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Exploring School Psychologists' Perceived Preparedness, Self-Efficacy, and Motivations for Practice in Urban Schools

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

EXPLORING SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' PERCEIVED PREPAREDNESS, SELF-
EFFICACY, AND MOTIVATIONS FOR PRACTICE IN URBAN SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

KILEY CALLAHAN

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

School psychologists are trained to provide direct and indirect services to support children and adolescents' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020). Within the school setting, school psychologists work with students, caregivers, educators, and other professionals to ensure supportive learning environments for all. According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), practitioners are expected to demonstrate professional competencies, including knowledge and skills across ten domains of practice. These domains include: data-based decision making, consultation and collaboration, academic interventions and instructional supports, mental and behavioral health service interventions, school-wide practices to promote learning, services to promote safe and supportive schools, family, school, and community collaboration, equitable practices for diverse student populations, research and program evaluation, and legal, ethical, and professional practice (NASP, 2020).

School psychologists can become licensed to practice at the masters, specialist, or doctoral levels. According to data from 2015, the highest earned degree of NASP members was 25% doctoral level, 55% specialist level or equivalent, and 19% masters level (Walcott, Charvat, McNamara & Hyson, 2016). According to NASP standards, the specialist degree requires at least 60 graduate credits over three years with a 1,200-hour internship, which is the entry-level degree for school psychology practice (2010). Master's degrees are considered "specialist-equivalent" if they satisfy these requirements. In 2010, NASP re-authorized the *Standards for Graduate*

Preparation of School Psychologists, a framework for school psychology training programs designed to ensure the consistent implementation of an agreed-upon set of principles that guide graduate education for school psychologists-in-training. To obtain program accreditation, both specialist level and doctoral level programs are reviewed by the professional organization. Training programs are approved upon evidence of consistency with the NASP standards in both graduate coursework and internship requirements (NASP, 2010).

The *Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* state that school psychology graduate students must engage in applied training experiences, such as practicum and internship, in addition to coursework. They are also provided appropriate supervision, evaluation, and faculty support (NASP, 2010). Along with guiding training programs, these standards are intended to serve as a model to assist state education agencies in determining standards for school psychologists' graduate education (NASP, 2010). Ultimately, the trainers of school psychologists are responsible for ensuring that program candidates are exposed to training experiences across the ten domains of practice in order to help them develop professional competency as independent practitioners (NASP, 2010).

As outlined above, school psychologists receive training to support students across a wide range of practice areas. With that, the fundamental goal of school psychological service delivery is to enhance the learning and mental health of all students, regardless of their school setting (NASP, 2020). However, evidence suggests that school psychologists' professional needs and experiences may differ based on the context in which they work (Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003; Shernoff, Bearman, & Kratochwill, 2017). The urban school context, in particular, is associated with several challenges that may impact school psychology practice. These challenges include the impact of urban stressors, systemic barriers, systematic

marginalization, and limited resources (American Psychological Association, 2005; Foote, 2005; Graves, Proctor, & Aston, 2014; Lee, 2005).

To start, the stressors found in urban spaces often pose significant challenges that differ from those found in either rural or suburban districts (Lee, 2005). Urban learners are more likely to live in unsafe conditions, experience higher rates of exposure to community violence, and attend deteriorating school buildings with insufficient resources (Overstreet, 2000; Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008; Taylor et al., 2016). High rates of free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, student mobility, and temporary living situations are also found in urban districts (Bearman et al., 2018; Evans, Yoo, & Sipple, 2010; Shapiro, Murray, & Sard, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Teachers in urban schools report spending a considerable amount of time responding to individual or classwide behavior problems and are more likely to leave the profession within five years than those in either rural or suburban schools (Foote, 2005; Ingersoll, 2003; Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell 2017). Researchers have identified a strong link between urban poverty and risk for academic failure, in addition to the persistent disparities in academic achievement that exist for urban learners in comparison to their peers in suburban communities (Noguera, 2011; Silva-Laya et al., 2019).

Urban schools also educate a higher percentage of students of color and English learners than do rural or suburban schools (Council of Great City Schools, 2018; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). This has significant implications given that the school psychology workforce faces a shortage of culturally and linguistically diverse practitioners (NASP, 2017). As a result of the growing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity found in urban schools, school psychologists must prepare to implement culturally responsive practices to meet the unique needs of their students. Without the adequate knowledge, skills, or dispositions necessary for culturally responsive

practice, school psychologists may find themselves engaged in ineffective or harmful practices (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Johnson, Bahr, & Navarro, 2019). Furthermore, only a small percentage of the literature published in school psychology journals has a focus on diversity issues, and there are comparatively few studies that explore the efficacy of school-based interventions for students of color or English learners (Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013; Grunewald et al., 2014; Villareal, 2014).

In one study that explores the views and needs of urban school psychologists, Graves, Proctor, & Aston (2014) found that these practitioners often possess an awareness of the impact of urban stressors. Yet, the systemic barriers found in urban schools, such as limited resources, lack of administrative support, and inadequate training, often "prevent them from providing comprehensive school-based psychological services to the students who may be in most need" (p. 392). Urban school psychologists also cite heavy assessment caseloads, perceived difficulty relating to students, and little time for individual or group mental health service delivery as among their most significant challenges (Stoiber & Vanderwood, 2008; Graves, Proctor & Aston, 2014; Lee, 2005). These findings have important implications for the future of urban school psychology in light of the gap that exists between the needs of students and the availability of services in places like underserved urban districts, where steady recruitment and retention of school psychologists has been difficult (Rossen, Arnold, & Ney, 2018).

The impact of the school psychologist shortage in urban districts was further elucidated in a report published by the Ohio School Psychologists Association (OSPA) in 2016. The purpose of this report was to examine the current state of school psychologist staffing issues in the state of Ohio, to describe previous efforts to place school psychologists in underserved areas across the state, and to develop recommendations to address the problems that contribute to the

shortage (OSPA, 2016). Findings from the report revealed that unfilled practitioner positions were highest in urban schools with increased rates of poverty and an increased student population, with a total of 33 unfilled positions at these sites (OSPA, 2016). Urban schools (with high poverty rates but with an average student population size) had the second highest number of unfilled positions. These schools reported a total of 30 unfilled positions (OSPA, 2016). Comparatively, the subsequent sites where school psychologist positions were left unfilled were in suburban schools with low rates of poverty at 22 unfilled positions and small-town schools with low rates of poverty at 13 unfilled positions (OSPA, 2016).

It is important to note that the current shortage of school psychologists impacts school districts in all regions across the nation. Over the last two decades, NASP has projected that nearly two-thirds of practicing school psychologists will have retired or left the field by 2020 (Curtis, Grier, and Hunley, 2004). A report by the Kansas Association of School Psychologists in 2017 found that, of those in practice, 34% of school psychologists planned to leave their position by the end of the 2018–2019 school year, with more than half of those planning to leave the profession altogether (Kansas Association of School Psychologists, 2017; NASP, 2017).

Many factors contribute to the critical shortage of practitioners in the field. These factors include high numbers of practitioners reaching retirement, the limited availability of graduate programs and university faculty to train new practitioners, high rates of professional stress and burnout on the job, administrative challenges and pressures, and a "limited supply of qualified professionals willing to work in certain communities" such as high poverty, high crime, urban or rural settings or with specific populations, including children and families of color or those who are economically disadvantaged (NASP, 2006 p. 2; NASP 2016). These findings indicate that, in

addition to addressing recruitment, efforts to effectively train and prepare emerging school psychologists to succeed in their roles cannot be understated.

Along with its commitment to remedy the shortage of school psychologists and school psychology faculty, the National Association of School Psychologists strives to enhance professional competency for its members by providing access to resources, training materials, and professional development opportunities. And yet, some urban school psychologists, particularly those of color, reportedly found "no benefit" to obtaining membership (Graves et al., 2014 p. 387). In their study, Graves et al. (2014) revealed that there may be many urban school psychologists in practice whose views and perspectives are not adequately accounted for. Such a finding begs the question of whether there is some misalignment between the needs and experiences of urban school psychologists and the resources provided by their preeminent professional organization.

In addition to the standards provided by NASP, school psychologists may also access professional development and continuing education opportunities from their state school psychology associations. These associations also engage in leadership and advocacy at the state level to advance the professional interests of school psychologists. Thus, school psychology state associations may provide more targeted or "subspeciality" resources to address local or regional issues that arise in practice (Freedheim, 2003 p. 424). While some state associations, such as the New York Association of School Psychologists, offer interest groups for urban school psychologists, there are few resources or publications produced by state associations specifically designed to address the training needs of these practitioners.

To better prepare school psychologists to support urban learners, efforts to understand their training experiences and training needs must be prioritized. There are currently over 240

NASP approved specialist-level programs (Gadke, et al., 2017). Of these, a small number of school psychology programs maintain a dedicated urban mission or specific focus on urban school psychology practice. These programs have made considerable efforts toward providing targeted training by requiring fieldwork placements in urban districts, emphasizing culturally responsive approaches, and engaging in research to address issues in urban education. In recent years, there have also been efforts to establish partnerships between training programs and large urban districts like Boston Public Schools and Chicago Public Schools (Adamowski, 2019). As a result of these partnerships, graduate students are provided high-quality training, supervision, and mentorship in urban schools. At the same time, practicing school psychologists in these districts are afforded access to professional development offered by university faculty (Adamowski, 2019).

Despite these advancements, the views and perspectives of urban school psychologists regarding their training experiences and professional practice have been largely understudied. As a result, school psychologists' motivations for practice in this setting are not well understood. Additionally, it is unclear whether engagement in training across a broad spectrum of practice domains ensures that school psychologists feel prepared and confident in their ability to support urban learners. It is also unclear whether high levels of preparedness and self-efficacy for practice in urban schools can be achieved for those who received little training in this setting or lack exposure to the systemic challenges that impact urban districts.

These and other questions have yet to be qualitatively explored. Rather, the vast majority of published studies utilize survey research and quantitative methods to analyze urban learners' academic and behavioral outcomes and the challenges faced by urban school personnel. A purposeful exploration of urban practitioners' perspectives regarding their training and

professional practices may have important implications for training. With an enhanced understanding of urban school psychologists' perceptions of their training needs, programs may be better suited to prepare these practitioners to be effective in their roles.

Research Questions

In order to qualitatively examine school psychologists' views regarding their training needs and experiences for practice in urban settings, the following research questions were developed:

- 1) What were school psychologists' motivations for practice in urban schools?
- 2) How did school psychologists perceive their level of preparedness for practice in urban settings upon completion of graduate training? And subsequently, what knowledge, skills, or experiences may enhance preparedness?
- 3) Where do urban school psychologists access continued training and professional development opportunities?
- 4) How did school psychologists perceive their sense of self-efficacy for practice in urban settings upon completion of graduate training? And subsequently, what knowledge, skills, or experiences may enhance urban school psychologists' sense of self-efficacy?

Definition of Terms

Motivation. The term motivation is defined as the experience of being moved to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Researchers have found that individuals possess not only varying levels of motivation but also varying types of motivation. This is referred to in the literature as the "orientation of motivation" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 54). As Ryan & Deci state, "Orientation of motivation concerns the underlying attitudes and goals that give rise to action—that is, it concerns the *why* of actions" (2000, p. 54). For this study, the term motivation will be

used to understand the *why*, with particular emphasis given to participants' attitudes, goals, and beliefs that factored into their decisions to pursue practice in urban schools.

Preparedness. The term preparedness is defined as one's state of readiness ("Preparedness," 2019). While there is no formal, operationalized definition of preparedness in psychology literature, Holtzman (2019) described preparedness as "the belief or degree of certainty that the individual has the skills and experience necessary to be ready to assume his or her role as a school psychologist" (p. 17). For this study, the definition of preparedness outlined by Holtzman (2019) will be utilized. The concept of preparedness is particularly salient when exploring training for practice because it may further elucidate individuals' perceptions of the skills and knowledge they have (or have not) acquired.

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief about his or her capabilities to successfully execute or perform a specific task (Bandura, 1994). In theory, self-efficacy beliefs influence which tasks or activities an individual chooses to engage in. Individuals are more likely to evade tasks they feel they will not be successful in and act upon those they perceive themselves capable of (Bandura, 1994; Van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002). Bandura (1994) argues that individuals with "high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided" (p. 1). Thus, while preparedness describes the individual's belief that they have acquired skills and knowledge, self-efficacy refers to the individual's belief that they can successfully execute these skills.

Training experiences. For this study, training experiences will be defined as any opportunity provided by the individual's graduate program designed to ensure the individual meets the requirements for successful completion of their graduate degree, eligibility for

professional licensure, or that establish their professional identity as a school psychologist. These may include, but are not limited to, coursework, fieldwork (e.g., practicum and internship), supervision, professional development seminars, reading, research, mentorship, attendance at state or national conferences, and membership in university, state, or national school psychology professional associations.

Theoretical Framework

The use of a theoretical framework will guide the researcher's qualitative exploration of urban school psychologists' motivations that led to practice in an urban setting, their perceptions of preparedness, and the factors that have shaped and influenced their sense of self-efficacy beginning independent practice.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior, otherwise known as *reciprocal determinism* (Bandura, 1986). A central premise of this theory is that individuals learn through their own experiences, observation of others, and reinforcements within the environment. Through the theoretical lens of social cognitive theory, participants' learning and behaviors are shaped through the dynamic interaction of individual factors, environmental factors, behavioral factors (Bandura, 1986). This is a useful theoretical framework for exploring the training experiences of urban school psychologists because SCT emphasizes the dynamic nature of knowledge and skill acquisition over time. Furthermore, this framework allows for consideration of the various influences in participants' motivations for practice in an urban setting, their perceived preparedness, and sense of self-efficacy in practice.

For example, one salient influence in school psychology training is the standards for developing professional practice, known as the *National Association of School Psychologists Practice Model* (NASP, 2020). The use of a professional practice model in school psychology training provides a language for instructing, communicating, and describing standards for effective practice. Ideally, a professional practice model contributes to the learning environment by providing a framework for course content, professional development materials, and research in the field. However, both the NASP professional organization and the trainers of school psychologists must communicate these standards in a way that individuals can conceptualize and use in practice.

Moreover, individuals' training and preparation may be influenced by their own beliefs, values, and prior experiences. As such, trainers may not want to assume that what is taught as coursework or during a professional development seminar is what individuals will come to learn, accept, and recall. Instead, materials and content may be filtered through an individual's own interpretations and perceptions. In addition to acquiring foundational knowledge, school psychologists are expected to develop competency in the required professional skills. As such, school psychologists must learn to act as practitioners, not just learn about school psychology. In graduate training, students have the opportunity to put their skills to the test through practicum and internship before becoming independently licensed. As a part of those experiences, observational learning may heavily shape students' expectations and beliefs about future practice as they keep a close eye on the methods of their supervisor. Observational learning may also occur for an independent practitioner, be it during professional development training, with a colleague on the job, or perhaps even through supervision with a graduate student. These are just

a few examples of the ways in which a school psychologist's learning may occur in a social context with reciprocal interaction between person, environment, and behavior (LaMorte, 2019).

