working in an alternative education setting (as defined by the current study). See Table 2 for participant demographics of the overall sample and demographics across each type of school setting (percentages indicate the See Table 3 for a breakdown of employment settings reported by participants.

Table 2
Participant Demographic Information, Overall and by Work Setting

Characteristic	Total Sample (*N*=422)	Traditional (*n*=365)	Alternative (*n*=56)
Age, Mean (SD)	39.87 (10.21)	39.26 (9.87)	44.44 (11.66)
Gender			
Cisgender Male	84 (19.9%)	66 (18.1%)	18 (32.1%)
Transgender Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Cisgender Female	321 (76.1%)	285 (78.1%)	35 (62.5%)
Transgender Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Non-binary/third gender	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Prefer not to answer	12 (2.8%)	9 (2.5%)	3 (5.4%)
Race			
Indigenous to the US or Canada	13 (3.1%)	12 (3.3%)	1 (1.8%)
Asian or Asian American	14 (3.3%)	9 (2.5%)	5 (8.9%)
Black or African American	24 (5.7%)	21 (5.8%)	3 (5.4%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
White	370 (88.7%)	324 (88.8%)	45 (80.4%)
Prefer not to answer	9 (2.1%)	6 (1.6%)	3 (5.4%)
Prefer to self-describe[1]	2 (0.5%)	2 (0.5%)	0 (0%)
Ethnicity			
AMENA origin	11 (2.6%)	9 (2.5%)	2 (0.5%)
Latino/a/x origin	41 (9.7%)	43 (9.3%)	7 (12.5%)
Not AMENA or Latino/a/x	331 (78.4%)	294 (80.5%)	36 (64.3%)
Prefer not to answer	19 (4.5%)	10 (2.7%)	9 (16.1%)
Prefer to self-describe[2]	11 (2.6%)	10 (2.7%)	1 (1.8%)

Table 2 cont.

Participant Demographic Information, Overall and by Work Setting

Characteristic	Total Sample (*N*=422)	Traditional (*n*=365)	Alternative (*n*=56)
Education Level			
Master's Degree	33 (7.8%)	28 (7.7%)	5 (8.9%)
Specialist Degree	319 (75.6%)	282 (77.3%)	37 (66.1%)
Doctoral/Professional	70 (16.6%)	55 (15.1%)	14 (25.0%)
Disability			
Yes[3]	16 (3.8%)	13 (3.6%)	3 (5.4%)
No	375 (89.5%)	328 (90.6%)	46 (82.1%)
Prefer not to answer	13 (3.6%)	7 (1.9%)	6 (10.7%)
Years Working			
<1-4 years	113 (26.8%)	99 (27.1%)	14 (25.0%)
5-10 years	117 (27.7%)	103 (28.2%)	14 (25.0%)
11-15 years	85 (20.1%)	74 (20.3%)	11 (19.5%)
16-20 years	38 (9.0%)	32 (8.8%)	6 (10.7%)
>20 years	69 (16.4%)	57 (15.6%)	11 (19.6%)
Region			
Northeast	94 (22.3%)	77 (21.1%)	17 (30.4%)
South	103 (24.4%)	92 (25.2%)	11 (19.6%)
West	97 (23.0%)	77 (21.1%)	20 (35.7%)
Midwest	122 (28.9%)	117 (32.1%)	4 (7.1%)
Locale			
Urban	126 (29.9%)	104 (28.5%)	22 (39.5%)
Suburban	222 (52.8%)	191 (52.3%)	31 (55.4%)
Rural	117 (27.7%)	99 (27.1%)	18 (32.1%)
Frontier	8 (1.9%)	1 (0.3%)	7 (12.5%)
Other	7 (1.7%)	5 (1.4%)	2 (3.6%)
Grade Level			
Elementary	269 (63.9%)	241 (66.0%)	28 (50%)
Middle	213 (50.6%)	178 (48.8%)	35 (62.5%)
High	207 (49.2%)	169 (46.3%)	38 (67.9%)
Adult	39 (9.3%)	27 (7.1%)	12 (21.4%)
Preschool	147 (34.9%)	133 (36.4)	14 (34.9%)

Note: Percentages indicate the proportion of the indicated group that selected a particular answer, and may not add to 100% due to rounding, missingness, or selecting multiple options.

[1]Self-described races included Asian Indian

[2]Self-described ethnicities included Jewish, Eastern European, North African.

[3]Specified disabilities included Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Specific Learning Disability, Visual Impairment

Table 3
School Setting Details

Type of School Setting	*n* (%)
Traditional/Mainstream	326 (77.4%)
Private School	24 (5.7%)
Alternative School	23 (5.5%)
Alternative Program within public school	20 (4.8%)
School within a behavioral health facility	7 (1.7%)
School within a residential facility	0 (0%)
School within a juvenile justice facility	6 (1.4%)
Charter school	13 (3.1%)
Other	2 (0.5%)

Measures

School Psychologists' Professional Roles and Functions Survey

The *School Psychologists' Professional Roles and Functions* survey examined the practice roles and responsibilities of school psychologists (see Appendix A). The survey consisted of approximately 20 questions related to participants' demographics (e.g., race, gender, age), level of training and certification (e.g., type of degree, licensure), and details about work setting (e.g., type of school, population served). These questions were adapted from previous NASP membership surveys (2015, 2020c), which are distributed every five years to examine the characteristics and job responsibilities of members of the National Association of School Psychologists. Questions regarding work setting (e.g., "Do other mental health or behavioral professionals provide services in your building?") were adapted from previous surveys of alternative education settings (Carver et al., 2010).

Definitions of both alternative education and traditional education environments were provided for participants. For the purposes of this study, alternative schools and programs are

defined, consistent with Carver (2010)'s survey of alternative education, as "schools designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools. The students who attend alternative schools and programs are typically at risk of educational failure (as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, or similar factors associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from school)" (pg. 1). The definition used in the study included: alternative schools or programs for students placed at-risk of school failure; alternative programs within traditional schools; alternative schools or programs within juvenile justice centers; schools or programs that exclusively serve special education students; and schools situated within behavioral health or residential facilities. The definition excluded alternative schools or programs that are not for students at risk of school failure (e.g., gifted and talented programs, magnet schools). Traditional school settings are defined as school settings that provide education services to students not focused primarily on special, vocational, or alternative education but rather on regular curriculum.

In addition to questions asking about demographics, training, and work setting, the survey included 90 questions to understand the frequency of school psychologists' engagement across four practice domains: consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy/social justice. Questions regarding practice activities asked respondents to rate how frequently they engaged in each respective activity. Consistent with previous surveys in school psychology research (e.g., Farmer et al., 2021), participants rated each question using a 5-point scale with the following response options: *0-Not at All, 1-Rarely, 2-Sometimes, 3-Often, 4-Very Often*. Items across each domain were summed to form a total score reflecting the total amount of time engaged in the respective practice domain, with higher summed scores indicating more time engaged in each

practice domain. Possible sum scores for each subscale ranged from 0 (indicating no engagement in that activity) to 48 for consultation, 64 for direct intervention, 84 for assessment, and 92 for social justice. Reliability analyses using Cronbach's alpha found that internal consistency was high across all subscales (consultation $\alpha = 0.92$; direct intervention $\alpha = 0.95$; assessment $\alpha = 0.91$; social justice $\alpha = 0.96$).

Survey items assessing practice activities were developed by the researcher using a combination of modified questions from pre-existing survey measures, as no current measure existed to answer all research questions. These measures included previous NASP membership surveys (NASP, 2015; 2020c) and other previous surveys examining practice activities (e.g., Bahr et al., 2017). Specific item selection and definitions provided to participants within each practice domain are further described below.

To examine roles and functions of school psychologists, the survey consisted of questions across the domains of consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy. Consultation was defined as "a process for providing psychological and education services in which a specialist (consultant) works cooperatively with a staff member (consultee) to improve the learning and adjustment of a student (client) or group of students" (Erchul & Martens, 2010). Participants reported if they engaged in consultation in their current role and if not, they skipped to the next section of the survey. Those who indicated "yes" were asked 17 questions related to parent, teacher, and systems-level consultation. For example, participants rated how often they consulted with teachers regarding class-wide behavior management strategies and how often they consulted with parents regarding externalizing difficulties. Survey questions were informed by literature regarding best practices in school consultation (e.g., Erchul & Young, 2014).

Direct intervention activities were defined as "any academic or behavioral services provided first-hand to a student or groups of students by you as a school psychologist." Participants who indicated that they engaged in intervention activities were asked 22 questions related to providing services at a universal, targeted, and individual level, including specific counseling approaches, individual therapy, and conducting groups. For example, participants rated how often they delivered universal SEL curriculum and how often they provided individual counseling focused on social-emotional health. Survey questions were informed by previous research on common intervention approaches described in alternative education (e.g., Ballard & Bender, 2021), and other literature regarding common intervention practices in schools (e.g., Burns et al., 2012; Henderson & Thompson, 2016).

Assessment and evaluation activities were defined for participants as "the collection of information, which might be in narrative or numeric form, for the purposes of making a decision. Assessment contributes to defining problems, identifying student assets and needs, determining current levels of student functioning, estimated the rate of progress toward well-defined goals, and evaluating program outcomes. Evaluation is the interpretation of information collected during an assessment and its use to guide a decision" (NASP, 2016). Participants who indicated they engaged in assessment activities were asked 25 questions related to observation, standardized testing, rating scales, and screening procedures. For example, participants were asked how often they administered standardized cognitive assessments and how often they conducted risk assessments of students involving risk of harm to self or others. These questions were informed by previous surveys of school psychologists' assessment practices (Benson et al., 2019; Sotelo-Dynega & Dixson, 2014), and literature regarding common school assessment

practices (e.g., Sattler, 2018; Whitcomb et al., 2018).

Advocacy was defined for participants as “speaking up for the rights and welfare of students and families and providing a voice to clients who cannot or do not wish to speak for themselves” (NASP, 2020b). Social justice was defined as "both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth" (NASP, 2021). Participants who indicated that they engaged in social justice and advocacy activities were asked 26 questions related to self-reflection, anti-bias activities, and evaluating policies. For example, participants were asked to rate how often they led student affinity groups and how often they conducted anti-bias education/professional development with teachers. These questions were developed using previous surveys asking school psychologists to report what types of social justice activities occurred and were realistic to perform in school-based practice (Biddanda et al., 2019; Jenkins et al., 2018; Shriberg et al., 2011). Other literature describing strategies and suggestions for school psychologists engaging in social justice activities also informed question development (Ballard et al., 2021; Malone & Proctor, 2019).

As recommended by survey development guidelines (Boateng et al., 2018), the content validity of the survey was evaluated prior to the study. The survey was piloted with seven experts and members of the intended audience (i.e., school psychologist practitioners) to ensure

that the questions adequately assessed the common practice activities of school psychologist. In addition, feedback was solicited on the length, readability, and interpretability of the questions. Based on the feedback received, all necessary revisions were made prior to administration in the current study. Revisions included clarifying definitions (e.g., definition of assessment), adjusting wording of some questions for clarity (e.g., indicating check all that apply), adding additional answer options (e.g., teams-based consultation), and reformatting to improve readability (e.g., adding bolding, progress bar).

Procedures

Participants were recruited using several targeted approaches. To recruit school psychologists in alternative settings, multiple requests were sent to the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) with requests to distribute the survey to their members via email and/or social media. Follow-up requests were sent to nine regional representatives of the NAEA. No response was received from these two approaches. A search was conducted for alternative education settings in each state in order to locate contact information, resulting in requests to distribute the survey being sent to 159 alternative education settings. One reminder email was sent three weeks later. The recruitment email also included a request for recipients to forward the email to their networks.

Broader recruitment, to capture school psychologists in both alternative and traditional settings, included compiling contact information from a publicly accessible database of Nationally Certified School Psychologists on the NASP website. Ten percent of listed NCSPs from each state were randomly selected for recruitment, resulting in a list of 2706 email addresses. Approximately 177 of these emails were undeliverable, resulting in an initial

recruitment sample of 2,529. Two reminder emails were sent over the course of two months. The survey was posted (with permission) on two social media sites in groups relevant to school psychology, Reddit (r/schoolpsychology) and Facebook (Said No School Psychologist Ever; APA Division 16). Approval was granted by the National Association for School Psychologists' research committee to distribute the survey to a random sample of 1,000 members; NASP emailed the initial survey and sent two follow-up reminders. Due to the nature of survey distribution, the exact response was unable to be calculated. Similar recruitment procedures have been utilized in other surveys of school psychologists' practice activities (e.g., Benson et al., 2019; Hendricker et al., 2023).

The survey was administered via the online platform Qualtrics. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were presented with details about the study, including the purpose, anticipated benefits, and risks, and asked to indicate that they consent to participate. No identifying information was linked to individuals. De-identified data were exported to R Studio by the researcher for analysis. Participants who wished to be entered into a raffle for one of 11 $25 gift cards as an incentive for participation were redirected to a separate Google form for entry, which was not linked to their responses. All ethical considerations were adhered to and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts Boston approved the study prior to survey distribution.

Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using R Studio software (version 4.2.2). Preliminary data were screened for missing data patterns. Across participants, item-level missingness ranged from 0.7% to 7.8% across subscale items. Within participants, 7.6% of participants were partial cases

(i.e., missed one or more items) on the consultation subscale, 9.3% were partial cases on the direct intervention subscale, 17.2% of participants were partial cases on the assessment subscale, and 10.9% were partial cases on the social justice/advocacy subscale. Only approximately 83% of the 422 participants in the sample would have been available for analysis under the traditional listwise deletion method. Data were primarily missing due to skipped items; however in a few instances, participants did not complete an entire subscale. Little's MCAR test was significant (p<.001) indicating that data cannot be assumed to be missing completely at random. As there was no reason to suspect the presence of non-random missingness, data was assumed to be missing at random (MAR).

In order to calculate subscale scores for partial cases and use all available data for analysis (i.e., not exclude any cases), multiple imputation (MI) was used to impute missing item-level data for all cases who responded to at least one item on the subscale. MI has been found to be less biased than other methods (e.g., single imputation, listwise deletion; Newman, 2014). MI was done using the "mice" (multivariate imputation using chained equations) package, which generated 10 imputed datasets that were pooled according to Rubin's rules for analysis. Imputed values compared reasonably to observed values, and results using listwise deletion were similar to MI, so imputed results are presented.

Responses from the Likert-type questions in each domain (i.e., consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy), which asked respondents to rate how frequently they engaged in a particular practice on a five-point scale, were averaged in order to compare average frequency of engagement in each practice across activity (within and across groups). Each subscale's items were also summed to form a total score that indicated how often the respondent spent their time

engaged in each domain as a whole. Correlations were then conducted to evaluate the relationship between subscales within the overall sample.

To answer each of the four research questions, participant data was divided into two groups – those who indicated they worked primarily in alternative education settings and those who indicated they primarily worked in traditional education settings. Subscale scores within each domain were averaged within each group and then compared statistically using *t*-tests, after checking for assumptions (i.e., normality, homogeneity of variance), to look for any mean differences between settings in how often school psychologists report engaging in consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy. In cases in which normality was violated, the data was transformed using logarithmic transformation prior to running *t*-tests (Fields et al., 2012). In addition, individual items on each practice activity subscale were compared using Kruskal-Wallis rank sum tests to examine possible relationships between type of school setting and individual practice activities. To account for the inflated possibility of Type I error when running multiple statistical comparisons, the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure was used to adjust *p*-values. *P*-values reported in results tables have all been adjusted.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Practice Domains Overall

To compare the reported frequency of engagement in practices across the four domains, the average of all items within each subscale was calculated. Overall, school psychologists reported engaging in consultation most frequently, across both types of setting. The overall sample reported engaging in direct intervention activities the least frequently, although there were differences based on setting (see Table 4). Differences between settings within specific domains are further examined in the following sections.

Table 4
Average of Practice Activity Items Across Domains

	Mean Frequency (SD)		
Practice Domain	Overall Sample	Traditional	Alternative
Consultation	2.12 (0.79)	2.16 (0.76)	1.87 (0.92)
Direct Intervention	0.88 (0.86)	0.84 (0.85)	1.15 (0.94)
Assessment	1.96 (0.73)	2.03 (0.66)	1.59 (1.01)
Social Justice	1.12 (0.88)	1.13 (0.89)	1.07 (0.88)

In addition, correlations between the subscales were calculated to examine the relationship between engagement across the various domains. All subscales were significantly correlated in the overall sample, but the correlations were weak to moderate (see Table 5). A similar pattern of correlations was seen in the traditional sample. However, correlation patterns

within the alternative sample were different. The correlations between consultation and assessment, consultation and social justice, and assessment and social justice, were stronger. This may be related to the weaker relationship between intervention and assessment and social justice, although neither of these correlations were significant.