And finally, according to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy may be a critical factor in determining whether an individual will actually implement the knowledge and skills acquired in training. As previously stated, self-efficacy is defined as a belief in one's ability to successfully execute or perform a specific behavior (Bandura, 1994). Without a strong sense of self-efficacy, school psychologists may avoid activities they believe they cannot succeed in and instead only engage in the activities they perceive themselves capable of (Bandura, 1994). Enhancing self-efficacy may be of considerable importance for school psychologists in large urban school districts, as the literature indicates there are many possible challenges and barriers in place.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Urban Schools

The term ‘urban’ is used to characterize a geographic area with a high rate of population density (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). In the United States, more than 80% of the population lives in an urban setting (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). As a result, urban school districts serve more students across a greater number of school buildings than either suburban or rural districts (Adamowski, 2019). Beyond just high rates of population density, urban communities are also typically associated with higher rates of poverty and community violence as well as racially and ethnically diverse populations (Lee, 2005; Boutte, 2012). Within these communities, urban school districts are also often perceived as large, complex systems with structural challenges and less accessibility to resources (Lee, 2005).

The distinguishing characteristics of urban-dwelling related to city size, population density, social inequalities, and diversity of populations may have important implications for children and families concerning youth development, physical and mental health, and educational opportunity (American Psychological Association, 2004). The American Psychological Association states that "urban schools are ecologically embedded institutions that routinely incorporate and reflect both the challenges and strengths of their surrounding communities" (2004, p. 35). These and other factors influence the educational experiences of urban learners and, therefore, have important implications for urban school psychology practice.

Thus, the purpose of this literature review is to examine the issues relevant to graduate training for effective school psychology practice in an urban setting.

To start, a critical consideration for practitioners in urban schools is the varied use and interpretation of the term 'urban' itself. Aside from its originally intended use, 'urban' can also be used as a form of coded language. For example, Billingham & Kimelberg (2018) suggest that the word 'urban' is used, not only to refer to a particular region, but also to groups from specific racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, to challenges thought to be associated with these groups, and to the systems and institutions that serve them (e.g., urban schools). The authors state, "In all cases, the term 'urban' acts not simply as a modifier denoting a specific geographic space, but also as a proxy for a perceived set of negative characteristics" (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2018 p. 860). In other words, the term can be misused by some to mean "failing" systems with "challenging" populations (Foote, 2005).

Like all students, those educated in urban schools bring with them several strengths and assets. In their report on urban psychology, the American Psychological Association argues that there are a number of assets commonly found among urban learners that should be "capitalized on" in the classroom (APA, 2005 p. 31). For example, urban learners often demonstrate effective problem-solving, enhanced resiliency, strong caregiving skills, and well-developed cultural values and belief systems (APA, 2005; Williams & Newcombe, 1994). However, urban learners are often depicted from a deficit perspective, with much of the literature highlighting their challenges and vulnerabilities (APA, 2005). Instead of leading with strengths, urban learners continue to be negatively characterized as at-risk and low-achieving (Williams & Newcombe, 1994). By some, these students "can be seen as the cause rather than the effect" of the challenges

facing urban education (Foote, 2005 p. 347). To that end, urban schools and the children and families they serve have been unfairly viewed as problems that ought to be fixed or as systems and communities to avoid (Hirschman, 1970 as cited in Billingham & Kimelberg, 2018). Due in part to this stigma, Lee (2005) argues that urban public education systems face significant challenges that are “qualitatively different from those confronting schools in rural or suburban contexts” (p. 185). As a response to these negative characterizations, Milner (2012) proposed a framework designed to re-conceptualize urban schools. Within this framework, urban schools can be classified into one of the following three categories: urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristic.

Urban intensive schools. Within Milner's (2012) framework, urban intensive schools are situated in large metropolitan cities where population density is highest. These schools are found in urban districts such as Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. As a result of the sheer size of the population in major cities, one can also expect that high student population density exists within urban intensive school districts. The infrastructure of urban intensive schools and the large number of students within these settings can make it challenging to provide adequate resources to those who need them. More so, Milner (2012) states, "outside-of-school factors such as housing, poverty, and transportation are directly connected to what happens inside of the school" (p. 559).

Urban emergent schools. These schools are located within cities where the population density is not as high as an urban intensive setting. While urban intensive schools exist within cities with one million residents or more, urban emergent environments are typically home to smaller populations. Due to the smaller population density, Milner (2012) argues that residents

and systems within urban emergent spaces do not necessarily experience the same magnitude of challenges as those within urban intensive spaces. He states, "In these areas, there are fewer people per capita; the realities of the surrounding communities are not as complex as those in the intensive category" (p. 559). Schools in cities like Nashville, Tennessee, and Columbus, Ohio serve as examples of urban emergent schools.

Urban characteristic schools. Lastly, Milner (2012) categorizes urban characteristic schools as those not necessarily located in large or even mid-sized cities, but where features of urban schools are present. A school located within a rural or suburban region may be considered urban characteristic if trends within this setting are commonly associated with trends in urban education. For example, this may be a school outside of an urban district serving a high English learner population (Milner, 2012).

The Urban School Psychologist

The aforementioned structural, societal, and cultural factors present in urban communities shape and influence urban learners' educational experiences and needs. Therefore, training for urban school psychologists must be responsive to the ways in which these complexities and trends emerge across all areas of practice, including assessment, intervention, and consultation. The following sections include a review of the literature on issues related to the varying roles and functions of the urban school psychologist, highlighting potential opportunities to enhance graduate training for successful practice in urban settings.

Assessment

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) states that school psychologists are uniquely positioned to provide a wide range of comprehensive services to

support students (Skalski et al., 2015). Within this wide range of comprehensive services, school psychologists are expected to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in assessment and evaluation practices. Specifically, school psychologists should be knowledgeable about the "varied models and methods of assessment and data collection methods for identifying strengths and needs, developing effective services and programs, and measuring progress and outcomes" (NASP, 2010 p. 4). While assessment is a foundational practice area for all school psychologists, there is evidence to suggest that urban school psychologists spend the majority of their time in traditional special education evaluation procedures, leaving little time for engagement in other essential practice areas. In fact, the primary role and function of the urban school psychologist, as described by Miranda & Olivo II (2008), is that of special education assessor (Hussar, 2015). This role may be related to the limited resources and high psychologist-to-student ratios commonly found in urban schools (Adamowski, 2019). Therefore, while urban school psychologists may receive training in a broad spectrum of service areas, they may not fully utilize these varied skills.

As previously stated, a critical indicator for urban school psychologists to consider is the ratio of students they can be expected to serve. The school psychologist to student ratio can have significant implications for the amount of time school psychologists can expect to engage in various practice areas. In a 2002 study, Curtis et al. examined school psychology practice based on demographic characteristics, including psychologist-to-student ratios. The researchers surveyed 1,411 school psychologists sampled from the NASP membership database. They found statistically significant positive correlations between the school psychologist-to-student ratio and the number of initial special education evaluations completed, the total number of re-evaluations

completed, and the percentage of time spent in evaluation-related activities for students in special education. Conversely, psychologists with smaller student ratios spent more time in individual counseling, conducted a greater number of counseling groups, and served more students through group counseling sessions than did their peers with higher ratios (Curtis, et al., 2002).

For reference, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of 1,000 students per school psychologist. The professional organization has even recommended smaller ratios of 500-700 students per school psychologist when considering prevention efforts and supporting students with more intensive needs (NASP, 2020). Yet, school psychologists have reported serving more than 2,000 students across multiple school buildings in some urban districts. For instance, Graves et al. (2014) examined urban school psychologists' ratios compared to those reported by Curtis et al. (2012) in their analysis of the NASP membership data. Graves et al. (2014) surveyed a total of 97 school psychologists, with over 40% of participants in the study reporting ratios of over 2,000 students served and 10% reporting ratios of over 3,000 students. Comparatively, less than 15% of school psychologists from Curtis et al.'s (2012) NASP member sample reported similar ratios.

Graves et al. (2014) also examined urban school psychologists' perceptions of their roles and the challenges they face. The most frequently cited challenges included: large caseloads, lack of funding and resources, and lack of support from administration. Participants reported that the amount of time spent in testing and assessment left little time to engage in counseling and consultation. The researchers also asked participants to provide commentary regarding the state of urban school psychology. Following qualitative analysis, two themes emerged. The first finding revealed the need for modifications to current school psychology practice in urban

settings. Specifically, participants reported challenges related to assessment and implementation of multi-tiered interventions. One participant stated, "The urban system is way behind on implementing the Response to Intervention (RtI) model due to heavy initial referral burden and lack of school resources for helping struggling students." Another stated, "RtI is given lip service, but is not practiced" (p. 390).

Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) represent a departure from the more traditional models of assessment and intervention once commonly found in schools. Historically, the school psychologist's primary function was to conduct individual psycho-educational evaluations to determine special education eligibility, often utilizing a battery of standardized, norm-referenced testing procedures (Murphy-Price, 2016). As such, school psychologists working in more traditional systems have since been viewed as the "gatekeepers" to specialized academic and behavioral supports (Dawson, 2000; Petry & Serbonich, 2018).

The introduction of RtI has challenged the notion that students may only receive such supports upon qualifying for special education and instead allows for a more flexible model of service delivery that involves on-going data collection and assessment for all students. With less time and effort dedicated to traditional testing and assessment, school psychologists may be able to focus on initiatives such as universal screening and progress monitoring, school climate and safety, school-wide data-based decision making, and systems-level consultation (Skalski et al., 2015). However, urban school psychologists have reported fewer opportunities to engage in these activities due to the constraints they face in their school settings (Graves, Proctor, & Aston, 2014).

In a related study, Stoiber & Vanderwood (2008) examined whether there exists a gap for urban school psychologists between what they desire to do in their professional roles and what they actually do. The researchers surveyed 86 school psychologists within a large urban school district. The survey was designed to assess school psychologists' beliefs about their roles by asking them to rate three aspects of practice typically performed by school psychologists: (a) current use, (b) the importance of the practice, and (c) their level of competence in performing the practice. In addition, the participants were asked to identify areas for further professional development and report demographic information. To examine which practices are most used, valued, and competently performed, responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., single item means). Categories included traditional assessment, consultation/collaboration, and prevention/intervention, and participants were asked about their use, importance, and level of competence in each area. Analyses were conducted to explore possible differences in current practice, importance, and competency ratings across the three types of role functions.

Overall, Stoiber & Vanderwood (2008) found that school psychologists surveyed were more frequently engaged in traditional assessment than either consultation or prevention/intervention activities. The participants also ranked traditional assessment as the highest level of professional competency. However, the researchers also found that participants rated consultation and prevention/intervention activities as more important or more highly valued than traditional assessment. Ultimately, Stoiber & Vanderwood (2008) identified a practice gap between what these urban school psychologists value, what they do, and what they do competently. The study findings revealed a second practice gap specific to prevention and intervention activities. Although the participants valued these activities, they reported that they

were less likely to implement them with a high degree of competence or implement them at all.

Stoiber & Vanderwood (2008) also theorized that this finding may result from the increased demand on urban school psychologists to test a large caseload of students as opposed to preventing and intervening as a result of academic and behavioral challenges.

Behavioral and Mental Health Intervention

In addition to their skills in assessment, school psychologists are expected to demonstrate the skills necessary to support their students' behavioral and mental health needs through both direct and indirect service. According to NASP, school psychologists should be prepared to engage in the implementation and evaluation of services that support peer socialization, social-emotional learning, individual and group counseling, behavioral coaching, positive behavioral support, and parent education (NASP, 2020). With schools now serving as a central access point to mental health service delivery, school psychologists have a unique opportunity to engage in evidence-based practices to support students' needs. This is especially true for urban learners, whose access to quality mental health care may be lacking (Miranda, 2017). In fact, several barriers have been identified to explain the low rates of mental health service utilization among children and families in urban settings. Among them are mental health stigma, inaccessibility and other challenges related to transportation, complexities inherent to mental health service delivery and insurance reimbursement systems, and unresponsive healthcare providers (Atkins et al., 2006). In light of these treatment barriers, the need for quality school-based mental health services cannot be understated. Therefore, competency in evidence-based mental and behavioral health practices is crucial for school psychologists.

School-based mental health centers (SBMHCs) serve as a unique opportunity to provide quality treatment and mental health care in a way that is more accessible to children and their families (Brown & Bolen, 2008). SBMHCs in the United States have seen considerable expansion over the last several decades, with more than 2,500 centers opened across 48 states. First established to provide access to physical and mental health care services to students in large urban high schools, SBMHCs now serve students of all ages in various geographic regions (School-Based Health Alliance, 2017). Despite the overall growth of school-based mental health centers nationally, it is unlikely that many school psychologists have direct experience with these centers and, if they have, their roles are limited (Shaw, 2003). This is likely due to the differing practice aims between SBMHCs and traditional school-based service delivery (Brown & Bolen, 2008; Shaw, 2003).

However, school psychologists may have roles within these centers, including program development, assessment, grant writing, parent education, program evaluation, counseling, and staff education (Shaw, 2003). Outside of these roles directly within a SBMHC setting, school psychologists may also facilitate collaboration between SBMHC staff and school personnel to provide a more comprehensive approach to mental health care for students (Brown & Bolen, 2008). Shaw (2003) argues that opportunities to engage in specialized training to either work directly or collaborate with SBMHCs may be advantageous for practitioners interested in expanding their roles. Enhanced knowledge and training in these areas could be particularly beneficial for school psychologists interested in addressing mental health treatment more comprehensively.

In addition to school-based mental health centers, Shernoff et al. (2017) argue that school psychology graduate training is “one of the most direct ways to promote evidence-based mental health practice by ensuring newly trained school psychologists enter the workplace prepared to deliver and support high-quality, effective services to enhance student mental health” (p. 220). Despite this understanding, some studies have identified a lack of exposure to evidence-based mental health practices in graduate training, along with limited use of such practices in schools (Shernoff et al., 2017). For instance, in a 2014 study, Hicks and colleagues examined nationally certified school psychologists' training in and use of behavioral evidence-based interventions (EBIs). Hicks et al. (2014) surveyed 392 practicing school psychologists to examine their satisfaction with graduate training in EBIs, familiarity with interventions considered to be "proven" or "promising practices," and the frequency with which they implement EBIs in practice.