Table 5
Correlations Between Practice Domains

Practice Domain	1. Consultation	2. Intervention	3. Assessment	4. Social Justice
		Overall Sample		
1. Consultation	-			
2. Intervention	0.33***	-		
3. Assessment	0.44***	0.17***	-	
4. Social Justice	0.20***	0.30***	0.20***	-
		Traditional Settings		
1. Consultation	-			
2. Intervention	0.36***	-		
3. Assessment	0.40***	0.24***	-	
4. Social Justice	0.14**	0.34***	0.12*	-
		Alternative Settings		
1. Consultation	-			
2. Intervention	0.35**	-		
3. Assessment	0.55***	0.07	-	
4. Social Justice	0.53***	0.13	0.56***	-

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Consultation

Visual and descriptive analysis determined that the distribution of the consultation sum scores approximated a normal distribution. However, Levene's test was significant (F(1, 417)=4.43, p=.04), indicating unequal variance between the two groups. As such, a two-tailed Welsh's independent samples *t*-test, which does not assume equal variance, was used to determine if there were significant differences in how often school psychologists in

alternative and traditional settings reported engaging in consultation work overall. School psychologists in traditional settings (M= 25.95, SD = 9.13) did not report significantly different rates of engagement in consultation activities than their counterparts in alternative settings (M= 22.24, SD = 11.08), t(67.04)=2.23, p=.06 (see Table 6). Cohen's d effect size was small, d=0.37. Power analysis indicated an achieved power of 0.72. The average frequency across all items within the consultation scale was 2.16 (SD=0.76) within traditional school settings and 1.87 (SD=0.92) within alternative settings.

Table 6
Consultation in Traditional vs Alternative Settings

Practice Domain	Traditional (n=363)		Alternative (n=56)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t* (df)	*p*
Consultation	25.95	9.13	22.48	11.08	2.23 (67.04)	0.06

In addition to comparing sum scores, mean scores on individual practice items were calculated and compared using Kruskal-Wallis rank sum tests (see Table 7). Significant differences were seen in teacher consultation regarding academic difficulties, parent consultation regarding academic difficulties, team-based consultation, and MTSS/PBIS consultation, with school psychologists in traditional education settings engaging in higher rates of each practice activity.

Table 7
Consultation Practice Activities

Practice Activity[1]	Traditional	Alternative	*H*
Consultation/Collaboration with Community agencies (e.g., hospital, community mental health)	1.30	1.36	0.45
Consultation with teachers regarding…			
• academic difficulties?	2.61	1.88	15.96***
• externalizing difficulties?	2.78	2.46	2.46
• internalizing difficulties?	2.37	2.30	0.03
• class wide behavior management strategies?	1.68	1.57	0.55
Consultation with parents regarding…			
• academic difficulties?	2.16	1.55	14.21**
• externalizing difficulties?	2.27	1.96	3.63
• internalizing difficulties?	2.17	2.04	0.39
• home-based intervention?	1.33	1.34	0.00
Team-based consultation (e.g., IEP meetings, grade level teams)	3.01	2.46	6.97*
Systems-level consultation (e.g., district)	1.94	1.82	0.64
Consultation regarding multi-tiered systems of support (e.g., RtI, PBIS)?	2.34	1.75	10.48**
Total Mean Score[2]	25.95	22.48	-

[1]*Individual item scores ranged from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often);* [2]*Possible total scores ranged from 0-48;* ****p*<.001, ***p*<.01, **p*<.05

Direct Intervention

Visual and descriptive analysis determined that the distribution of the intervention scores showed a substantial positive skew, as a substantial portion of respondents (38.8%) reported engaging in no direct intervention at all. The data was transformed using a logarithmic transformation, resulting in an approximately normal distribution. Levene's test was not significant ($F(1, 415)=0.10$, $p=.75$), indicating equal variance between the two groups. A two-tailed independent samples *t*-test was used determine if there were significant

differences in how often school psychologists in alternative and traditional settings reported engaging in direct intervention work overall. School psychologists in traditional settings (*M*= 0.79, *SD* = 0.67) did not report significantly different rates of engagement in intervention activities than their counterparts in alternative settings (*M*= 0.96, *SD* = 0.69), *t*(415)=-1.72, *p*=.12 (see Table 8). Cohen's *d* effect size was small, *d*=0.25. Power analysis indicated an achieved power of 0.40. The average frequency across all items within the intervention scale was 0.82 (*SD*=0.85) within traditional school settings and 1.15 (*SD*=0.94) within alternative settings.

Table 8

Direct Intervention in Traditional vs Alternative Settings

Practice Domain	Traditional (n=361)		Alternative (n=56)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	t (df)	*p*
Intervention	0.79	0.67	0.96	0.69	-1.72 (415)	0.12

In addition to comparing sum scores, mean scores on individual practice items were calculated and compared using Kruskal-Wallis rank sum tests (see Table 9). Significant differences were seen related to delivering social-emotional learning curriculum, and using behavioral/applied behavior, dialectical behavioral, and trauma approaches in direct therapy. School psychologists in alternative settings reported higher rates of each activity.

Table 9
Direct Intervention Practice Activities

Practice Activity[1]	Traditional	Alternative	*H*
Universal PBIS interventions (e.g., reinforcement points)	0.82	1.11	4.07
Universal SEL curriculum (e.g., Second Step)	0.67	1.07	6.30*
Group contingency interventions (e.g., Good Behavior Game)	0.58	0.77	2.04
Check-in/Check-Out interventions	0.97	1.21	2.11
Tier 2 student groups focused on….			
• Academic skills	0.62	0.80	2.35
• Social emotional health	1.16	1.39	1.58
Provide individual counseling focused on…			
• Academic skills	0.70	0.89	2.89
• social-emotional health (e.g., counseling)	1.49	1.71	0.90
Use the following approaches during counseling:			
• Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	1.28	1.52	1.36
• Behavioral Therapy/ABA	0.77	1.23	8.73*
• Dialectical Behavior Therapy	0.52	0.98	8.15*
• Play Therapy	0.57	0.82	3.36
• Trauma Therapy	0.50	1.09	13.84**
Implement self-monitoring interventions	1.08	1.38	1.52
Engage in direct intervention work with caregivers (e.g., family counseling)	0.48	0.86	5.99
Providing crisis intervention services	1.27	1.57	1.93
Mean Total Score[2]	13.48	18.41	-

[1]*Individual item scores ranged from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often);* [2]*Possible total scores ranged from 0-64;* ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Assessment and Evaluation

Visual and descriptive analysis determined that the distribution of the assessment sum scores approximated a normal distribution. However, Levene's test was significant (F(1, 415)=37.05, p<.001), indicating unequal variance between the two groups. As such, a

two-tailed Welsh's independent samples *t*-test, which does not assume equal variance, was used determine if there were significant differences in how often school psychologists in alternative and traditional settings reported engaging in evaluation work overall. School psychologists in traditional settings (*M*= 42.52, *SD* = 13.85) reported significantly higher engagement in assessment activities than their counterparts in alternative settings (*M*= 33.43, *SD* = 21.16), *t*(62.51)=3.11, *p*=.01 (see Table 10). Cohen's *d* effect size was medium, *d*=0.60. Power analysis indicated an achieved power of 0.99. The average frequency across all items within the assessment scale was 2.03 (*SD*=0.62) within traditional school settings and 1.59 (*SD*=1.01) within alternative settings.

Table 10
Assessment in Traditional vs Alternative Settings

Practice Domain	Traditional (361)		Alternative (56)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	t (df)	*p*
Assessment	42.52	13.85	33.43	21.16	3.11 (62.51)	0.01

In addition to comparing sum scores, mean scores on individual practice items were calculated and compared using Kruskal-Wallis rank sum tests (see Table 11). Significant differences were seen in activities related to reviewing previous records, conducting interviews with teachers, conducting behavioral observations, cognitive and academic assessment, administering parent and teacher rating scales, and evaluating for special education eligibility, with school psychologists in traditional education settings engaging in higher rates of each activity.

Table 11
Assessment Practice Activities

Practice Activity[1]	Traditional	Alternative	*H*
Review previous records	3.29	2.57	10.50**
Conduct interviews with…			
• parents?	2.51	2.00	5.32
• teachers?	2.84	2.21	8.26*
• students?	2.77	2.29	3.32
Conduct behavioral observation of students	2.99	2.36	6.99*
Administer the following assessments:			
• Cognitive assessment (e.g., WISC-V)	2.98	2.05	17.99***
• Academic assessment (e.g., WIAT-III)	2.24	1.34	15.38***
• Neuropsychological assessment (e.g., NEPSY-II)	0.99	0.80	1.74
• Projective measures (e.g., Roberts-2)	0.53	0.57	0.34
• Executive functioning (e.g., CPT-3)	1.76	1.39	4.57
Administer SEB and/or executive functioning rating scales to….			
• Parents (e.g., BASC-3)?	3.04	2.18	11.82**
• Teachers? (e.g. BASC-3)?	3.05	2.13	16.24***
• Students (e.g., CDI-2)?	2.25	1.84	3.48
Conduct risk assessments of students involving risk of harm to self or others	1.63	1.38	3.68
Participate in universal screening procedures for….			
• Social, emotional, or behavioral risk (e.g., SSRS-IE)?	0.98	0.86	0.52
• Academic risk (e.g., DIBELS)?	0.86	0.55	3.12
• Social, emotional, or behavioral strengths (e.g., DESSA-mini)	0.69	0.68	0.04
Conduct assessment for the purposes of determining special education eligibility (i.e., IDEIA criteria)	3.42	2.39	19.34***
Conduct assessment for diagnostic purposes (i.e., DSM-5 criteria)	0.54	0.79	2.57
Engage in assessment for treatment planning	1.67	1.63	0.08
Engage in assessment for progress monitoring	1.50	1.43	0.24
Total Mean Score[2]	42.52	33.49	-

[1]*Individual item scores ranged from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often);* [2]*Possible total scores ranged from 0-84;* ****p*<.001, ***p*<.01, **p*<.0

Social Justice and Advocacy

Visual and descriptive analysis determined that the distribution of the social justice scores showed a substantial positive skew, with a substantial portion of the sample reporting no engagement in social justice/advocacy work (27.5%). The data was transformed using a logarithmic transformation, resulting in an approximately normal distribution. Levene's test was not significant ($F(1, 411)=1.02$, $p=.31$), indicating equal variance between the two groups. A two-tailed independent samples *t*-test found that school psychologists in traditional settings ($M= 1.10$, $SD =0.70$) did not report significantly different engagement in social justice activities than their counterparts in alternative settings ($M= 1.06$, $SD =0.73$), $t(411)=0.45$, $p=.65$ (see Table 12). Cohen's *d* effect size was negligible, $d=0.06$. Power analysis indicated an achieved power of 0.07. The average frequency across all items within the social justice scale was 1.13 ($SD=0.89$) within traditional school settings and 1.07 ($SD=0.88$) within alternative settings.

Table 12
Social Justice and Advocacy in Traditional vs Alternative Settings

Practice Domain	Traditional (n=361)		Alternative (n=56)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	t (df)	*p*
Social Justice	1.10	0.70	1.06	0.73	0.45 (411)	.65

In addition to comparing sum scores, mean scores on individual practice items were calculated and compared using Kruskal-Wallis rank sum tests (see Table 13). No significant differences were found between setting in how frequently school psychologists reported engaging in any of the individual social justice practice activities.

Table 13
Social Justice and Advocacy Practice Activities

Practice Activity[1]	Traditional	Alternative	*H*
Self-reflect on your own practices and cultural awareness to evaluate bias and inequity?	2.13	1.91	0.98
Engage in education (e.g., reading, research, training opportunities) to increase your own knowledge and awareness of bias and inequity?	1.87	1.71	0.58
Lead student affinity groups (e.g., GSA, BIPOC)?	0.51	0.47	0.25
Conduct anti-bias education/professional development with…			
• Students in classrooms?	0.50	0.55	0.35
• teachers/school staff?	0.80	1.02	1.39
• parents?	0.42	0.46	0.06
• community partners/organizations?	0.42	0.58	1.33
Use school-wide data to evaluate for bias in….			
• Discipline (e.g., suspensions)?	1.18	0.89	2.01
• Special education placement?	1.46	1.15	2.28
• Academic performance?	1.24	0.98	1.76
• Bullying/victimization?	0.92	1.06	0.83
• Gifted programming placement?	0.66	0.47	2.39
Advocate for culturally responsive and equitable practices in:			
• Assessment and evaluations?	1.96	1.84	0.23
• Student intervention?	1.88	1.93	0.12
• School-wide policies?	1.80	1.78	0.0003
• Staff training?	1.43	1.40	0.05
Evaluate for inclusiveness and bias in….			
• Classroom curricula?	0.79	0.69	0.42
• School visual materials?	0.87	0.82	0.34
• Home/school communication materials?	0.82	0.78	0.10
Advocate for individual students from marginalized backgrounds?	1.94	1.71	1.43
Include students as leaders in advocacy activities?	0.87	1.15	2.28
Collaborate with community advocacy groups (e.g., GLSEN)?	0.67	0.80	0.86
Engage in advocacy efforts at the legislative level?	0.52	0.46	0.08
Total Mean Score[2]	25.61	24.58	-

[1]*Individual item scores ranged from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often);* [2]*Possible total scores ranged from 0-92; ***p*<.001, **p*<.01, **p*<.05

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Given that students placed in alternative education settings (AES) are highly likely to experience a variety of challenges and injustices (e.g., marginalization, trauma), it is critical that school systems provide supports that facilitate, rather than further impede, the academic success and social-emotional well-being of students. School psychologists, with specialized training in consultation, direct intervention, assessment, and social justice work, are well-positioned to provide these supports, helping AES develop environments that align with best practice recommendations for effective alternative education placements. The purpose of the current study was to examine differences in the frequency of engagement in four domains of practice within a sample of 422 school psychologists (56 working primarily in AES) who completed the *School Psychologists' Professional Roles and Functions* survey. The goal of the study was to better understand the roles and functions school psychologists working within alternative education settings, particularly in comparison to their counterparts working in traditional environments. Ultimately, a clearer understanding of the role school psychologists play in alternative settings can help better prepare them to meet the unique needs of students who are placed in their schools.

Patterns Across Practice Domains

Across both alternative and traditional settings, school psychologists on average reported engaging in consultation more frequently than any other practice domain, consistent with expectations. School psychologists also reported engaging in assessment at relatively high rates, on average. This is relatively unsurprising, given the high rates of consultation and assessment reported in previous surveys (Farmer et al., 2021). In addition, research has consistently suggested the importance of consultation in the field (Bahr et al., 2017) and that assessment continues to be a primary function of school psychologists (McNamara et al., 2019). Although Farmer and colleagues' study (2021) likely included school psychologists working in alternative settings, they were unable to analyze differences across groups. The current study supports that similar patterns of more frequent engagement in assessment and consultation are reported by school psychologists in both alternative and traditional settings (although rates differ, discussed in proceeding sections).

School psychologists in the overall sample reported engaging in direct intervention and social justice work at lower frequencies than assessment and consultation. In traditional settings, direct intervention average scores were the lowest of the four domains; social justice was the lowest within alternative education settings. Nearly 40% of the overall sample reported engaging in no direct intervention work at all (40% of the traditional sample, 32% of the alternative sample), and almost 30% of the overall sample (27% of the traditional sample, 31% of the alternative education sample) reported engaging in no social justice and advocacy work at all. In contrast, under 8% reported engaging in no consultation or assessment work at

all. These percentages are again consistent with, although somewhat lower than, previous NASP surveys that found school psychologists engage in relatively less intervention work compared to other domains, and report not engaging or rarely engaging in social justice work (e.g., 31% of school psychologists reported engaging in mental and behavioral health services "not at all" or "very little"; Farmer et al., 2021). Again, these overall patterns across domain appear to be largely consistent across setting.

The overall lower rate of engagement in direct intervention may be due to several factors. Despite an expressed desire to engage in direct intervention work, school psychologists in traditional settings report many barriers. For one, the role of a school psychologist is traditionally associated with assessment and special education placement (Fagan, 2014), which may result school psychologists not being perceived as mental health providers by school administration and staff (Hanchon & Fernald, 2013). In addition, high assessment caseloads and a high ratio of students to school psychologists may also result in school psychologists providing relatively less direct intervention services than they desire (Eklund et al., 2020). Finally, school psychologists may not feel adequately prepared to provide direct intervention services; one study reported that approximately 40% of school psychologists did not feel adequately prepared to engage in individual or group counseling with students (Hanchon & Fernald, 2013). Given the growing mental health needs of students, particularly the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools would greatly benefit from efforts to increase school psychologists' capacity to provide mental health services within both traditional and alternative settings (Eklund et al., 2020).

Similarly, lower rates of engagement in social justice and advocacy also have several possible explanations. For one, social justice has only recently been prioritized in school psychology training and practice, despite many advocates calling for change for several decades (García-Vázquez et al., 2021). As such, relatively few school psychologists may feel prepared to engage in these types of activities. Farmer et al. (2021) reported that only 11% of school psychologists felt "knowledgeable" or "very knowledgeable" about social justice. Furthermore, knowledge level was positively associated with engagement in social justice practice. In addition, social justice work in schools has become increasingly politicized in recent years, in many cases leading to policies or legal regulations that make it unsafe for school psychologists to engage in social justice work (e.g., banning critical race theory; Gross, 2022). These trends are troubling, given the many social justice issues that students face, including problematic trends in alternative education systems (Parris, 2022).