Results revealed that 71% of participants rated their graduate training in behavioral EBIs as inadequate, with no significant difference between non-doctoral and doctoral-level practitioners. On average, 72% of the participants reported being unfamiliar with the "proven" or "promising practices" listed on the survey, with 19% somewhat familiar. Only 8% of participants reported they were familiar with the EBIs. Hicks et al. (2014) found that school psychologists' perceptions of the adequacy of their graduate training significantly correlated with their views on intervention implementation barriers. Those who rated their graduate training as inadequate rated several barriers as substantially more impactful. These barriers included: lack of training in EBIs, the effort necessary to implement EBIs is unreasonable, greater assistance needed to implement EBIs, lack of required resources, and lack of encouragement to use EBIs within their work

setting. The findings reported by Hicks et al. (2014) reveal a gap in training to support the mental and behavioral health needs of students in schools, which ultimately contrasts with current practice standards for the field of school psychology at large (Shernoff et al., 2003). While these are significant findings for practice in all settings, they may be vital when working with populations who face barriers in accessing mental health treatment, including those in urban environments.

In emphasizing the importance of exposure to evidence-based mental health practices in graduate training programs, Shernoff et al. (2017) also stress the importance of responsiveness and flexibility to adapt to the local school context. Thus, school psychologists should be prepared to tailor their practice to meet their students' mental health and behavioral needs. One important contextual factor for urban school psychologists to consider is the impact of community violence and chronic stress. Children and adolescents of color living in high-poverty urban communities are more likely than their peers to be exposed to community violence (Overstreet, 2000; Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008; Taylor et al., 2016). Exposure to community violence may occur by hearing or learning about a violent event from another, witnessing an event first-hand, or through direct victimization (Buka et al., 2001). An extensive body of literature has suggested that children and adolescents exposed to community violence are more likely to develop a range of mental health disorders and symptomatology over time (Ozer et al., 2004). In a meta-analysis examining the mental health outcomes of children and adolescents across 114 empirical studies, Fowler et al. (2009) reported that exposure to community violence was most strongly correlated with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and externalizing disorders.

Additionally, many cross-sectional and longitudinal findings have consistently linked exposure to community violence with both aggressive and combative behaviors (McMahon et al., 2003 as cited in Taylor et al., 2016) as well as with hyperarousal and intense feelings of insecurity often associated with trauma (Linares et al., 2001). Similarly, Overstreet (2000) found that stress, anxiety, and fear as a result of exposure to violence significantly interfere with typical developmental tasks for a child, including the ability to trust others, feelings of safety, emotion regulation, exploring one's environment, and the ability to form peer relationships. These findings may be particularly relevant for school psychologists as they seek to identify and support students' social-emotional needs in school.

While the link between experiences of community violence, trauma, and externalizing disorders has been well established, the findings for internalizing disorders such as depression have been less consistent. Fowler et al. (2009) reported a small effect for internalizing symptoms following exposure to community violence, and this association was slightly stronger for females who had witnessed an event. To better understand depressive symptomology and aggressive behaviors in urban adolescents who have been exposed to violence, Ng-Mak and colleagues (2004) examined the theory of "pathologic adaptation" (p. 196). This theory suggests that high levels of exposure to violent events are correlated with desensitization and emotional numbing, resulting in lower than expected depressive symptomology and psychological distress. At the same time, however, the individual develops a tendency toward aggression and violent behavior. After controlling for contextual variables such as gender and socioeconomic status, the researchers found evidence to support the theory of pathologic adaptation for adolescents exposed to community violence in urban settings.

Similarly, Ozer & Weinstein (2004) investigated the experience of social constraint following exposure to community violence for children and adolescents across multiple urban middle schools. Almost half of the adolescents who participated in this study "reported feeling constrained from sharing their thoughts or feelings because of others' reactions" (p. 463). Those who reported they felt the need to keep their feelings to themselves (i.e., reported high levels of social constraint) also reported increased traumatic stress symptoms. These results indicate that there is an opportunity for school psychologists to operate as trusted sources for children and adolescents or to connect students with the appropriate services to address feelings of social constraint and symptoms of trauma.

While the neighborhood-level factors, peer, and familial influences have been studied relative to community violence, less is known about the impact of schools and school-based services. As such, the school environment as a potentially influential protective factor has been understudied. In a comprehensive literature review of protective factors in the context of exposure to community violence, Ozer et al. (2017) found only four out of the twenty-nine included studies investigated the moderating effect of schools. Within these studies, the researchers found teacher support and helpfulness, school safety, and positive school climate to have protective effects for adolescents in urban settings (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004; Ludwig & Warren, 2009; O'Donnell et al., 2011). Moreover, few studies have investigated possible risk factors within the school setting related to poor mental health outcomes for students exposed to violence in their communities. Thus, there may be a need for more research and training on effectively supporting students exposed to community violence in the school setting.

Academic Intervention

In collaboration with teachers and administrators, school psychologists can also be expected to demonstrate the skills necessary to implement and evaluate services that support students academically (NASP, 2020). Examples of these services may include the identification of empirically supported instructional strategies to promote student learning at the individual, group, and systems-level; the use of assessment data to inform classroom accommodations and modifications to the academic curriculum; the implementation and evaluation of academic interventions; and partnering with educators to ensure the attainment of state and local academic benchmarks by all students (NASP, 2020). Importantly, several contextual factors may impact students' academic achievement. The literature indicates that, for urban learners, some of the most salient factors include the effects of concentrated poverty, limited access to valuable resources, inferior structural and environmental conditions, and chronic stress and trauma.

The link between economic injustice and student's educational outcomes cannot be overlooked. A growing body of literature has explored this link specifically for urban learners living in communities with high rates of concentrated poverty. While there can be a great deal of variability in poverty levels within geographic regions, the highest rates of concentrated poverty can be found in urban spaces. In these spaces, a large proportion (at least 40%) of residents live at or below the federal poverty line (Shapiro et al., 2015). The National Center for Education Statistics reported that nearly 40 percent of students attending urban districts were educated in "high-poverty schools"; this is compared to 18 percent of students who attended suburban schools and 15 percent of students who attended rural schools (NCES, 2016).

In his research examining the link between economic injustice and educational outcomes, Noguera (2011) found that poverty impacts student and school performance in at least three critical ways. First, Noguera (2011) points to inequities within areas of concentrated poverty where both academic and social supports are less available. This can be seen in the inequitable access to academic tutors, summer enrichment, and quality after-school programming for children living in poverty compared to their more affluent peers.

Secondly, Noguera (2011) points to the unique environmental conditions of concentrated poverty that influence students' health, safety, and well-being, and ultimately, impact learning. These conditions may include chronic stress, interpersonal violence, and exposure to toxic and hazardous environmental conditions. Finally, Noguera (2011) states that "negative social capital" adversely impacts urban learners, whereby urban schools function "in isolation" from nearby organizations and social-services agencies designed to foster positive educational outcomes for students (p.11). Noguera (2011) argues that this may be the result of weak relationships between schools and these organizations or because the school neighborhood is viewed as "hostile and potentially dangerous" (p. 11).

In a systematic review of the literature on urban poverty and educational outcomes for students, Silva-Laya et al. (2019) examined 66 peer-reviewed articles, most of which were published between 2014-2017 in the United States. The researchers first sought to explore gaps in educational achievement and found that most studies confirmed lower educational attainment for urban learners living in poverty. Silva-Laya et al. (2019) found that the risk of academic failure and lower educational attainment for urban learners could lead to absenteeism or school abandonment, loss of confidence and self-esteem, and the devaluation of education as a potential

resource. Silva-Laya et al. (2019) also examined the organizational and socio-cultural conditions across the literature.

Their analysis revealed several factors that impact the educational outcomes for urban learners, including negative peer influence, higher rates of crime, and high levels of marginalization. Specifically, the researchers reported links between these factors and decreased enrollment rates, poor academic performance, and limited educational aspirations. Furthermore, Silva-Laya et al. (2019) found that, for these students, the lack of a culturally responsive school curriculum led to a decline in healthy teacher-student relationships and the overall school climate.

Consistent with Noguera's (2011) findings, Silva-Laya et al. (2019) also found that risk of school failure was linked to families' experiences of economic injustice, the inferior structural conditions of school buildings, and deficiencies in academic materials. A recent study by Berman et al. (2018) further establishes the effect of inferior structural conditions on rates of absenteeism and academic performance in urban settings. In this study, Bearman et al. (2018) investigated the impact of environmental and structural conditions on academic outcomes across 158 buildings in Baltimore City Public Schools. Specifically, the researchers examined factors relevant to urban school environments such as the school building's proximity to roadways, air pollution toxicity from industrial sites, the physical condition of school buildings, and surveyed perceptions of school safety. In addition to school environmental data, the researchers collected academic performance data, survey measures of school climate, and community and school-level demographic data.

Of the 158 school buildings included in the study, a total of 122 were rated as being in "poor or worse" condition, with 40 schools scoring as candidates for replacement; none of the buildings evaluated were considered adequate for educational activities (Bearman et al., 2018 p. 802). Results from the study indicated that worsening school building conditions and students' perceptions of unsafe schools were significantly associated with decreased academic performance. Conversely, for middle school students, higher attendance rates and better school facilities were associated with increased academic performance. Additionally, attending schools with high industrial pollutant levels, less school safety, and more neighborhood crime significantly impacted rates of student absenteeism. Bearman et al. (2018) reported that the presence of poor ventilation, mouse or cockroach allergens, and insufficient classrooms in this urban district were all found to reduce students' attendance and impede educational performance, especially in schools with higher rates of poverty and among younger students.

Similar effects were found for students in over 500 New York City public elementary schools, as reported in a study by Evans et al. (2010). In this particular study, the researchers were interested in the relationship between inferior structural conditions and high student mobility rates. Student mobility can occur for many reasons, be it voluntary or involuntary. Examples of reasons for moving from one school to another might include: a residential move, moving to live with alternative caregivers, a voluntary transfer, school closure, disciplinary action (e.g., expulsion), overcrowding, and entering into a temporary living situation (Rumberger, 2015). In their analysis of school building quality and student academic achievement data, the researchers found that students attending structurally inadequate schools with higher levels of student mobility showed lower levels of academic achievement in both

reading and math. Evans et al. (2010) found that the combination of "a poor quality school building and a transient population" appears to be particularly detrimental for students' academic performance as measured by standardized test scores (p. 242). The researchers found that this effect occurred independently of the student population's socioeconomic and racial demographics.

While the relationship between structural conditions and student mobility provides a more nuanced lens for examining student outcomes, the harmful effects of student mobility alone are well documented. Student mobility is common across regions in the United States, but the highest student mobility rates can be found in urban schools and at the elementary level (Fiel et al., 2013). For instance, in an early study of the effects of student mobility and academic achievement, Kerbow (1996) found that, for students with repeated school changes in a large urban district, academic performance declined. Students who moved schools more than three times over six years were one full academic year behind students with lower mobility rates. Several factors contribute to this decline, including lack of exposure to key concepts and instructional pacing, incorrect grade level placement, and curricular inconsistencies across teachers and schools (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). Kerbow (1996) also found a slowed curricular pace, not only for individual students but for classrooms as a whole. According to Kerbow (1996), one possible explanation for this finding is that teachers may focus their efforts on reviewing academic concepts and material to accommodate the students who have missed instruction.

In a more recent study, student mobility still significantly impacted achievement even after controlling for gender and socioeconomic status. Parke & Kanyongo (2012) examined

student mobility and attendance data across 80 elementary, middle, and secondary schools in a large urban district. In this study, the researchers found students' rates of mobility and non-attendance to have a significant effect on achievement. This effect was found at all grade levels (3, 5, 8, and 11) on the state achievement test in both mathematics and reading while controlling for demographic variables such as socioeconomic background and ethnicity. Students who were identified as more "stable" in their patterns of attendance and mobility showed higher average achievement scores than those with higher rates of mobility and non-attendance. Thus, the researchers posited that when students miss class or are mobile, they appear to make fewer academic gains than their peers (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). Overall, the literature on the effects of student mobility on achievement suggests that urban school psychologists would likely need to develop a knowledge base around supporting highly mobile students or high absenteeism rates.

Finally, urban learners' experiences of chronic stress and trauma have also been linked to challenges in academic functioning. As previously described, higher rates of community violence exposure have been linked to poor mental health outcomes, particularly for children and adolescents in high poverty urban settings. However, many researchers have established a link between these mental health outcomes and academic achievement. For example, Busby et al. (2013) studied 491 urban learners' exposure to community violence in 6th grade and followed up to assess their academic functioning two years later. The researchers found that aggressive behavior following exposure to community violence was significantly correlated with poor academic functioning based on measures of reading achievement and teacher ratings of academic readiness. Mathews et al. (2009) studied the impact of community violence on school

functioning for 145 children attending urban schools between the ages of 10-13 years old. They found that traumatic stress symptoms also mediated the relationship between exposure and academic performance (i.e., standardized test scores and grade point average). The researchers found that trauma symptoms, such as re-experiencing an event, avoidance behaviors, and hyperarousal, were the primary mechanisms by which community violence affected students' school functioning. These findings suggest that manifestations of either externalizing behaviors or trauma resulting from exposure to community violence may interfere with a student's ability to meet academic expectations in the classroom.

Consultation and Collaboration

In addition to engaging in direct service, school psychologists can be called upon to consult and collaborate with educators, caregivers, and community professionals to support students academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally. NASP (2010) states that school psychologists act as agents of change, using their skills in collaboration and consultation to address the needs of students at both the classroom and school-wide levels. For example, school psychologists work collaboratively with teachers to identify and address classwide challenges, establish strong home-school collaboration practices, and develop partnerships with nearby organizations to address students' needs (NASP, 2020). To engage in effective consultation, school psychologists can expect to aid in problem-solving at the systems level and identify opportunities to enhance the school climate for students, families, and school personnel.

Within urban districts, there is a growing focus on the development of strong school-community partnerships (Valli et al., 2016). There is some evidence to suggest that educational outcomes may improve for urban learners if schools attend to a "broader array of needs" by

establishing partnerships with outside community organizations, government entities, and social service agencies (Valli et al., 2016 p. 720). Such partnerships may be particularly sensible in urban schools, given that essential resources and services are often geographically proximal, with universities, hospitals, businesses, and non-profit organizations typically found in large cities (Black & Krishnakumar, 1998). This proximity to resources can be of considerable value for many families and is viewed as an advantage of urban-dwelling. Thus, urban school psychologists may have a unique opportunity to utilize their consultative and collaborative skills to develop and maintain school-community partnerships.