These overall patterns between practice domains suggest that there are many similarities in the roles of school psychologists across work settings. However, comparisons between specific services across consultation, direct intervention, assessment, and social justice also highlight several potentially important differences between school psychologists working in alternative and traditional settings. The following sections discuss these differences within each specific domain and individual practice activities.

Consultation

In the domain of consultation, both groups reported overall high levels of consultation. A t-test comparing participants across work settings indicated that school

psychologists in traditional and alternative education settings did not report engaging in significantly different overall rates of consultation. This is somewhat unsurprising, given the overall high rates, and that consultation is a primary function of school psychologists (as discussed in previous sections; Bahr et al., 2017). In addition, given the potential for high rates of social-emotional concerns and/or high case loads across both types of settings, consultation may be a more efficient way to ensure as many students as possible are receiving appropriate intervention (Eklund et al., 2020).

Despite overall similarities, there were some differences when examining individual items. School psychologists in traditional settings reported higher rates of consultation involving academic difficulties, with both teachers and parents. Although concrete research is lacking to explain these findings, patterns may be the result of several factors. For one, differences in training requirements of staff across settings may contribute to differences in how often consultation is sought (Lehr et al., 2009). For instance, rates of academic consultation may be lower in alternative education settings based on greater availability of staff with higher levels of training in specialized academic interventions (e.g., special education teachers, academic specialists). Staff working in alternative settings may feel more confident in managing and intervening regarding academic concerns, thus seek out a school psychologist for consultation less often. In addition, social-emotional concerns may take precedence in some AES, possibly resulting in fewer consultation requests regarding academic challenges (Gagnon & Barber, 2015). Together this may partially explain why school psychologists in traditional settings endorse higher rates of academic consultation.

Higher rates of team-based consultation and consultation regarding multi-tiered systems of support were also reported by school psychologists practicing in traditional settings. Higher rates of consultation regarding multi-tiered systems of support in traditional settings may be related to the unique "tier three" settings of AES; many AES implement highly individualized intervention programs for each student, and thus may be less likely to focus on providing support across tiers compared to traditional settings (e.g., Aspiranti et al., 2021). Similarly, there may be less need for teams-based consultation in alternative education settings, where interventions tend to be highly individualized, and a teams-based referral system may be used less often to address student concerns.

Interestingly, consultation with parents and teachers regarding social-emotional concerns (e.g., internalizing and externalizing behaviors) was not endorsed significantly more by school psychologists in AES than those in traditional settings, contrary to expectations. Given the complex social-emotional needs of students in alternative education settings, which often directly contribute to alternative placement (Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Lehr et al., 2009), it is somewhat surprising that no significant differences were found. This finding may again be the result of several hypothetical factors. For one, teachers in alternative settings may have additional training in managing behavioral concerns (Carver et al., 2010). In addition, alternative education settings typically have a lower staff to student ratio, resulting in more staff available to help support student behavior in the classroom (Lehr et al., 2009). Similarly, caregivers of students within alternative education settings may be more likely to access external therapeutic supports, relying less on consultation with school psychologists. The training and supports available may help mitigate some of the increased

social-emotional needs of students in alternative education, leading to similar rates of consultation across settings regarding internalizing and externalizing behaviors.

Direct Intervention

A t-test comparing participants across work settings indicated that school psychologists in traditional and alternative education settings did not report engaging in significantly different overall rates of direct intervention, contrary to expectations. This is somewhat surprising, given that social-emotional/behavioral concerns are the most frequently cited reason for alternative placement and that students often carry mental health diagnoses (Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Nowicki, 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2014). A lack of detected overall differences may reflect the large numbers of school psychologists that reported engaging in no intervention work across both settings, in addition to a general tendency for school psychologists to (a) engage in relatively less direct intervention work compared to other domains of practice and (b) feel unprepared to engage in counseling intervention work (Eklund et al., 2020; Hanchon & Fernald, 2013; discussed in previous sections).

However, examining individual items found that school psychologists in alternative settings did engage in significantly higher rates of intervention in some specific areas, including the delivery universal SEL curricula. Given that alternative settings tend to have relatively fewer students, lower student to staff ratios, and that school psychologists in alternative education in the current study report engaging in less consultation and assessment work, school psychologists in alternative settings may have relatively more opportunities to

engage in various direct intervention activities. Similar opportunities may be more rare for school psychologists working in traditional settings.

There were also differences in how frequently school psychologists in traditional and alternative settings reported using some specific therapeutic approaches. There were no significant differences in how often school psychologists reported using a cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) approach, and this orientation was endorsed more on average than any other, consistent with prior research in which school psychologists most often reported being trained in a CBT model (Hanchon & Fernald, 2013). However, school psychologists in alternative education settings reported more often utilizing specific therapeutic approaches such as applied behavior analytic approaches, dialectical behavior therapy, and trauma therapy. This may reflect the tendency for some therapeutic alternative schools to focus on specific therapeutic approaches or specialized populations. For instance, some alternative schools focus primarily on providing applied behavior analysis services for students with autism (e.g., Griffith et al., 2014). Other therapeutic schools focus on providing treatment using psychoanalytic (Reinstein, 2013) or solution focused (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011) approaches. School psychologists working in alternative settings may have received additional on-the-job training encouraging the use of therapeutic approaches beyond CBT, which may have resulted in observed practice activity differences.

Assessment and Evaluation

In examining assessment and evaluation practices, a t-test comparing participant responses across work settings indicated that school psychologists in traditional education

settings reported engaging in significantly higher rates of assessment than those in alternative education settings. These differences may stem from factors related to the process of placing students in alternative education settings. Given the restrictive nature of alternative placements, most students are placed at the recommendation of their IEP team only after exhausting other options, including more inclusive special education options (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). As such, it may be likely that most students are evaluated prior to entering alternative placements, requiring alternative education school psychologists to complete fewer evaluations. In addition, districts may prefer to have the school psychologist from their own school conduct tri-annual re-evaluations, further reducing comprehensive evaluations conducted by school psychologists in alternative education settings. Given the high rates at which school psychologists report conducting initial and re-evaluation for special education (McNamara et al., 2019), it is unsurprising that reductions in evaluation caseload would result in less engagement in assessment activities overall.

School psychologists in traditional settings also reported higher rates of several specific assessment activities, including: reviewing records, conducting interviews with teachers, conducting observations, cognitive and academic assessment, administering rating scales to teachers and parents, and assessing students for special education eligibility. Assessment and evaluation activities outside of comprehensive assessments (e.g., progress monitoring) were reported at similar rates. It was expected that some differences in types of assessment activities would be found, given the complex social-emotional profiles of students often placed in alternative education settings (Gagnon & Barber et al., 2015). However, many of the differences were not in the expected direction. For instance,

differences in evaluations for the purposes of special education eligibility and diagnosis were anticipated. The former was indeed reported more frequently in traditional settings. However, this was not accompanied by a corresponding difference in diagnostic evaluations in alternative settings. In fact, diagnostic evaluation was reported relatively infrequently across both settings. This might reflect that school-based evaluation is more likely to emphasize special education. It may also reflect a general de-emphasis (and even conflict) regarding school psychologists' roles in providing DSM-5-TR diagnoses (Tobin & House, 2016).

It was also expected that patterns of academic and social-emotional assessment would be different across settings, again based on differences in students' SEB profiles. However, both types of assessment activities (e.g., academic, social-emotional) were reported more frequently in traditional settings. This may be related to school psychologists' in traditional settings overall higher rates of engagement in comprehensive assessment activities compared to those in alternative education settings, which likely include engaging in multiple assessment activities (e.g., direct assessment, rating scales; McConaughy & Ritter, 2014).

Social Justice and Advocacy

School psychologists in traditional and alternative education settings did not report engaging in significantly different rates of social justice, contrary to expectations. This is somewhat surprising, given the many systemic inequities and barriers experienced by students in alternative education settings, including disproportionate placement patterns, the restrictive nature, inconsistency in producing effective outcomes, and the potential for stigma

(Ballard & Bender, 2021; Diaz et at., 2023; Parris, 2022). In addition, there were no significant differences between settings in looking at individual practice activities.

Across both settings, the highest rates were reported on items involving social justice activities focused on the self (e.g., self-reflection, self-education) and advocating for culturally responsive practices. This may be related to the individual nature of the work, which can be more feasible and accessible for practitioners than broader, systems-level social justice work. The importance of this individual-level self-work should not be discounted. Pham and colleagues' (2021) emphasize openness and critical reflexivity as the first component of working toward cultural humility, which in turn is critical to addressing social justice issues in the field of school psychology. Without an awareness of ones' own privilege and power, and critical reflection and knowledge of systems of oppression, school psychologists risk perpetuating systems of white supremacy within education.

Ultimately, developing cultural humility includes translating self-reflexivity and awareness into transformative action, social justice advocacy, and alliance building (Pham et al., 2021). Unfortunately, relatively lower rates of social justice engagement were reported by school psychologists on items related to systems-level social justice work, including anti-bias education and community advocacy. These types of activities are critical to disrupting racism and oppression in schools, which negatively impact youth from marginalized backgrounds. However, systems-level issues are complex to navigate, both interpersonally and politically. School psychologists may feel underprepared, a lack of confidence, or legally unable to engage in social justice activities (Farmer et al., 2021). As such, it is crucial that graduate

training programs, professional organizations, and accreditation bodies encourage and enable social justice and advocacy activities that prevents harm to students (Pham et al., 2021).

Implications

The current findings have several implications for research. For one, this study adds to (and updates) the current literature on alternative education and school psychology, a relatively under-researched topic. Previous studies similarly examining practice trends in the field, including previous NASP surveys (e.g., Bahr et al., 2017; Farmer et al., 2021), have been unable to compare practice activities across settings, given sample limitations. The current study highlights not only differences, but also many similarities between alternative and traditional settings. This study provides a foundation for more nuanced exploration of school psychology practice within alternative education, in addition to explorations of graduate training preparation in relation to alternative settings.

The current findings also have several implications for practice, for the field of school psychology and for school psychologists working within alternative education settings more specifically. The primary differences between traditional and alternative education settings were found in the domains of consultation and assessment, with school psychologists in traditional settings reporting higher rates of both. This suggests that consultation and assessment may be less emphasized within alternative education settings. As such, school psychologists who are seeking to work in alternative settings may seek training opportunities that fall outside of these practice domains. School psychologists who are seeking to work in

traditional settings should ensure that their training includes opportunities for consultation and assessment training, as is common in many graduate programs.

In addition, although direct intervention practices overall were not significantly different, there were differences in some individual practice activities that suggest school psychologists in alternative settings may engage in specific intervention activities more often. For example, this was seen in how often school psychologists reported applied some specific counseling approaches (e.g., trauma therapy, dialectical-behavior therapy). Given that prior research suggests many school psychologists feel inadequately prepared to provide individual and group counseling services (Eklund et al., 2020; Hanchon & Fernald, 2013), those seeking to work in alternative settings may wish to seek training or professional development that expands their counseling skills. Professional development beyond a cognitive behavioral approach, which was the most commonly reported orientation received during training in previous studies, may be particularly relevant (Hanchon & Fernald, 2013).

Across both settings, school psychologists reported engaging in relatively low rates of direct intervention, compared to assessment and consultation. This suggests that despite the expanding role of school psychologists, many practitioners seem to continue to perform the traditional job duties of consultation and assessment in relation to individual students. It may be beneficial for the field as a whole to spread awareness about school psychologists' functions, based on the NASP practice model, beyond consultation and assessment, and highlight their potential in serving as school-based mental health providers.

There were also no significant differences between settings regarding social justice practice activities, overall or when examining individual practice items. As a domain, engagement in social justice activities was relatively low, again relative to consultation and assessment activities. Across all education settings, this is a concerning trend; in alternative education, which already has the potential to marginalize students, this is especially concerning. It is ethically imperative that school psychologists, and the broader field, work to increase the amount of social justice activities that they engage in and adopt a critical lens, in order to interrupt systems of oppression and disrupt the harm being inflicted upon students from marginalized backgrounds (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022).

As individuals, school psychologists may wish to seek additional opportunities for training and professional development in social justice work, which may increase their confidence and frequency of engagement in this domain. Fortunately, increased guidance and learning resources are becoming available for embedding social justice work at the individual level (e.g., critical reflection, Pham et al., 2022), school curricular level (e.g., transformative social-emotional learning; Jager et al., 2019), and graduate training program level (e.g., Bender et al., 2020; Grapin, 2017). Leadership organizations should also continue to push social justice as a priority for the field as a whole through training and professional development, which can help set the expectation that school psychologists function as agents of social justice in creating equity for students across all education settings.

Finally, although significant differences were found, there were also many similarities and significant overlap between alternative and traditional settings. Therefore, although it

may be beneficial to pursue additional training opportunities if seeking to work in an alternative setting, trainings specific to the *individual* settings, rather than alternative settings as a whole, may be more helpful. School psychologists appear to engage in many of the same practices, regardless of setting, suggesting that they may be already well-equipped to provide services beyond traditional settings. Given the comprehensive nature of graduate training in school psychology, which includes extensive exposure to ten domains of practice (NASP, 2020a), it is unsurprising that school psychologists' skills are transferable to various settings.

Limitations

Although the study provides a starting point for examining differences between the roles of a school psychologist in alternative and traditional education settings, there are several important limitations to note. First, importantly, the number of participants who reported working in alternative education settings was limited, represented a substantially smaller portion of the sample than school psychologists working in traditional settings. Although this gap was expected, given the much higher number of traditional schools in the United States, the limited sample resulted in limited statistical power to detect differences. As such, these findings may not reflect true differences in the field, and may not be generalizable to alternative education settings as a whole. The limited sample also prevented analysis and exploration of practice activities by specific type of alternative setting (e.g., therapeutic day schools, disciplinary schools). Given that these types of alternative settings vary widely in their purpose, goals, and intervention approach, it is highly likely that there are differences between types of alternative settings that were not able to be examined.

In addition, the sample of school psychologists was relatively homogeneous in terms of demographics, with most respondents reporting being white, cisgender females with no reported disabilities. Although these demographics reflect trends in the field (Goforth et al., 2021), this also limits the diversity of perspectives that are represented. The broad and multifaceted nature of the school psychology field means that individual practitioners have some influence in shaping their job roles within their school settings. As such, the current findings may largely reflect the practice activities that are valued or prioritized by white, cisgender female school psychologists while obscuring the practice activities valued by participants of other identities.

Finally, because there was no pre-developed measure available to answer the research question, the current study used a researcher developed tool. Although the survey was developed using pre-existing measures, followed recommended guidelines for survey development, and Cronbach's alpha for all subscales was above .9, there was no prior validity or reliability data for the measure. This may have potentially impacted findings. The findings may also have been impacted by the ordering of the survey items, which were not randomized. This may have resulted in in more fatigue toward the end of the survey, impacting results on the later sections (e.g., social justice).

Future Directions

The current study highlights several avenues for future research. For one, given the limitations of the sample, it would be beneficial to conduct further research examining practice differences between alternative and traditional education settings. A larger sample

might allow a closer quantitative examination of differences between types of alternative education settings, further highlighting the different roles and responsibilities school psychologists hold in those settings. This might identify further training and professional development opportunities for school psychologists seeking to work in specialized settings, in addition to revealing setting-specific issues and challenges that school psychologists might need to be prepared to address.

Considering the relative difficulty of locating school psychologists who do work in alternative settings, future research should also move beyond quantitatively comparing the settings. Qualitative research, including interviews or focus groups, with school psychologists who are currently working in alternative settings should be conducted in order to help better illuminate not only the roles and responsibilities, but also the unique factors that contribute to why differences between alternative and traditional school settings do (or do not) exist. The current study provides a broad, descriptive overview. However, in-depth, qualitative research could provide the field with a picture of the contextual features, procedures, and practices occurring in alternative education. It is possible (and likely) that these vary widely from school to school, but identifying any commonalities can highlight opportunities and priorities for creating change within alternative education settings.

Finally, although research on school psychology practice itself is important for encouraging the field to critically self-reflect and can inform training, it is crucial that research in alternative education move beyond examining what professionals are doing and move toward examining the impact on students. Future research should continue to focus on

social justice issues occurring within systems of alternative education, and how school psychologists can alleviate harm done to students. For example, future research could examine how the services provided by school psychologists help increase student well-being in alternative schools, prevent unnecessary placement in alternative education settings, or how school psychologists can effectively facilitate the transition back to traditional settings. Through research on how effective services foster positive outcomes, school psychologists can ensure that alternative placements are meeting student needs rather than serving to further marginalize them.