For example, Morgan et al. (2015) examined academic outcomes for students at a large urban high school in New York City following participation in a school-community partnership to address low graduation rates and post-secondary academic readiness. Specifically, the partnership was designed to increase graduation rates for students eligible for free or reduced lunch, provide education about and improve enrollment rates in post-secondary institutions, and increase both students' and parents' knowledge about the availability of financial aid resources. To meet these goals, school personnel partnered with a nearby university in addition to local educational agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, and non-profit organizations. The researchers examined outcomes for a total of 294 students with varying rates of participation in this school-community initiative over four years (Morgan et al., 2015).

The academic and community support services offered to students were provided in and outside the classroom. Examples of such services included helping participants learn more about effective time management, meeting personal goals and educational requirements, financing a college education, student leadership conferences, and community service opportunities.

Analyses of the relationships between the two types of support services (academic or community) and student outcomes revealed statistically significant positive correlations between academic support services and total credits earned, high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and SAT scores. Engagement in community support services also had statistically significant correlations with student GPAs, total course credits earned, and college enrollment.

Results from qualitative interviews revealed that participation in the program was helpful to students (Morgan et al., 2015). Specifically, students noted that the program helped them graduate from high school on time, exposed them to college and career options, motivated them to consider going to college, provided access to college and financial aid resources, and helped explain college costs. Several students felt that they had the confidence to complete college upon overcoming challenges faced in high school and believed that adults in their school and community cared about their future.

The findings from this study highlight the potential benefit of engaging in community partnerships, especially in school districts where access to resources is scarce. And yet, while urban communities do indeed offer opportunities to access resources and services, it is essential to note that there can be a barrier between these opportunities and their accessibility largely due to systematic marginalization (APA, 2005). When urban schools and the students who attend them are viewed from a deficit perspective, they may be isolated from accessing valuable resources within local organizations either due to ineffectual relationships or because the school and its community are viewed as "hostile and potentially dangerous" (Nogueru, 2011 p. 11). As previously stated, Noguera (2011) suggests that this "negative social capital" commonly associated with urban schools can threaten these potential partnerships (p. 11). Because the

development of such partnerships is a recognized responsibility of school psychologists (NASP, 2020), those in urban schools must identify and address these and other barriers that may impede services for students.

In addition to developing school-community partnerships, school psychologists can play an essential role in school-wide systems-level consultation. NASP (2010) states that school psychologists engage in problem-solving at the systems level to identify factors that influence learning and behavior and evaluate classroom, building, and school-wide initiatives. Urban school psychologists may utilize their consultation and collaboration skills to address system-level challenges commonly found in these settings. For instance, the literature suggests that urban school districts face higher than average teacher and administrator turnover (Papay et al., 2017; Ingersoll, 2003). High rates of staff turnover can have a considerable impact on school climate and outcomes for students (Shernoff, 2011).

For instance, a report published in the National Association of Secondary School Principals stated that during the 2016-2017 academic year, principals from urban districts across the nation moved schools at higher rates than principals from any other community type (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Furthermore, schools with higher percentages of students from low-income families, students of color, and low-performing students were more likely to experience principal turnover (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Similarly, in an analysis of data from the Colorado Department of Education between 2010-2015, Beckett (2018) found that the percentage of students of color within school districts was a significant predictor of principal turnover, with greater numbers of students of color correlated with higher principal turnover. In this particular study, Beckett (2018) found that urban schools in Colorado experienced a change in leadership

every 2.5 years, and less than 25% of principals stayed at the same school for five years. These findings may have critical implications for urban school systems and indicate a need to address principal retention strategies in these settings.

Similarly, Ingersoll (2003) found that teachers from schools in urban districts were more likely to leave the profession than their counterparts in either rural or suburban schools. Ingersoll (2003) reported that, within five years, between 15-20% of urban teachers move schools or leave the profession altogether. In a more recent analysis, Papay and colleagues (2017) used human resource records provided by states and school districts directly to examine trends in teacher attrition across regions. Papay et al. (2017) analyzed data across 16 different urban school districts and found that rates of teacher turnover varied slightly from district to district. Still, the researchers found that between 13% and 35% of entry-level teachers in urban schools left their district after one year, while 44% to 74% left within five years. Papay et al. (2017) stated that "if anything, Ingersoll's estimates understate the teacher turnover challenge in large urban school districts" (p. 435).

As previously stated, high rates of teacher and staff turnover in urban districts can have significant implications for the organizational school system. For example, Guin (2004) explored the impact of teacher turnover on the organizational climate across 66 elementary schools in a large urban district. Teachers in the study were administered a staff climate survey. They were asked about factors related to their perceptions of their workplace climate, including overall school climate, teaching climate, feelings of respect, principal leadership, and teacher interactions. Guin (2004) found that teachers from schools with the highest turnover rates reported lower ratings on the indicators of a positive working climate. Overall, participants

expressed frustration about the use of time and resources exhausted when teachers have to be replaced, repeated professional development designed to accommodate new teachers, and a lack of cohesion among teaching staff (Guin, 2004).

Furthermore, Guin (2004) found that high teacher turnover rates had implications for the instructional program within urban schools. Guin found that the "continual loss of teachers had a negative impact on the momentum of instruction" (2004, p. 11). This effect could be seen for staff morale and the implementation of instructional activities. Guin's (2004) findings suggested that higher rates of teacher turnover in urban schools led to interruptions in the instructional agenda requiring schools "to restart their instructional focus each year, resulting in a less comprehensive and unified instructional program" (p. 19). Specifically, the study results revealed significant negative correlations between teacher turnover and students' academic performance. Thus, when teacher turnover rates were high, fewer students met the statewide standard in both reading and math (Guin, 2004). In a similar study, Ronfeldt et al. (2013), found that the harmful effect of turnover on achievement extended to students whose teachers had remained at the school, indicating that teacher turnover may have a more far-reaching impact than expected. Although Ronfeldt et al. (2013) were unable to identify the mechanism of this effect with certainty, the researchers posit that "turnover negatively affects collegiality or relational trust among faculty; or perhaps turnover results in loss of institutional knowledge among faculty that is critical for supporting student learning" (p. 32).

Given the impact of teacher attrition on student outcomes and organizational climate in urban schools, school psychologists may be uniquely positioned to support early-career and novice teachers (Shernoff et al., 2016). For example, Ingersoll & Smith (2003) found that issues

related to classroom management, such as disruptive behavior and motivating student learning, were contributing factors to teacher turnover in addition to teachers' feelings of isolation and lack of mentorship. In light of these findings, Shernoff et al. (2016) developed a coaching intervention implemented across three different high-poverty urban elementary schools designed to enhance the effectiveness of early-career teachers through consultation with seasoned educators, administrators, and school psychologists. Thus, the researchers sought to expand the traditional role of school psychologists in an urban setting, capitalizing on their knowledge and strengths to potentially reduce the rates of early-career teacher turnover (Shernoff et al., 2016).

Following the implementation of this coaching intervention over two academic years, both quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed improvement in early-career teachers' classroom organization, perceived effectiveness, and quality of instruction. Participants reported finding value in learning from other perspectives and increased opportunity to develop and utilize skills throughout the coaching intervention as facilitators to enhancing perceived effectiveness in the classroom. Additionally, the researchers used quantitative measures to examine outcomes related to teacher connectedness over time. The data revealed that 53% of participants showed "meaningful improvements" in perceived connectedness over the course of the intervention (p. 238). The researchers reported that only one early-career teacher was lost to turnover during the intervention due to the non-renewal of her contract by the district (Shernoff et al., 2016). While Shernoff et al. (2016) were unable to state conclusively that the reduced turnover rate is a direct result of the coaching intervention, the researchers reported that this outcome was significantly lower than the teacher turnover rates in similar schools across the district, which averaged 50% turnover every three years.

Another crucial collaborative relationship for school psychologists to develop is with parents and caregivers. Parents and caregivers play a key role in fostering positive educational outcomes for their children, and strong collaboration between home and school can help facilitate these outcomes (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Much of the literature has focused on the value of *parental involvement* in schools (Lawson, 2004). However, when the family-school partnership is framed in such a way, much of the expectation for how these two groups will collaborate is dictated for parents by schools (Lawson, 2004). As Lawson & Briar-Lawson (1997) stated, when viewed in this way, parental involvement then becomes a question of: "How can parents help the school and its teachers" (p. 9)? The implications of this dynamic are important for school psychologists to be mindful of when called upon to engage in collaboration.

Furthermore, when parents and caregivers are viewed by school personnel as non-participants in their child's educational activities, it is often presumed that they are unable or uninterested in doing so (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). However, the literature suggests there are many reasons why some caregivers may engage less frequently than others. These factors may include a lack of trust between educators and caregivers, feelings of disempowerment within an expansive school system, the perception that the family's cultural values and beliefs are not affirmed by school personnel, and caregivers' own negative experiences in school (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Lightfoot (2004) suggests that the pressure for caregivers to become involved in their child's schooling is especially strong when they are caregivers of color, experiencing economic hardship, are living in urban settings, or if the child has been labeled in some way "at-risk" (p. 91). Lightfoot (2004) goes on to state that "many articles discussing parental

involvement seem to target low-income and urban parents as key problems in the educational system" (p. 91).

Another possible barrier between caregivers and educators in building collaborative relationships is that these two groups may perceive *parental involvement* differently. To investigate this further, Lawson (2004) conducted a qualitative study of educators' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement in an urban elementary school. The researcher held qualitative focus groups with one group of teachers and two groups of parents, one of which was considered "involved" and the other "uninvolved." The results revealed a divergence between teacher and parent views. Lawson (2004) found that while teachers were more "school-centric" in their views, parents (both "involved" and "uninvolved") were more "community-centric" in theirs (p. 122).

One salient finding from the study was that teachers' responses revealed a belief that parents and caregivers should serve the school's interest in helping children achieve academically. Teachers also expressed beliefs that parents in this urban community were neglectful of such responsibilities. Lawson (2004) found that these perceptions of neglect contributed to labeling and stigmatizing views of parents and ultimately alienated parents. Parents' responses revealed that they wanted to support teachers' efforts, but teachers' lack of response to their concerns (e.g., neighborhood safety) often left them wanting to become less involved. Together, these findings highlight the disconnect between parents' and educators' views in this particular urban school, which eventually served as a barrier to engaging in meaningful collaboration (Lawson, 2004).

The divergence between the views and beliefs found in school and at home can also directly impact urban learners' experiences in the classroom. Home-school dissonance may occur when students' "preferred, home-based values and attitudes" are not aligned with those espoused at school. This finding is particularly true for urban students of color who experience economic injustice (Brown-Wright et al., 2013 p. 145). Brown-Wright et al. (2013) theorized that when students perceive that the behaviors and beliefs expressed at home are devalued in the school setting, they may be more likely to engage in disruptive classroom behavior. Therefore, the researchers examined urban learners' perceptions of home-school dissonance in relation to self-reported disruptive behavior. Additionally, Brown-Wright et al. (2013) studied whether lack of motivation served as a potential mediator.

A total of 391 adolescents from two urban high schools served as study participants (Brown-Wright et al., 2013). Following analysis of self-report data, the findings in the study indicated that urban learners' perceptions of dissonance between their home and school experiences were significantly related to their reports of classroom disruptive behavior. These associations were found irrespective of students' class rank, gender, or ethnicity (Brown-Wright et al., 2013). Furthermore, the analysis revealed that amotivation mediated the relationship between home-school dissonance. The researchers found that "feelings of amotivation (a) may be associated with home-school dissonance and (b) may be associated with how students behave in classrooms they think may be dissonant from their home contexts or experiences" (Brown-Wright et al., p. 157).

These and other findings highlight the importance of alignment of school-based activities and expectations with those present in the homes and communities of urban learners (Brown-

Wright et al., 2013). Instead of focusing efforts to increase parental involvement in "school-centric" activities, school personnel ought to consider the views and beliefs of families and caregivers to establish more meaningful collaboration (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Thus, efforts to recognize and address dissonance for urban learners and their families in the school setting may be of particular importance for school psychologists.

Culturally Responsive Practices

Experiences of cultural dissonance may also emerge between school personnel, including school psychologists, and the students they serve. For instance, Ahrum and colleagues (2001) argue that cultural dissonance occurs as school personnel act on biases and beliefs about students whose racial and ethnic identities differ from their own. Through their research at New York University's Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, Ahrum et al. (2011) state that cultural dissonance could manifest in at least three distinct ways. First, school personnel may perceive students' race and class as limiting predictors of their academic achievement. Ahrum et al. (2011) state that urban school personnel may attribute students' learning or behavioral difficulties to the cultural views and beliefs found in their home environment. The researchers suggest that some urban school practitioners may actually believe that the "differences in cultural norms of urban communities from prevailing school norms are the driving force behind underachievement" for these students (Ahrum et al., 2011 para. 18).

Secondly, cultural dissonance may lead school personnel to inappropriately conflate students' racial and ethnic identity or perceived economic hardship with learning, emotional, or intellectual disability. When school personnel hold these beliefs, students may come to view their racial or ethnic identity as a "risk factor." They may process school-related difficulties as

confirmation of negative stereotypes about their own identities (Ahram, 2011 para. 20). Finally, cultural dissonance may manifest in a lack of culturally responsive or anti-racist school-wide practices and policies. Without such practices, urban learners and their families may view the school environment as unsafe, inhospitable, and unwelcoming, leading to less investment in educational outcomes (Ahram et al., 2011). Again, these biases may affect the professional practices of school psychologists and significantly impact the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes of the students they serve. Ahram et al. (2011) go on to state:

Cultural dissonance can be profoundly impactful, however, to the school experiences of urban students. It has an impact on the manner in which schools view students; it contributes to misconceptions about students' motivations. It shapes and colors the expectations for achievement and sends critical messages to students about how much (or little) their cultural selves are valued by the school and larger society (pp. 15).

More so, when cultural dissonance emerges, school personnel and practitioners may be less likely to engage in conversations or practices to support urban learners through effective instruction and intervention (Ahram et al., 2011). To begin to address cultural dissonance, Ahram et al. (2011) suggest that school personnel engage in on-going dialogue about these beliefs and the harmful implications they can have for students. Educators may begin to address this need through professional development, participation in professional learning communities, year-long reading groups, and incorporating these conversations into grade level, curriculum, and staff meetings.

These findings are especially relevant for urban school psychologists, which are more likely than either suburban or rural districts to educate children of color (Logan & Burdick-Will,

2017). In a review of demographic data from 57 large urban school districts, Foote (2005) reported that urban schools educated 21% more African American/Black students, 14% more Hispanic students, 23% more students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and 10% more English learners than the national average. Data collected by the same council revealed that the number of languages spoken by students in these urban schools grew from 38 to 50 different languages between the years 2013-2018 (Council of Great City Schools, 2018).