Conclusion

Alternative Education Settings (AES) have the potential to facilitate positive outcomes for students with a variety of unique needs and experiences that are not supported within traditional schools. However, without adequate supports, AES risk further marginalizing students and exacerbating vulnerabilities. School psychologists, with training and expertise in both education and mental health, are well-positioned to provide these services. However, little is known about the role school psychologists play in AES, making it difficult to anticipate what types of roles and responsibilities might be expected. Results of the current study suggest that assessment may be relatively more emphasized in traditional settings, although this activity remains important to practicing in alternative education. It appears consultation, social justice, and direct intervention activities were practiced at similar rates across settings. However, intervention and social justice were practiced much less frequently within both settings overall. The many similarities across settings suggest that

school psychologists are performing similar job roles, and are overall similarly prepared to work within alternative education setting, ultimately helping to support students and facilitate positive outcomes.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' PROFESSIONAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS SURVEY

The purpose of the current study is to examine the professional roles and responsibilities of school psychologists providing services in educational settings, including traditional public schools and alternative education. This survey will ask you to report on how frequently you engage in consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy work in your schools.

To be eligible for the survey, you must:

- Currently work within either traditional (e.g., public schools) or non-traditional (e.g., alternative placements) K-12 educational environment AND have a degree in school psychology
- Current interns, trainees, and those without school psychology degrees are not eligible for participation.

By continuing, you are indicating that you consent to participate in the study.

- Yes
- No

Participant Demographic Info

1. What is your race? (Check all that apply)
    a. Indigenous to the United States or Canada
    b. Asian or Asian American
    c. Black or African American
    d. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    e. White
    f. Prefer not to answer
    g. Prefer to self-describe: _____

2. What is your ethnicity? (Check all that apply)
    a. Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African (AMENA origin)
    b. Latino/a/x origin
    c. Not of AMENA or Latino/a/x origin
    d. Prefer not to answer
    e. Prefer to self-describe: _____

3. Please enter your age (in years).

4. What is your gender?
    a. Cisgender Male
    b. Transgender Male
    c. Cisgender Female
    d. Transgender Male
    e. Non-binary/third gender
    f. Prefer not to answer
    g. Prefer to self-describe

5. How many years have you worked as a school psychologist, not including graduate preparation and internship?
    a. <1-4 years
    b. 5-10 years
    c. 11-15 years
    d. 16-20 years
    e. >20 years

6. Do you identify as having a disability?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Prefer not to answer
    d. If yes, please describe (optional)

7. What languages do you speak fluently?

8. What is the highest level of education you have completed in school psychology?
    a. Master's level
    b. Specialist Level (PsyS, EdS, CAS, CAGS, Master's + 30 credits)
    c. Doctoral level (PhD, PsyD, EdD)
9. Which credentials do you hold? (Check all that apply)
    a. State certified/licensed school psychologist
    b. Nationally Certified School Psychologist
    c. Licensed Psychologist
    d. Board Certified Behavior Analyst
    e. Other (describe)

10. What state do you work in?

Setting and Job Specifics

11. What type of school setting do you primarily work in?
    a. **Traditional/Mainstream** (i.e., school not focused primarily on special, vocational or alternative education)
    b. **Private School** (not for students at-risk of school failure)
    c. Charter School
    d. **Alternative School** (i.e., schools designed to meet the needs of students that cannot typically be met in traditional schools)
    e. **Alternative program within public school** (i.e., separate program within a school designed to meet needs that are not met in a traditional classroom)
    f. School within a behavioral health facility
    g. School within a residential program
    h. School within a juvenile justice setting
    i. Other:

12. Please indicate if you provide services in any other type of school setting:
    a. Not applicable
    b. **Traditional/Mainstream** (i.e., school not focused primarily on special, vocational or alternative education)
    c. **Private School** (not for students at-risk of school failure)
    d. Charter School
    e. **Alternative School** (i.e., schools designed to meet the needs of students that cannot typically be met in traditional schools)
    f. **Alternative program within public school** (i.e., separate program within a school designed to meet needs that are not met in a traditional classroom)
    g. School within a behavioral health facility
    h. School within a residential program
    i. School within a juvenile justice setting
    j. Other:

13. What percentage of your total work hours do you spend, on average, providing services in alternative school settings in a typical month?
    a. 0-100% (sliding scale)

14. What type of program best describes the alternative setting where you provide services?
    a. Therapeutic (i.e., schools focused on social, emotional, and behavioral needs)
    b. Academic (i.e., schools focused on academic curricula, such as credit recovery)
    c. Disciplinary (i.e., schools for students who have been suspended or expelled)
    d. Combination (please specify)
    e. Other (please specify)

15. In the schools to which you are primarily assigned, what percentage of enrolled students are culturally or linguistically diverse (best estimate).

- Sliding scale 0-100%

16. In the schools to which you are primarily assigned, what percentage of enrolled students receive special education services (best estimate)?
    a. Sliding scale 0-100%

17. Which best characterizes the geographic location of the schools you serve? (Check all that apply)
    a. Urban
    b. Suburban
    c. Rural
    d. Frontier
    e. Other

18. What ages does your setting serve (check all that apply)
    a. Preschool
    b. Elementary
    c. Middle
    d. High
    e. Adult

19. How many other school psychologists work in your primary setting (i.e., the site where you typically spend the most work hours)?
    a. _____

20. Please indicate if any other types of mental health or behavioral health professionals provide services within your building: Check all that apply.

a. Other types of psychologists
b. Nurse practitioners
c. Psychiatrists
d. Social workers
e. School counselors
f. Guidance counselors
g. Licensed mental health counselors
h. Board Certified Behavior Analysts
i. Occupational Therapists
j. Other (please specify type):

The following sections will ask you to rate how frequently you engage in various practice activities. If you indicated that you regularly provide services in more than one setting, please consider your primary work setting. In addition, please consider the 2021-2022 school year when rating each item.

Consultation

This section will ask questions about any consultation services you provide at your primary setting. **Consultation is "a process for providing psychological and education services in which a specialist (consultant) works cooperatively with a staff member (consultee) to improve the learning and adjustment of a student (client) or group of students"** (Erchul & Martens, 2010). For example, consulting with teachers or parents regarding behavioral or academic challenges in order to develop an intervention.

Do you provide any **consultation** services in your role at your current setting?

- o Yes (Go to question grid)
- o No (skip to next section)

What percentage of your time per week do you spend engaged in consultation?

How often do you engage in each of the following consultation activities in your work?	*Not at All (0)*	*Rarely (1)*	*Sometimes (2)*	*Often (3)*	*Very Often (4)*
Consultation/Collaboration with Community agencies (e.g., hospital, community mental health)					
Consultation with teachers regarding…					
• academic difficulties?					
• externalizing difficulties?					
• internalizing difficulties?					
• class wide behavior management strategies?					
• (OTHER; please specify)					
Consultation with parents regarding…					
• academic difficulties?					
• externalizing difficulties?					
• internalizing difficulties?					
• home-based intervention?					
• OTHER (please specify)					
Team-based consultation (e.g., IEP meetings, grade level teams)					
Systems-level consultation (e.g., district)					
Consultation regarding multi-tiered systems of support (e.g., RtI, PBIS)?					

Is there anything else related to **consultation** that you feel is important in your current role as a school psychologist (e.g., additional activities, barriers, considerations)?

Direct Intervention Services

This section will ask questions about any direct intervention services you provide at your primary setting. **Direct intervention services include any academic or behavioral services provided first-hand or directly to a student or group of students by you as a school psychologist.** For examine, individual student counseling, social-emotional groups, or crisis intervention services.

Do you provide any **direct intervention** services in your role at your current setting?

- Yes (Go to question grid)
- No (skip to next section)

What percentage of your time per week do you spend engaged in intervention?

How often do you engage in each of the following intervention activities in your work?	**Not at All (0)**	**Rarely (1)**	**Sometimes (2)**	**Often (3)**	**Very Often (4)**
Universal PBIS interventions (e.g., reinforcement points)					
Universal SEL curriculum (e.g., Second Step)					
Group contingency interventions (e.g., Good Behavior Game)					
Check-in/Check-Out interventions					
Tier 2 student groups focused on….					
• Academic skills					
• Social emotional health					
• Other groups (please specify)					
Provide individual counseling focused on…					
• Academic skills					
• social-emotional health (e.g., counseling)					
• Other (please specify)					
Use the following approaches during counseling:					
• Cognitive Behavioral Therapy					
• Behavioral Therapy/Applied Behavioral Analysis					
• Dialectical Behavior Therapy					
• Play Therapy					
• Trauma work					
• Other (please specify)					
Implement self-monitoring interventions					
Engage in direct intervention work with caregivers (e.g., family counseling)					
Providing crisis intervention services					

Is there anything else related to **direct student intervention** that you feel is important in your current role as a school psychologist (e.g., additional activities, barriers, considerations)?

Assessment and Evaluation

This section will ask questions about any assessment or evaluation services you provide at your primary setting. **Assessment is the "collection of information, which might be in narrative or numeric form, for the purposes of making a decision. Assessment contributes to defining problems, identifying student assets and needs, determining current levels of student functioning, estimated the rate of progress toward well-defined goals, and evaluating program outcomes. Evaluation is the interpretation of information collected during an assessment and its use to guide a decision" (NASP, 2016).** This may include assessing cognitive abilities, social-emotional functioning, conducting universal screening, and/or collecting progress monitoring data.

Do you provide any **assessment and evaluation** services in your role at your current setting?

- Yes (Go to question grid)
- No (skip to next section)

What percentage of your time per week do you spend engaged in assessment and evaluation?

How often do you engage in each of the following assessment activities in your work?	**Not at All (0)**	**Rarely (1)**	**Sometimes (2)**	**Often (3)**	**Very Often (4)**
Review previous records					
Conduct interviews with…					
• parents?					
• teachers?					
• students?					
Conduct behavioral observation of students					
Administer the following assessments:					
• Cognitive assessment (e.g., WISC-V)					
• Academic assessment (e.g., WIAT-III)					
• Neuropsychological assessment (e.g., NEPSY-II)					
• Projective measures (e.g., Roberts-2)					
• Executive functioning (e.g., CPT-3)					

Administer social, emotional, behavioral, and/or executive functioning rating scales to….					
• Parents (e.g., BASC-3)?					
• Teachers? (e.g. BASC-3)?					
• Students (e.g., CDI-2)?					
Conduct risk assessments of students involving risk of harm to self or others					
Participate in universal screening procedures for….					
• Social, emotional, or behavioral risk (e.g., SSRS-IE)?					
• Academic risk (e.g., DIBELS)?					
• Social, emotional, or behavioral strengths (e.g., DESSA-mini)					
Conduct assessment for the purposes of determining special education eligibility (i.e., IDEIA criteria)					
Conduct assessment for diagnostic purposes (i.e., DSM-5 criteria)					
Engage in assessment for treatment planning purposes					
Engage in assessment for progress monitoring purposes					
Engage in other assessment activities (please specify)					

Is there anything else related to **assessment and evaluation** that you feel is important in your current role as a school psychologist (e.g., additional activities, barriers, considerations)?

Social Justice and Advocacy Work

This section will ask questions about any advocacy work you conduct at your primary setting. **Advocacy refers to "speaking up for the rights and welfare of students and families, and providing a voice to clients who cannot or do not wish to speak for themselves" (NASP, 2020).**

Social justice is defined as "both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory

practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth" (NASP, 2017). For example, advocating for equitable school discipline policies or speaking against the oppression of marginalized students (e.g., racism, heterosexism).

Do you engage in any **advocacy or social justice** work in your role at your current setting?

- Yes (Go to question grid)
- No (skip to next section)

What percentage of your time do you spend engaged in social justice and advocacy work?

How often do you engage in each of the following social justice and advocacy activities in your work?	**Not at All (0)**	**Rarely (1)**	**Sometimes (2)**	**Often (3)**	**Very Often (4)**
Self-reflect on your own practices and cultural awareness to evaluate bias and inequity?					
Engage in education (e.g., reading, research, training opportunities) to increase your own knowledge and awareness of bias and inequity?					
Lead student affinity groups (e.g., GSA, BIPOC groups)?					
Conduct anti-bias education/professional development with…					
• Students in classrooms?					
• teachers/school staff?					
• parents?					
• community partners/organizations?					
Use school-wide data to evaluate for bias in….					
• Discipline (e.g., suspensions)?					
• Special education placement?					
• Academic performance?					
• Bullying/victimization?					
• Gifted programming placement?					

Advocate for culturally responsive and equitable practices in:					
• Assessment and evaluations?					
• Student intervention?					
• School-wide policies?					
• Staff training?					
Evaluate for inclusiveness and bias in….					
• Classroom curricula?					
• School visual materials?					
• Home/school communication materials?					
Advocate for individual students from marginalized backgrounds?					
Include students as leaders in advocacy activities?					
Collaborate with community advocacy groups (e.g., GLSEN)?					
Engage in advocacy efforts at the legislative level?					

Is there anything else related to advocacy and social justice that you feel is important in your current role as a school psychologist (e.g., additional activities, barriers, considerations)?

Is there any other information you would like to include regarding your role in consultation, intervention, assessment, or social justice work?

(For those who indicated they work in an alternative setting): You indicated that you provide services within an alternative setting. Are you interested in being contacted for a follow-up interview regarding your roles and responsibilities as a school psychologist in an alternative setting?

- Yes
- No

(**If yes**): Please provide your email:

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FLYER

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Seeking School Psychologists for a survey on Traditional Vs Alternative Education Settings!

I hope this email finds you well! I am seeking school psychologists who work in either alternative education settings (e.g., for students with intensive needs) or traditional schools (i.e., public schools) to complete a survey about your engagement in various job activities including consultation, intervention, assessment, and social justice work. This dissertation project aims to better understand how the professional responsibilities of school psychologists who work in alternative education settings compare to those working within traditional schools.

Participation in the study would involve completing a survey with questions that ask about your work setting and engagement in various job activities, including consultation, intervention, assessment, and social justice work. The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes. It is anticipated that participation will involve minimal risk, and you may skip any questions that cause discomfort. Participants will be entered into a raffle to win one of eleven $25 gift cards. If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact Staci Ballard (staci.ballard001@umb.edu). This project is being advised by Dr. Stacy Bender (Stacy.Bender@umb.edu) and has been approved by the UMass Boston Institutional Review Board.

To participate, please use the following link or QR code:
https://umassboston.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9LcBGLJWhA8b7lc

Please feel free to forward this request to any other school psychologists that would be interested, particularly any that work in alternative education settings!

Thank you for your consideration,

Staci Ballard, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling and School Psychology
University of Massachusetts Boston

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Survey Consent Form

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Counseling and School Psychology
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Principle Investigator: Staci Ballard

Title of Study: Professional Roles and Functions of School Psychologists in Alternative vs. Traditional Education

Introduction and Contact Information
You are asked to take part in a research study. **Participation is voluntary.** The primary researcher is Staci C. Ballard, M.Ed., Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Counseling and School Psychology. The faculty advisor is Stacy L. Bender, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Counseling and School Psychology. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have questions, Staci Ballard can be reached by email at Staci.Ballard001@umb.edu. Her advisor Dr. Bender can be reached at Stacy.Bender@umb.edu.

Description of the Project:
The purpose of this research study is to compare school psychologists' job activities in traditional K-12 settings to alternative education settings. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous survey with questions about your demographics and work setting. The survey will also include questions about how often you perform different job activities related to consultation, intervention, assessment, and advocacy. It is anticipated that your participation will take less than 10 minutes. At the end of the survey, you will have the opportunity to be entered into a raffle for one of eleven $25 Visa gift cards. Your answers will not be linked to your identity.

Risks or Discomforts:
It is expected that there are minimal risks to your participation. You may experience some mild discomfort as you reflect on your work experiences while completing the survey. You may skip any questions or stop participating at any time. If you would like to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Staci Ballard.

Benefits:

There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Your participation may help us learn more about how to improve school psychological practice in alternative settings, in turn improving student outcomes.

Confidentiality:
Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Survey data will be collected anonymously and in no way linked to your identity. Identifying information will be collected separately only for the purposes of the gift card raffle or interest in a follow-up study. Information gathered for this project will be password protected or stored in a locked file cabinet and only the research team will have access to the data. Data will be stored for potential use in future research studies or shared with another researcher for future research studies. In this case, you will not be asked again for your consent.

Voluntary Participation:
The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may end your participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to end your participation, you should exit out of the survey browser. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you or involve a loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions:
You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have a research-related problem, you can reach Staci Ballard (Principle Investigator) at staci.ballard001@umb, or Stacy L. Bender (Faculty Advisor) at Stacy.Bender@umb.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

By clicking yes, you will be agreeing to participate in the research and indicating that you meet the following inclusion criteria. To be eligible for the survey, you must:

- Currently work within either **traditional** (e.g., public schools) or **non-traditional** (e.g., alternative schools for students with intensive needs) K-12 educational environment **AND** have a degree in school psychology (e.g., Ed.S, Ph.D)
- *Current interns, trainees, and those without school psychology degrees are **not eligible** for participation.*

Please keep a copy of this form for your records or if you need to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Staci Ballard, M.Ed.
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