And while student populations are expected to become increasingly diverse over time, culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists remain underrepresented in the field (U.S. Department of Education, 2019; NASP, 2017). According to their most recent member survey, the National Association of School Psychologists reports that 87% of respondents identified as White, only 14% of respondents reported fluency in a language other than English, with only half of these individuals engaging in bilingual or multilingual service delivery (NASP, 2017). These trends indicate a "divergence between the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the school psychology workforce and the population of students that they serve" (NASP, 2017 p. 2). As a result, school psychologists may find themselves in "culturally challenging situations" without the adequate knowledge, skills, or dispositions necessary for culturally responsive practice (Johnson et al., 2019 p. 952).

These and other findings indicate that to be effective school psychologists, culturally responsive practice must permeate all aspects of service delivery, including assessment, intervention, and consultation (Johnson et al., 2019). In 2015, NASP specified that culturally competent practice involves "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those

professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (para. 1). The professional organization has since reaffirmed its commitment to culturally competent practice, and included "diversity" as a core value in their most recent strategic plan (NASP, 2017).

Despite this professional commitment, there is evidence to suggest that culturally responsive approaches are under-utilized in urban schools. For example, McCallops et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of more than fifty studies examining social-emotional learning interventions implemented in urban schools and found only five used culturally responsive approaches. None of the studies addressed the effects of discrimination on social-emotional development. Furthermore, school psychologists themselves may be underprepared to engage in culturally responsive practices. For instance, Newell & Looser (2017) examined training in multicultural assessment, consultation, and intervention between school psychologists in urban and rural contexts. A total of 86 school psychologists from one Midwestern state served as the study participants. They were asked to indicate the context in which they worked (i.e., urban or rural setting) and completed a survey on multicultural skills in assessment, intervention, and consultation. While 95% of participants endorsed some kind of multicultural training, in general, the study revealed that both urban and rural school psychologists reported little training in multicultural assessment, intervention, and consultation. They also report little training in group-specific services to students of color or are culturally and linguistically diverse. Participants in urban settings did report a higher number of multicultural training experiences compared to their peers in rural settings. Additionally, urban school psychologists shared that they attended a wider variety of training (e.g., coursework, workshops, and presentations) than rural school psychologists.

Multicultural intervention was the only practice area in which urban school psychologists reported a higher level of training than rural school psychologists. Specifically, the urban school psychologists in this study indicated higher levels of training in "identifying the beliefs, values, and perspectives of self and others; intervening at the school-wide level; intervening ecologically; and using students' strengths in intervention" (Newell & Looser, 2017 p. 91). Newell & Looser (2017) stress that this training alone is not sufficient. The researchers argue that training and preparation for school psychologists "should develop multicultural skills that consider the uniqueness of geographical context" (Newell & Looser, 2017 p. 91).

Beyond insufficient training in multicultural practice, there is also evidence to suggest that diverse student populations are underrepresented in published studies across school psychology journals (Villareal, 2014). To examine this underrepresentation, Miranda & Gutter (2002) first reviewed the school psychology literature from 1990-1999 and found that only 10% included diversity as a primary study focus, which only slightly increased from the previous decade. A more recent replication by Grunewald et al. (2014) examined school psychology journal articles published between 2004-2010 and, again, found only a slight increase, in which 15.5% of studies analyzed were classified as "diversity-related" (p. 428). In a study of school psychology intervention research, Villareal (2014) examined 1,543 intervention articles across five major school psychology journals and found that comparisons among groups were minimal. Villareal (2014) found that only 14% of the studies included in the analysis made comparisons between students of different racial or ethnic groups. Only 9% of studies made comparisons between different economic groups, and only 1.2 % indicated a comparison between students of various English learner groups (Villareal, 2014).

These findings indicate that factors related to the diversity of students within these studies are not being considered in a central way to explain outcomes related to behavior and functioning following intervention (Villareal, 2014). Further examination of the school psychology literature in this study revealed that Hispanic students are currently the most underrepresented in intervention research. At the same time, these students represent the highest population of students found in urban schools across the United States (Logan & Burdick-Wills, 2017). These studies reveal a gap between the empirical research produced in school psychology and the needs identified in practice. Similarly, Jones et al. (2013) identified a gap between the existing training literature related to cultural competence and the skills exhibited by psychology graduate trainees (including school psychology trainees). This finding suggests that professional guidelines may not necessarily provide specific information for developing and evaluating cultural competence.

In a related study, Johnson et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative content analysis of NASP's published policy statements and training standards to evaluate how the concept of cultural competence is represented in these professional guidelines. Utilizing a constant comparative method, the researchers analyzed each document looking for patterns and themes (Johnson et al., 2019). They found that, while there is considerable use of the terms *culture*, *diversity*, and *social justice*, a description of cultural competence is not provided in these guidelines as an independent practice domain or with a specific definition. Rather, *cultural competence* is a term that is simply dispersed throughout the documents. Johnson et al. (2019) argue that the field of school psychology ought to “work toward a consensus on what cultural

competence means for the profession” and should consider creating cultural competence as a distinct domain alongside NASP’s already established practice areas (p. 971).

Advancing culturally responsive and anti-racist school psychology practice is of considerable importance in graduate training, irrespective of the school setting. As professional guidelines for developing cultural competence continue to emerge, efforts to prepare school psychologists for work with diverse populations should reflect experiences grounded in multicultural practice and research (Lopez & Bursztyn, 2013). Undoubtedly, training and preparation in culturally responsive practice is essential for the urban school psychologist. With the beliefs, knowledge, and skills needed to engage in such practice, school psychologists can be more effective in supporting the needs of urban learners and their families. More so, school psychologists may be better prepared to identify and address critical issues such as cultural dissonance as they emerge at the school level.

Summary

The studies above present compelling information about the educational outcomes of urban learners and the challenges facing urban school personnel. Urban school psychologists have identified growing student ratios, limited resources, and administrative barriers as among their most significant challenges. High rates of teacher and administrator turnover, student mobility, economic disadvantage, exposure to community violence, and home-school dissonance have been linked to poor academic and behavioral outcomes for children and adolescents living in urban communities. These findings reveal that urban school psychologists must be responsive to the ways in which such complexities and trends emerge across all areas of practice, including

assessment, academic and mental health intervention, consultation, and culturally responsive practice.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with a thorough description of the study design and rationale for the chosen methodology. The study participants, recruitment process, and enrollment procedures are described in detail, along with information about the instruments used. A thorough description of the data analysis procedures is then provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of the steps taken to account for the researcher's positionality in arriving at meaningful and representative findings of the participants' views.

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to advance school psychologists' practice in urban schools by exploring the aspects of training (e.g., knowledge, skills, experiences) that result in enhanced self-efficacy, preparedness, and motivation for practice in this setting. Using semi-structured qualitative interviews, this study explores school psychologists' perspectives regarding their readiness for practice in urban schools. Information was gathered to explore possible training experiences that may further contribute to successful practice.

As previously described, much of the literature related to urban school psychology practice is focused on its unique challenges. Less is known about the training experiences and professional development considered valuable to school psychologists in this setting and whether those perceptions are aligned with findings from the literature. Furthermore, few studies in the

related literature have used qualitative approaches, with many primarily relying on survey methods. This study is phenomenological in nature, and, as such, the data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. The product of a phenomenological study is a composite description that represents the "essence of the experience being studied" (Creswell, 2013 p. 62). This approach was selected because it acknowledges that each participant brings a unique experience and set of beliefs regarding their professional training and practice. Ultimately, the researcher attempted to gather a comprehensive and detailed exploration of individual perspectives to discern themes from participant responses.

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) suggest that qualitative researchers would be interested in how individuals interpret their experiences, construct their world view, and the meaning they attribute to their experiences. Therefore, the primary goal of the research is to uncover and interpret such meaning. As participants shared their lived experiences, the researcher learned about urban school psychologists' training needs and experiences through attentive listening, appropriate probes, and careful analysis. As opposed to a quantitative survey which may limit participant responses, a semi-structured interview allowed for the inclusion of important themes to be uncovered that were perhaps not previously considered by the researcher. In this study, the semi-structured interview was derived from Seidman's (2006) three series model for conducting phenomenological interviews. The use of the three series model encouraged participants to reflect on their beliefs and experiences before entering a graduate program, throughout their training, and upon entering professional practice in an urban setting.

Recruitment

The participants in this study were recruited using purposeful sampling through email and other online professional networking platforms (e.g., NASP Urban School Psychology Interest Group; *LinkedIn*). The emails and site postings included a brief explanation of the study and a request to forward the information to their professional contacts interested in participating. Although the researcher did use an existing professional network to recruit participants, no individual who was personally known to the researcher was included in the study. The following inclusion criteria were applied for participant recruitment: (1) licensed school psychologist; (2) at least one year of full-time practice in an urban school setting; and (3) graduate degree obtained from either a NASP and/or APA accredited school psychology specialist or doctoral-level program (Ed.S, Ph.D., Ed. D, etc.).

Procedures

Study Enrollment

Individuals who expressed an interest in participating were asked to contact the researcher directly by phone or email. The researcher then conducted a short screening to determine if the inclusion criteria were met. The researcher described the study procedures. Individuals who met the criteria and were provided with participant information documents approved by the researcher's university Institutional Review Board. These documents detailed the possible risks and benefits associated with the study, compensation for participation, confidentiality, procedures for providing verbal consent, and assurance that participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Data Collection

Data in this study was collected using individual semi-structured interviews led by the primary researcher. The use of a semi-structured protocol allowed for further exploration beyond the researcher's initial questions. This format also allowed the researcher to engage and respond to the participant's views and unique contributions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, the use of a semi-structured interview presented opportunities to ask clarifying questions and probe for additional information when appropriate. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using a video conferencing platform (Zoom) and were between 70 and 90 minutes in duration. At the start of the interview, participants were again reminded of study procedures and that participation in this study was voluntary. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis by the primary researcher.

Instrumentation

Demographic questionnaire. Following the initial screening, a short demographic questionnaire was collected from participants who met inclusionary criteria and provided verbal consent to participate in the study. The demographic questionnaire requested the following information: age, gender, race/ethnicity, geographic region the school psychology program attended, dates of attendance, degree obtained (e.g., masters, specialist, doctorate), number of years of practice as a licensed school psychologist, number of years of practice in an urban school district, and geographic region of the urban school district (see Appendix A). If a participant had attended more than one school psychology program, the participant was asked to select one graduate program to focus on for the purpose of the interview.

Interview protocol. As previously stated, the interview protocol was derived from Seidman's (2006) three series model for conducting phenomenological interviews (Appendix B). Seidman's (2006) model includes a life history interview, an experience with phenomenon interview, and a meaning-making interview. Using this model as a guide, the interview protocol produced by the researcher first introduced questions related to the individual's experiences before entering a school psychology training program (e.g., *"Tell me about your decision to pursue school psychology as a career"*). The second part of the interview asked the participants about their experiences during their school psychology training program (e.g., *"What were your beliefs regarding working in an urban school during your graduate training?"*). The third part of the interview included questions about the participants' experiences as practicing school psychologists. This part of the interview included questions that encouraged participants to reflect upon or "make meaning" of their experiences (e.g., *"How do you currently view urban school psychology? Tell me about your beliefs regarding practice in this setting currently"*).

Participant and Setting Descriptions

Table 1 describes the individuals who participated in the study based on information provided in the demographic questionnaire. Table 2 provides more detailed information about the urban school districts in which participants have practiced. Each district was also classified using Milner's (2012) framework for urban schools. Urban intensive school districts are found in large metropolitan cities where population density is at its highest, approximately one million residents or more. Urban emergent schools are also found in large metropolitan cities but with less overall population density.

Table 1. Participant Descriptions

Participant	Age Range	Race	Gender	Degree Earned	Region of Training Program	Years in Urban School
1	30-39	Black/African American	Female	Ed.S.	Southeast	5
2	40-49	White	Female	Ed.S.	Midwest	19
3	50-59	White	Female	M.A.	Midwest	30
4	30-39	White	Male	Ed.S.	Midwest	11
5	20-29	Black/African American	Female	Ed.S.	Mid-Atlantic	2
6	30-39	White	Female	Ed.S.	Midwest	11
7	30-39	Asian	Male	Ed.S.	Northeast	8
8	40-49	White	Female	Ed.S.	Northeast	3
9	40-49	Black/African American	Female	Ed.S.	Southeast	15
10	40-49	White	Female	Ed.S.	Midwest	21

Table 2. Setting Descriptions

District	Region	Number of Students Enrolled	Percentage of Students with IEPs	Approximate Psychologist to Student Ratio	Total City Population Estimate	Descriptor (Milner, 2021)
1	Midwest	355,000	14%	1 to 1,460	2.6 million	Intensive
2	Northeast	54,000	21%	1 to 782	692,000	Emergent
3	Northeast	25,000	21%	1 to 1,250	300,000	Emergent
4	Southeast	347,000	24%	1 to 1,684	2.7 million	Intensive

5	Midwest	37,000	24%	1 to 462	381,000	Emergent
6	Midwest	75,000	20%	1 to 535	590,000	Emergent
7	Mid-Atlantic	79,000	15%	1 to 560	593,000	Emergent

Note: The information found in the table above is district-wide data reported from the 2019-2020 academic year, with the expectation of data reported by District 6, which reflects the 2018-2019 academic year.

Analysis

Consensual qualitative research (CQR) techniques were used to analyze the study data (Hill, 1997). To do so, the primary researcher relied on the assistance of a data analysis team made up of two coding assistants and an auditor (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). Both the coding assistants and the auditor were advanced doctoral-level graduate students in the same program of study as the primary researcher. All team members had previous experience and graduate-level coursework in qualitative methods. Additionally, both coding assistants shared a mutual interest in the study topic and had previous fieldwork experience in a large urban school district themselves. The auditor was utilized to review the work of the primary researcher and coding assistants, evaluate the adequacy of their work, and offer feedback (Ladanay, Thompson, & Hill, 2012). Further descriptions of the CQR analysis techniques are included below.

Domain List

The primary researcher developed an initial domain list based on the review of the literature and the primary questions found within the interview protocol (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). This initial domain list was then applied to several interview transcripts by the coding team. Following the first application, the team met to modify and refine the domain list to better capture participants' responses. This process was repeated once again until the domain list

stabilized and accurately fit the data (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). Once the domain list was finalized, the coding team applied the domains to each interview transcript. To do so, team members read the interview transcripts and assigned "blocks" of data (phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) into one or more domains (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). The team then came back together to discuss their application of the domains across all raw interview data. If there were disagreements between team members, the disagreements were reviewed and discussed until consensus was reached. The primary researcher then compiled one extensive data set where the "blocks" of data were listed along with the agreed-upon assigned domain(s). This was referred to as the team's consensus version (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012).

Core Ideas

The next stage of analysis involved the construction of core ideas. The purpose of this process is to distill the "blocks" of data into fewer words to capture the essence of the participant's expression (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). The coding team was then able to compare ideas found with the raw data across all participants more precisely. The construction of core ideas also helps to reduce confusion, contradiction, or repetition within responses (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). The primary researcher independently read each "block" categorized within the study domains and aimed to develop a core idea that reflected the participants' true sentiments, with a goal of including their original words and expressions (Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). Then, the core ideas were brought back to the other team members to review and discuss until consensus was achieved for all transcripts. The final versions of all core ideas were added to the coding team's consensus version data set.

Cross Analysis

The final stage of data analysis involved identifying themes within the data across all participants (Ladanay, Thompson, & Hill, 2012). To complete this process, the primary researcher analyzed the core ideas and found common elements or themes that emerged. The data was reviewed, and themes were refined several times to thoroughly represent the commonalities found within participant responses. This analysis was shared with the coding team for review and feedback until a structure was developed that captured most, if not all, of the data within each domain.

Audit

The primary researcher met with the study auditor to review and discuss the initial domain list, who provided feedback regarding its accuracy and application to the raw data. Once the construction of core ideas was completed, the consensus version of the data set was also shared with the auditor for review. The auditor reviewed the coding team's interpretation of participant expressions and provided feedback as needed. Finally, the auditor cross-checked the themes within each domain in order to evaluate their clarity and accuracy. The primary researcher, coding assistants, and the auditor continually exchanged notes and feedback to make modifications as needed until consensus was reached.

Position of the Researcher

Creswell (2013) states that "researchers position themselves in a qualitative research study," meaning that researchers convey their background, how it informs their interpretation of

the data, and what they ultimately have to gain from the study (p. 47). The primary researcher in this study is a doctoral student in school psychology who has trained in an APA and NASP-approved doctoral-level graduate program for over three years. Furthermore, the researcher has actively sought training experiences in large urban school districts and was accepted into a program designed to provide a small cohort of graduate students with a structured and organized sequence of supervised training experiences for those interested in urban school psychology.

Thus, the researcher brings to this study views and beliefs about the state of training for urban school psychologists and an emerging awareness of the challenges and barriers faced by practitioners in urban school districts. These personal perspectives allow the researcher to effectively probe for information shared by study participants to attain the richest description from each individual. However, because the researcher is also the primary source through which participants' views and perspectives will be filtered, it is critical to engage in purposeful reflexivity to understand others' training experiences and not simply those of the researcher.

One method used by the researcher to mitigate the potential effects of unacknowledged bias is bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010). As Drew (2004) states, bracketing is "the task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon" (p. 215). In this case, the researcher engaged in the form of bracketing known as memo writing throughout data collection and analysis in order to examine and reflect upon the researcher's own perspective (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Memos were written as theoretical, methodological, procedural, or observational comments that illuminated the "cognitive process of conducting research" in addition to exploring the researcher's own feelings throughout the data collection and analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2010 p. 86).

In addition to memo writing, the researcher also utilized member checking as a strategy for ensuring credibility and validity. Member checking involved soliciting feedback directly from study participants on preliminary or emerging findings following data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This strategy allowed the researcher to obtain respondent validation by ruling out possible misinterpretation as well as helping to identify the researcher's own bias.

Participants should be able to recognize their experience in the research team's construction of the core ideas. Therefore, the primary researcher brought the preliminary analysis back to each individual participant to learn whether the interpretation "rings true" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 246). If participants identified inaccuracies or misinterpretations, the team re-examined the data to capture their views and perspectives more accurately (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The previous chapter provided a description of the study design, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and consensual qualitative research analysis techniques. The rationale for conducting a phenomenological qualitative study was presented along with descriptions of both individual participants and the professional settings explored within the study. Chapter three also outlined the steps taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the data, address potential bias, and examine the positionality of the primary researcher.

In this chapter, the study results will be presented. Specifically, the results of this study reflect the domains and themes derived directly from participant interview data that emerged from the analysis procedures described in the previous chapter. A total of five domains were found within this study, which included: 1) Experiences In/Perceptions of Graduate Training 2) Motivations for Practice in Urban Schools, 3) Stressors and Inequities found in Urban School Systems, 4) Critical Professional Competencies in Practice, and 5) Factors Impacting Urban School Psychologists' Perceived Effectiveness. As a qualitative phenomenological study, the words and expressions of study participants are the primary source from which findings emerged. Therefore, in addition to examining and contextualizing the domains and themes identified, direct quotes taken from the interview data will be included in this chapter in order to further elucidate the lived experiences shared by study participants.

The degree to which themes were representative across participants was also analyzed. Using consensual qualitative research techniques recommended by Ladanay, Thompson, & Hill (2012), when a theme emerged across nine or more participants, it was considered *general*. A theme that emerged for more than five participants but less than nine was considered *typical*. And lastly, a theme that emerged for more than two participants but less than five was considered *variant*. The representativeness of themes within each domain is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Study Domains and Themes with Frequency Data

Domain/Theme	Frequency
Motivation for Practice in Urban Schools	
Impact	Typical
Accessibility	Variant
Challenge	Variant
Range of Opportunities	Typical
Experiences In/Perceptions of Graduate Training	
Exposure to Urban Schools	General
Community within Graduate Cohort	Typical
Need for Connection between Course Content and Practice	General
Importance of Partnership between Trainer and Practitioners	General
Independence during Fieldwork	Typical
Reflection of Preparedness Upon Completion of Training	General
Critical Professional Competencies in Practice	
Adherence to Special Education Procedures and Deadlines	General
Application of Clinical Skills	General
Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices	General
Continuing Education and Professional Development	General
Relationship Building	Typical

Stressors and Inequities found in Urban School Systems

Time Pressures	General
Staff Turnover	General
Lack of Sustainability in Systems	Typical
High Caseloads	Typical
Economic Injustice	General
Racism	Typical
Trauma	Typical

Facilitators of/Barriers to Perceived Effectiveness

Self-Confidence Entering into Early Career	General
Stress and Burnout	Typical
Perceived Stigma and Negative Attitudes	Variant
Lack of Alignment with District Administrators	Typical
Humility	Typical
Sharing of Ideas/Collaboration	General
Setting Professional Boundaries	Typical
Access to a Network or Mentorship	General

Research Question One

The first research question posed in this study was, “What were school psychologists’ motivations for practice in urban schools?” As a part of the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on why they chose to pursue school psychologist positions in urban school districts following the completion of their graduate training. Themes that emerged from the Motivations for Practicing in an Urban School District domain illustrate findings that are relevant to this research question.

Motivations for Practicing in an Urban School District

Participants described several different motivations for pursuing practice in an urban school setting. Several common themes were identified across participant responses within this domain, which included: a) impact, b) challenge, c) accessibility, and d) range of opportunities. Each of these themes along with relevant participant expressions will be discussed below in order to better understand the most influential factors that led participants to pursue and maintain their current positions in urban schools.

Impact. The most widely cited reason why participants chose to pursue their position in an urban school district was their belief that they could have a positive impact. Sixty percent of participants indicated in some way that they believed their knowledge and skills would have a meaningful effect on outcomes for students and families in urban schools. For instance, Participant 6 reflected on her position as being impactful, and explained that she can be helpful to others as a school psychologist in her district. She shared,

So I think that it's just I found the right fit for my personality and my life. And some other people's personality and lives are going to fit a lot better in other settings, but for me, like, and I feel like I'm helping. I don't feel like... every day if there's a meltdown or a crisis or an ideation or whatever. You know, we have so many crises and so much death in [city], that you're always helping. Right? Every day. There's something you've done that's helpful.

Like Participant 6, Participant 8 also described the impact she has in her school setting. She suggested that the positive relationships she builds with students influence educational outcomes, which is highly motivating to her. Participant 8 explained,

I appreciate the impact that I can add that I can have on kids' lives, you know, I see our role as school psychologists as really pivotal in potentially changing a child's future educationally. Also, especially in an urban setting, and I'm sure we'll get into more of this. The impact that like my positive relationship with the kids can have on them. And in their lives, period.

Participant 5 also expressed that perceived impact was a primary motivation for her. She, too, identified building positive relationships and identifying strengths in both students and staff as motivators in her practice. Participant 5 shared,

I wanted to be in [district] long term, despite all of the things that are normally said about [city] with like, the crime rate and the trauma and all of that, yes, that's true. But I also got to see how resilient students and families can be, just like the selflessness of the staff who work at these schools. And, yeah, it's just really rewarding to be able to work with students for counseling for a whole school year and see how they, you know, improve just from you building that rapport and relationships. So I just felt like there was a specific impact that I could make in a district like this.

In these statements, the participants acknowledged that their skills and abilities on the job could be useful and valuable to others. The opportunity to see the impact of their work through students' progress and rewarding feedback was a strong motivator for many of the participants. As seen above, Participants 5, 6, and 8 described their perceived positive impact in urban school settings as something that continues to motivate them over time.

Challenge. When asked about their motivations for practice in an urban school district, 30 percent of participants also described being drawn to the challenges of the work. Therefore, this emerged as another theme within the same domain. For many participants, the perceived challenges on the job, in addition to the complexity of needs within the district, were factors that led them to initially pursue their positions and continue to motivate them in practice. Participant 3 explained, "I think that was where I wanted to be. Um, so I think that was my primary place to be looking because it was challenging. And I like a challenge. And I think the complexity of the students in an urban setting was something that really drew me to those students." Participant 4 also perceived there to be challenges to the work and identified this as a factor that furthered his interest in urban school psychology. He stated,

I don't think it's something that I ever like acutely thought about or was, like, in tune with, but I think that after... where my undergrad was, and the one school-based experience that I had there was what we would consider a little bit more urban or like mixed SES, I think that it was a natural gravitation toward that just because of the challenge and the interest.

Participant 4's initial exposure to urban school settings and the challenges he saw there gave him some idea about the type of work and practices he might be expected to engage in professionally. This led to what he described as a natural gravitation toward his current position. In somewhat of a different trajectory, Participant 6 described her transition from a school psychologist position in a suburban district to her current role in a large urban district. She stated,

I wanted to be where the action is. The types of problems I was dealing with were not the types of problems I felt super engaged in. So I learned my lesson that the grass is not always greener in a suburban setting, and that I was a little bit kind of stifled and I just liked being like boots on the ground like where you can really help kids every day.

Here, Participant 6 compares her limited engagement in her previous role to the work she does now in an urban district. Within these statements, participants described that the work of a school psychologist in a large urban district often comes with significant challenges. And yet, it is that perceived challenge that has led them to become more engaged in the work and motivated to continue their practice in this setting over time.

Range of opportunities. The next theme that emerged from participant responses regarding motivation for practice in urban schools was the belief that they would be able to engage in a wide range of practices and settings within a more expansive district. Because of the number of school buildings and educational programs often found in urban districts, some participants were drawn to the possibility that they could practice across various settings and address a diverse range of needs. For example, Participant 6 explained,

My role is just a little different being that I'm in [district]. One of the benefits is you can change your job anytime you want. So if I get sick of being an elementary school

psychologist, the next year, I can sign up to be a high school school psychologist, or if I don't like my principal, and was just not a good mix or something like that I can sign up for a different school the next year. That doesn't mean I'm going to get anything better. It just means I'm going to get something different. And you can keep doing different things every year until you find your fit. Whereas if you're in a suburban school, when I worked at that somewhat suburban school for three years, it was all about seniority, and it was all about, like, if you wanted that school, you're gonna have to wait for that person to give it up or retire. And you might be in the same school for 30 years and to me, that is very stifling and suffocating. I cannot imagine not doing something different sometimes. I like a little variety.

Participant 4 recalled considering the range of practice areas he might be expected to engage in across a large district as an influential factor in his decision to pursue his current position. He stated,

So that's, when I was interviewing for this position, that's what really appealed to me was that I was able to take some of the skills that I had learned in terms of a little bit more progressive skills and be able to apply them in terms of doing different consultation and like therapy with students, and then also doing like, the traditional roles. So that's really what appealed to me about coming here.

Participant 3 expressed a similar idea when she explained the value in being able to access a range of opportunities in her district. She stated, "I've had different focuses over my career. I had a period of which, in an urban district, this is one of the beauties of being in an urban district, because it is so large you know, we always joke that you can be in a different building every single year for your entire career and still keep moving if you wanted to do that."

Together, these statements point to the participants' perceptions that there are a range of professional opportunities available to them in a large urban district, not only in practice areas but also in different buildings and programs. These opportunities and the ability to move to different settings within the same district have served as motivating factors for them in their decision to pursue and maintain professional practice in this setting.

Accessibility. For 40 percent of the participants, the decision to pursue a position in an urban school district was a result of the position being the most accessible to them in some way. Therefore, the final theme that emerged from participants' responses related to this domain was accessibility. For example, two participants explained that their current position was geographically proximal to where they lived. Another experienced a last-minute change in personal circumstances that facilitated employment in an urban school district. Within this theme, participants also described never having actively considered other districts because they had previously been involved with the district, just in a different role (e.g., teacher or case manager).

For example, Participant 2 explained that she had originally planned to move to a new state after graduating from her school psychology training program, but at the last minute changed plans. As such, she was left looking for an open position near the end of the hiring season and happened to see open positions in a large urban school district. She stated,

Again, it's not exciting. So, like I said, I was about to move out of state. And I decided not to. And [district] schools had 16 positions open for a psychologist and it was June, and my friends had all applied for my program. They were all staying in town and out of the seven of us, five of us, I think ended up in [district], three of us are still there. So, it was just a matter of: 'Oh my gosh, I'm staying in [city] who's still hiring?' I mean, that's like, embarrassing and cool at the same time. I mean, I went straight through school. I was young, I was naive. I didn't know anything, you know. And so I ended up like, I'm so thankful now, that that's what ended up happening. But when I think about just the thought that was the lack of thought that went into it. It was really like, with hiring at the time and what was available to you what was available. And, and where my friends went, honestly.

Participant 8 described having recently moved with her three children and needed to find a position that was close enough to home. She shared,

I have three children. We moved here when my kids were in seventh, fifth and second

grades. So I didn't know anyone out here. The school districts are very different out here. And so I basically when I looked again, I looked at geography, so where were the school districts that were close in proximity to where I lived?

Here, Participant 8 acknowledges that her decision to pursue her current position was largely due to its proximity to where she lived. Participant 9 also described the accessibility of her district when it came time to apply for a full-time position. Like Participant 8, her decision also involved the district's geographic location, having been someone who had lived in large cities for many years. She also found the position to be more accessible to her after previously working in the same district as a case manager. She expressed,

Well, the only thought I had is that I wanted to do it. Um, because when I was a case manager at the community mental health organization, I actually had to do a lot of work with the schools. So that was part of my job that, you know, every month I had to do. I had to do checks at the school. So I would travel to like so many schools every month and get to learn the teachers and the psychologists and administrators. So I thought that it would, you know, I always thought that I would work for a large urban school district because I was born and raised mostly in Boston. Then I moved to Los Angeles and lived in Miami. So I've always resided in, you know, very large, urban cities. That's just kind of how it was, so it was natural.

Participant 10 described her transition from teacher to psychologist in the same large urban school district. To her, the decision to stay in the same district was expected given her prior history. Participant 10 explained,

So your question is a good one because I had already been a teacher in urban education. Yeah, of course, I was like, this is where I'm doing my practice of psychology. However, I can back it up to say... Your question is, what was my drive? Before that I can kind of relate it back even a few years earlier. I really didn't know what I wanted to do. Even when I entered school, like for my teaching degree, I was not intent on urban education, per se. But I did go to school in [city], and whenever we did our clinicals or our student teaching, what have you, it was always it was always in the city. And I found myself saying, "Yeah, this is where I should be."

Similarly, Participant 6 went from teaching kindergarten to becoming a school psychologist in the same district. She shared,

But then my school where I had taught for three years, had an opening for a school psychologist. So all these teachers I had already established relationships with great friends of mine. The principal, I already knew so well from being a teacher. And they had an opening. And so I took that because I really wanted to get back in with those people in that building and have that feeling again. So I worked there for two years after I graduated, and I went from being a teacher to their school psychologist.

While she did not initially want to return after her graduate training, she ultimately chose to return because of the availability of a position in a building where she had pre-existing professional relationships.

Research Questions Two and Three

The second research question posed in this study was, “How did school psychologists perceive their level of preparedness for practice in urban settings upon completion of graduate training?” and subsequently, “What knowledge, skills, or experiences may enhance preparedness?” Three domains emerged from the data relevant to this research question: Experiences In/Perceptions of Graduate Training, Stressors and Inequities found in Urban School Systems, and Critical Professional Competencies in Practice. Together, the themes within each of these domains illustrate important findings regarding preparedness for practice in urban schools. Findings from the Stressors and Inequities Impacting Urban School Systems domain are also relevant to research question four, which is presented later in this chapter.

Another aim from this study was to explore urban school psychologists’ approaches to obtaining professional development to better understand the training sources and materials most valuable to them in practice. Thus, the third research question was, “Where do urban school psychologists access continued training and professional development opportunities?” Findings relevant to this research question also emerged within the Critical Competencies in Practice domain and, therefore, will also be discussed below.

Experiences In/Perceptions of Graduate Training

Participants described many of their own experiences in graduate school in addition to reflecting on their perceptions of training currently. Several themes were identified across participant responses within this domain, which included: a) exposure to urban schools; b) community within graduate cohort; c) need for connection between course content and practice; d) importance of partnerships between trainers and practitioners; e) independence during fieldwork; and f) perceived preparedness upon completion of training.

Exposure to urban schools. One of the most frequently cited experiences among study participants was initial exposure to urban school settings during fieldwork positions, such as practicum and internship. Ninety percent of participants described these experiences as important in shaping their professional interests going forward. Specifically, participants noted that early exposure helped them, not only to apply their skills in an urban school system for the first time, but also provided them with supervision from a practicing urban school psychologist. For example, when asked about her first practicum experience, Participant 9 described her experience doing fieldwork in the district she currently works in now,

I completed the practicum in [urban district] with a couple of psychologists. So the first psychologist, she was a traditional psychologist who was assigned like, I don't know, two, three schools. And I just kind of shadowed her. I didn't do any work with students. I just kind of shadowed her. So wherever she was, I went. I attended meetings, I attended evaluation sessions. And so I had a good opportunity to observe an actual school psychologist in their role.

Similarly, Participant 5 also completed her practicum and internship in the district where she is currently practicing full-time and describes the way in which her responsibilities and the intensity of the training experiences were scaffolded over time. She shared,

So I did both practicum and internship in [urban district]. And that's why I'm where I'm working now. And I had a really great experience at both. It was really great. I think that

it was kind of like an intro into internship. So just like really lightweight shadowing, and doing some things here and there. And I had a really great relationship with my supervisor. Internship was a bit more in depth, there were like projects, we had to complete and I got a wider array of experiences, I got to respond to a crisis at like the beginning of my internship. I did like 10, or 15 re-evals, did a counseling case, consultation. So like, and that was a requirement of my program. But I think the district was really good with like making those opportunities available. It also involved rotations, where we would go to like, the specialty sites at the district and see, like, what like the different schools that were offered for more intensive needs, when they were, how they operate.

Participants found value in early exposure to urban schools because it helped them become aware of the unique stressors and challenges on the job. For instance, Participant 6 expressed,

Like if you think you're going to want to work for [city], getting out there and seeing what [city] is really like, I think that's super beneficial. You know, seeing the struggles and the realities that are [city] or an urban school is very important. And we have a lot that once they come to us, they want to come back, you know, there's a magic that is being an urban school psychologist.

Similarly, Participant 2 also identified the value in exposure to urban school systems during graduate training. She shared,

I think that stress comes with not understanding what you're getting into. So I think that it's so very important to know that ahead of time, and that goes back to the earlier point about sitting down and having conversation and interview and gathering information from the source. I want people to learn about it, because I want them to know its unique challenges. And I want them to know that there are some aspects of it that are very different than if you're working in a suburban setting. So I want there to be exposure. Early-career school psychologists need to know what urban education is, to know its challenges, to know what you're getting into, and sign up for it not as a stepping stone, but sign up for it because you're willing to be engaged in its mission.

Here, Participant 2 found exposure to urban schools during graduate training to be an important experience in helping determine whether practice in this particular setting aligns with one's professional goals and values.

Additionally, Participant 7 recalled the value of that exposure during practicum and internship in helping him to become more embedded into the school-community over time. Like

Participants 5 and 9, he also completed two years of fieldwork in the same district he now practices in as a licensed school psychologist. Participant 7 stated,

There's nothing worse than talking to an adult, when you talk about some place in your town, and they don't know anything that you're talking about, right? And they view you more as a visitor. And so that first year was a really intensive community building kind of experience. And it was done so kind of subversively, by surprises, like, go hang the cafeteria, just go talk to the kids, go play with them. Go help out with something, go greet the kids in the hallway in the morning and get to know every single one of them and say hi and greet them, you know, help at a dismissal. And it was awesome. Like, it really got me to know not only one or two people in the building, or like specialty groups in the building, but really the faculty and staff. And then you build onto that. And, you know, day one, that was the first thing that my supervisor and teachers taught me and I try to teach my kids, my students, now is how to invest yourself into the community.

Lastly, other participants in this study linked exposure during training to their readiness for practice in an urban district. For example, Participant 3 stated, "I feel they gave me a very strong base for what it is that I needed to do after my internship when I started as a first-year psych. I knew what the job was having interned there and I felt prepared because of that field placement that I had had."

Community within Graduate Cohort. Another common theme among participants within this domain was the value they placed on their graduate program cohorts. Specifically, 70 percent of participants expressed that they found a sense of community among their fellow trainees. The community found in training served as a natural support for many participants. Joining a cohort also allowed for an exchange of ideas that encouraged them to consider various aspects of the field from another's point of view. Participant 7 expressed,

I enjoyed having such a small group of cohort members. I think there's only six of us. And, you know, we took all the same classes at all the same times. And it really built a very strong relationship, but also one in which people were very openly capable of commenting on each other's thoughts or beliefs or statements without like, too much kind of fear of anybody jumping in on anybody else. At the end, they would also go out and grab a beer or whatever, it was all good, because of just that, that very kind of nurturing nature.

In this reflection, Participant 7 described the benefit to having a nurturing environment in his program in which graduate students could challenge each other and openly converse about their different beliefs. Similarly, Participant 3 shared,

Um, you know, I think in graduate training, we had a cohort. There were, I think, 15 of us that were together from the beginning to the end and I still have close friends. Um, so I think having that cohort to be able to draw things from was a very, very strong experience as a school to have a way to think about things with a group of other individuals. We and we had a diverse group of folks so for me coming from a middle class white household coming to a wide variety of students was really an eye opening experience I think for me.

Participant 2 also described the value she found in connecting with her fellow cohort members and the ways in which this transformed her own belief system going forward. She explained,

So for me, personally, it was very eye opening because I grew up in an all white middle class, suburban. You know, my whole um I've never gone to school with anybody different than me in any way. No different religion, no different socioeconomic status, no different race. So when I ended up leaving for college, I went to a very homogenous college too. And so when I ended up at [training program], it was the first time that I had friends that were of a different religion, have a different culture, a different race or have a different background than me and so that in and of itself was eye opening to me because I just met people that were different. I had never I had never been challenged by like my lifestyle or my beliefs or anything at all until I went there and it was like that was probably... that was super eye opening for me in terms of, you know, training for diversity. I think that was pretty impactful and that stands out is something that kind of transformed my belief system.

Thus, not only did participants find value in the support they received from their graduate cohort, but they also described the way this experience helped them to learn and connect with other school psychologists whose background and identities differed from their own. For a few participants, the immersion into a community or cohort during training provided opportunities to challenge and expand their own views and beliefs for the first time.

Need for connection between course content and practice. The next theme that emerged within this domain was the value of being able to make connections between content

learned in the classroom and the skills applied in practice. Often this could be seen as participants identifying gaps between what they had learned as best practices and the limitations they faced either in fieldwork during training or in their current professional practice. For instance, Participant 4 described feeling a dissonance between course content and fieldwork. He stated, “And then it... also there was also a big dissonance in terms of, I need different skills to do the job in the field, then you're teaching me in the classroom.” When asked to explain further, Participant 4 gave an example of the differences he perceived between how he was trained to conduct standardized testing in his program and the expectations for his current practice. He elaborated,

I think because there was a massive gap in the way that we were taught about standardized testing and the application of that in an urban district and the unfortunate reality that you know, state criteria still have to be met and deadlines have to be met and IEP s have to be put in place. And you know, evaluations have to be done in a very systematic way. Otherwise, you have lawyers jumping down your back, especially in a district like [urban district]. I was not prepared for that.

While Participant 4 saw this gap in training related to testing and special education procedures, Participant 1 noticed a need for more training in counseling and mental health service delivery given the responsibilities she has now as a school psychologist. She stated:

Yes, so I think having a more emphasis on counseling, so like, in [training state], counseling wasn't something that was required for school psychologists, and that particular district, you had the option to do it. But it wasn't like here in the state of [current state], where school psychologists have a counseling caseload. So these are students that have psychological services on their IEP, and that we provide those services. And that's something that is required for all of us to do. So I think having so yeah, we're doing counseling was like, new to me. And I was like, ‘Oh, my goodness.’ I mean, we have one counseling class and that’s great, but like to actually do it in the real world. It was like, I mean, it was, it was hard. It still is something, an area that I'm trying to improve in.

Participant 5 also identified gaps between what she learned as a part of her graduate coursework and what she felt she needed to be prepared. She, too, identified those gaps within

standardized testing as well as in various aspects of mental and behavioral health intervention, including functional behavioral analysis and social-emotional learning. She expressed,

But in terms of the curriculum, and just the experience that I had, I think overall, it was really effective in preparing me. I think that there... there are things that I could have learned a little bit more about, like, for example, social emotional learning. We didn't really have a course that specifically dealt with that. So there's just different areas of like, the profession that I wish we kind of spent a little bit more time on, or even just learning about different intelligence testing options, we learned kind of a few. And it was very short, and, you know, not very in depth. I think that those... definitely those pieces would have prepared me for my work in an urban district, because we do focus a lot on social emotional learning and FBAs. So, yeah, there, I feel like there are some courses that we could have had more of, or just had me prepared.

Another example emerged related to mental health intervention when participants identified a need for more training in trauma. For instance, Participants 2, 4, and 5 all identified a desire for more of a focus on trauma in graduate training given its prevalence and impact in urban schools.

Participant 4 stated,

Yeah, I think, um, something that I really would have liked was an entire course focused on like trauma. Yeah, um, because I just think that like that... that's probably applicable to any school setting. But that was not that was something that in our training program, those of us that were at the Ed.S. level always kind of had in the back of our mind. Like, well, we go into these schools, and these kids come home come in with so much just exposure to different things. And we have never once talked about them, or how to help a student process that or how to help a teacher, help a student or help a teacher or a school building help an entire community. So I think that was a massive miss. That would be beyond beneficial.

Within the same theme, participants also reflected on their courses related to social justice issues in education, multiculturalism, and diversity, which they also believed to be important knowledge areas in urban school psychology. Some participants recalled that they never took any courses related to social justice issues. For others, this content was delivered in their training program as one course or lecture. For example, Participant 2 listed several

knowledge areas and issues related to social justice in education that she believes would have helped her better prepare to serve her students,

Yeah, I think I wish I would have known a little bit more about history and politics. I wish I would have known more about education funding. I wish I knew. Like, I wish I knew how the [State] Department of Education works, you know. I wish I would have known about the institution of education, and how it's funded, how things are decided. I wish I would have known more about that. I wish I would have known more about trauma. I wish I would have known more about poverty. I wish I would have known more about the pipeline to prison. I wish I would have known more about implicit bias. I wish I would have known more about racism. I just wish I would have. Yeah, I wish I would have known more about that. Because I think it would help me to understand my students and serve them better.

Similarly, Participant 1 recalled limited training in these topics despite the geographic area of her graduate program being culturally diverse. She expressed,

And then diversity. So there was definitely a lack of courses, whether it was related to social justice, multiculturalism, working with diverse populations. So we kind of had a course that briefly touched on it, but not really so much of like different cultures and backgrounds and stuff like that. And it was surprising because [location] is very diverse. And so that was a little bit, something that I wish they would have done. When I was there during that time. And I guess with everything that's happening in the world today, they are being more proactive about racial injustice and having diversity courses. So I know that it's something that they're currently working on. I just wish they had it then.

Here, Participant 1 acknowledged the improvements she noticed in efforts to address racial injustice and working with diverse populations in schools, but still perceived this to be a limitation in her own training. Similarly, Participant 5 shared,

We had a course on multicultural psychology, which I think was meant to make us sensitive to cultural competency. So that I see that as their effort because it is relevant to working in an urban district, you do need to be like aware of cultural competency, but in terms of like, more obvious efforts, or whole courses, I don't think that there was much with that it was more so like, here and there in various lectures, but not like an actual course dedicated to it.

Alternatively, Participant 7 described his education in social justice issues and cultural competency as being embedded across his sequence of training. He recalled discussing cultural

diversity not just within one dedicated course, but in all of his courses, which he found to be a valuable part of his training. He expressed,

That was one of those things that is embedded in a lot of our classes, not just like talking about cultural competence, or what it is, but checking yourself for your own personal kind of bias. So within all conversations, you know, reflecting that was just a key piece that they tried to hit upon in each one.

So my biological basis guy was also my cultural competency teacher, but also my statistical teacher, right? So he tied in like, “Oh, well think about the biological differences, the environmental exposures of urban youth and look what happens in the brain, right?” Then you can take the stats, and he kind of tied it into that piece. And they just were able to really blend to get it together because they weren't teaching one subject matter.

Participant 7 observed that conversations about cultural diversity did not exist in isolation, but across classes like biological differences and statistics. Here, Participant 7 described an experience that is reflective of a mission or focus on social justice and cultural responsiveness rather than a single course in a program's training sequence. Participant 9 identified the need for a similar approach when she stated,

There's a lot of social justice issues that surround school psych. I think NASP does a good job at addressing this. But you know, that we just have to make sure whatever we're doing, that we...that our goal at the end, for school psychs being trained, is we should have a social justice lens.

In these statements, participants address the need for more course content rooted in a social justice framework. As Participant 7 described in his responses, courses related to social justice and culturally responsive practices can often appear as a “compartmentalized” or as a program’s way to “check boxes for their licensure.” As school psychologists in settings where inequities abound and student populations are becoming even more culturally and linguistically diverse, participants identified a strong knowledge base in these issues as critical to their work.

Importance of partnership between trainers and practitioners. The next theme that emerged from participants' reflections on graduate training was the importance of having strong partnerships and cohesion between the trainers of school psychologists in graduate programs and the practitioners in urban schools who supervise them. Three participants expressed their belief that graduate students benefit from taking courses with individuals who have practiced experience as school psychologists, particularly in urban districts. Participant 4 stated,

Yeah, we had, we had one adjunct faculty member, and he was a practicing school psychologist. And he was hands down the best professor we had, because you could ask him questions, and he could tell you, theoretically, here's what you should do, here's what can be done. And here's what you'll need to do. And that was a much more robust conversation and learning experience because it felt tangible. It felt like somebody was talking to you who actually knew what to make of everything you were learning. I think it does a big disservice to not have faculty who haven't had that experience, right. So like, if I, if I had had a faculty member who had had some sort of like, city or urban school-based experience to go and talk to or have, like, a focus group around that or like, have a small, like, monthly committee about that would be helpful.

Participant 4 expressed that having faculty with experience in urban schools and dedicated opportunities to explore practice in this setting during graduate school may have been helpful to him over the course of his training. Similarly, Participant 3 shared,

And, you know, and another, I don't know maybe beef or not beef is, you know, many of our school psych programs have folks that have not practiced school psychology in [state] and are not school psychologists. Um, and while they have very valuable information to share, it needs to make sure that it's rounded out with folks that are school psychologists. Because they might not have the same perspective that those practicing in the field have at this current moment, because, you know, school psychology is different this year than it was five years ago. And it's going to be different next year. So being out there and being connected with folks that are actually practicing is what's really going to help those students move along and do well when they get out there.

When asked about her training program, Participant 6 also identified a desire for faculty with more school-based experience. She stated, "I will say it was a little weak. And only one practicing school psychologist. You know, most of them were faculty-track the whole time. So,

they did some work. But as for anyone who had done an extended period of time in schools, there was only one.” Participant 3 shared more about practices that she believes are helpful to both trainers and practitioners. She shared,

And, you know, our program where I'm at we have twice a year, um, practitioners come to the university and, and inform the university, what things that they think need to be shorn up or or that students could use in the program. So I think that's an important part too, to have that dialogue back and forth between the university and the school sites so that the schools can tell the university what it is they need and the university can pivot and then create more information to put into their programs.

In this statement, Participant 3 recognized the value of consistent communication between universities and districts to provide the best possible training opportunities for graduate students. This may be particularly important given that several participants identified a need for stronger connections between course content and practice. Participant 3 went on to suggest that ideas be shared among a greater number of practitioners, not just a select few. She stated,

You know, I think only a select group of folks get to have that opportunity. I think it would be neat for universities to maybe send out a survey to the large group of practitioners in the area that they serve to find out what specific needs they might have, um, as well as you know, I think at times, universities need to be more thankful to their supervisors in the fields because I think field supervisors do a lot of work, and don't get a lot of accolades or benefits or perks from the work that they do. So you'll get some people that want to do it. And then some people that, you know, that won't because there's not that reciprocity.

Not only might this practice advance training efforts, but Participant 3 suggested this could be a way to show gratitude and appreciation for the contributions of fieldwork supervisors.

Participant 10 also stated that communication between trainers, practitioners, and graduate students could be improved. She suggested that even taking the time to interview professionals in urban school systems might be a valuable exercise. She explained,

Um, honestly, I think that, like I was thinking about this a little bit in, you know, anticipation of this interview, and I was thinking, I think they need to interview us. I think they need to talk to us. I think there should be a requirement. I think it would be

helpful if there was a requirement about asking people in the field specific things and it doesn't... not only school psychologists, but what do principals need from their school psychologists in an urban setting, what does a parent need from a school psychologist? So yes, like a set of interview questions that talks to all the key players in advance. I think what you're doing, you know what you're doing, like, I feel like so this is for research purposes, but I feel like an interview like this for everybody that's, you know, anticipating possibly working in an urban field. Just to have some dialogue with somebody that does it.

Again, these opportunities for dialogue and communication may be beneficial for understanding the training needs of graduate students with an interest in this setting. Participants 3 and 10 also note a desire for more opportunities for urban school psychologists to be heard by their colleagues in the field. Overall, 80 percent of participants identified a need for continued partnership, communication, and greater cohesion between faculty trainers and urban school psychologists in the field.

Independence during fieldwork experiences. Another theme that emerged within this domain was the value participants found in gaining more independence in their fieldwork training experiences (e.g., practicum and internship). Fifty percent of participants recalled that their supervisors encouraged them to take on more responsibility over time, which helped them to become more prepared for independent practice. Participant 8 experienced this encouragement starting in practicum, “My practicum supervisor at that middle school was great because she was a very independent person and she kind of let me... she would give me something and just like let me go.” In this way, Participant 8 was able to get a better sense of the range of practice areas and skills she could be expected to engage in on the job. Likewise, Participant 1 elaborated on her experience gaining greater independence during internship when she shared,

My internship supervisor kind of pushed interns to be on their own. And so I feel like that also gave me that end of the year push to really test out my skills before I graduated. And so that was also something that I appreciated because I feel like when I talk to other friends that are school psychologists now say like, “Oh, I didn't do this

during internship, or I wish I would have had some of those similar experiences.” I'm kind of grateful for it now.

Participant 7 completed his practicum and internship in the same urban district where he currently practices and now supervises interns himself. He reflected on the importance of scaffolding skills and responsibilities so that interns are truly prepared for practice,

When you first start working, it's not even necessarily like the job of direct servicing that's tricky and hard to manage, but like balancing your schedule, and like accessing materials, and like making sure you know the right things, or the right calendar, or the right checklist or the right form, you know? And, and those kinds of rudimentary, basic, tedious, office kind of details was the thing that helped, you know, get me going, because by that time, a lot of us were ready to kind of just go out and do it. And like we've been at those sites, we've been doing that stuff. But it was that slow kind of gradual transition of peeling back like here is your like, professional work skills that you need to like, now learn how to do and get off and running. It was a nice way to do it. And unfortunately, not everybody got that opportunity to do it. But again, it's like how do you do that as a supervisor, like I'm finding that hard now as I have an intern, like how do I kind of lean back like, 'Alright, now I'm going to give you more cases.' They're still coming from me but like, you have to figure out how to like manage and organize and triage which one comes first and stuff because it still has that little bit of an artificial nature to it without being fully independent.

In this statement, Participant 7 identified the importance of “peeling back” supervisor involvement so that emerging school psychologists can use their skills independently.

Participants recalled that this gradual step toward greater independence and responsibility helped them to feel ready to transition to their first full-time position in a fast-paced urban school setting. Importantly, participants found that their supervisors were skilled in appropriately encouraging them to take the lead during practicum and internship.

Perceived preparedness upon completion of training. As a part of the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their feelings of preparedness upon completion of graduate training. Most participants recalled feeling fairly prepared and expressed that they had foundational knowledge and skills that helped them feel more ready. Participant 5 captured this

when she expressed, “So when I completed my internship, um, I think overall, I was fairly prepared. I don't know that anyone is ever, like fully prepared.” Similarly, Participant 6 remarked, “I felt very nervous, but I was very prepared. Like everything I had done up until that point, prepares you.” In speaking to the importance of foundational knowledge in building preparedness, Participant 8 stated,

I think that you can in the training program, I think that that's where you can build capacity. Build your background knowledge, read those types of books, have an understanding of what instruction is, how instruction is presented, how kids learn. I think some of the other half is you just you, you learn it, because you're in it. Right? Um, you really do learn as you go. So I think you can prepare as much as you can by having a lot of background knowledge.

Within these reflections, participants stated their beliefs that it would be unrealistic to expect emerging urban school psychologists to feel fully prepared. There is an expectation that learning occurs on the job and over time. Still, the foundational knowledge and skills can be critical in building capacity for successful practice. Participant 10 shared a similar reflection,

Okay, that's a great question. It was, ‘I felt ready. I can do this!’ But then ‘I wasn't ready and I can't do this.’ Then the questions then the situations that I wasn't fully prepared for... although I had taught in [urban district], and I had done my practicum and my internship. Boy until you really hear some of the things that you hear. So I felt like I was fully prepared. But then I learned nothing can fully prepare you for this. I mean, and that's a fact that's true of, I would say most things if I related that to nursing or being a doctor or a pilot, or I mean, I could relate that to most professions that you think you're prepared because you've been schooled. But there's a huge difference between university textbooks-learned and practice-learned.

When asked about his perceived preparedness, Participant 4 recalled feeling underprepared, especially for the volume of work and fast-paced nature of a large urban school district. He described,

I don't think I would have felt prepared in any district let alone an urban district. Um, I don't know how other people answered that question. But really. Yeah, I think I think what happened by being an urban district versus like suburban or rural, is that I learned things very quickly. Because the speed of the evaluation timeline is... I did like 100 my

first year on the job, right, like, I had never done anything like that. In any sort of scope close to that. So it's, I think I learned in a year, most people in the field take a decade to learn or accomplish just because you have to, otherwise you sink.

In this statement, Participant 4 described feeling as though he had no choice but to learn to do the work and become better prepared during his first year on the job. For him, the learning curve was steep in his first year especially because he had never been responsible for such a demanding caseload during his training years.

A few participants reflected that they may have been underprepared for practice but were unaware at the time. For instance, Participant 2 has been practicing independently in an urban district for nearly twenty years. She recalled,

Um, there was never a point where I felt ill prepared. You know, it's not like I didn't my early years like my you know, first five years. I never thought oh my gosh, I never learned this. I never felt ill prepared because the other thing is, the field has changed so much over twenty years that when I first started, you know, my district initiatives weren't even the same as they are now. Like now we have all kinds of trauma training and resilience and restorative justice. That wasn't a thing twenty-two years ago, so I was prepared for what I was charged to do. Interestingly, I wouldn't have been prepared if you threw me in in 2019. Yep. So I think it's a little bit of a reflection of the times. But yeah, I didn't... If I was ill prepared. I didn't know it. It didn't impact the job that I was being asked to do. That's sad.

This participant's statement showed the importance of continuing to assess one's preparedness to meet the evolving needs of children and families as a school psychologist. What Participant 2 was expected to do as an early-career school psychologist in an urban school district twenty years ago is much different from what an early-career school psychologist may need to know currently. Again, this suggests that school psychologists should continually be reflecting on their level of preparedness to use the knowledge and skills expected of them in practice.

Stressors and Inequities found in Urban School Systems

Over the course of the interviews, participants described several stressors and structural inequities that impact urban schools. Several common themes were identified across participant responses within this domain, which included: a) time pressures; b) high caseloads; c) staff turnover; d) lack of sustainability in systems change; e) economic injustice; f) racism; and g) trauma. Each of these themes along with relevant participant expressions will be discussed below to better understand the stressors and barriers that impact, not only school psychologists in these settings, but also the students and families they serve.

Time pressures. One of the most frequently cited stressors urban school psychologists identified was the perception that there are myriad tasks assigned during the school day and not enough time to complete them. Thus, the first theme commonly found across participant responses was time pressures. For example, Participant 5 reflected on the challenge that comes with the busy nature of her urban school environment, “Because so much happens, just like on a daily basis, it is kind of important that you stay on top of things and like, try to get solutions to things as quickly as possible.” Participant 5 explained that it is important to be efficient and move swiftly in her work. Participant 8 also described her propensity to work quickly because of the demands of the job. She explained,

I would say that in an urban setting for probably for the most part, you need to be able to move quickly. It's very fast paced. I like that. So if you're more of like someone who wants to just kind of, I don't know, socialize part of the day, maybe it isn't. And I think to me, at my point my career, I think that my job is such second nature to me at this point that I think I'm very efficient at my job, so I can get a lot done compared to maybe someone who's starting out who's still trying to put like a lot of pieces to get puzzle pieces together as they go through their day. There's so much that goes into it.

Participant 9 also identified time pressures as a significant stressor, especially in early career.

She stated that many urban school psychologists are expected to serve several school buildings,

which may contribute to the perception that there is not enough time to meet the demands of the job. She expressed,

The district is pretty large. So some people may have... and the traffic is horrible now here in [city], so there may be issues with you know, your schools, may you there may be a long distance for you. Or, you know, you don't have enough time, that if you have three schools, I mean, you're at one school two days, one school two days, and one school one day, you may not have enough time to you perceive you'll be able to get your work done, or to even be a proper service.

When asked about challenges on the job, Participant 10 also identified time as a limited resource. She went on to state explicitly, "Yeah, and there is no... that's a lie. There is never enough time on the job. So be one with that. And you'll be okay."

High caseloads. Relatedly, several participants identified having high caseloads of students as a stressor in urban schools. Not only did participants express the importance of working efficiently because of time pressures, they also discussed the high psychologist-to-student ratios in their districts. When asked about her goals for service delivery, Participant 6 shared,

And then I do... we try and keep some social emotional groups going. I'd like to do more of that. But they kind of re-staffed our ratios this upcoming year. So instead of being like the recommended ratios for NASP, we're at the higher end ratios, and I got cut at my school a half a day. Even though we're getting to two classes of 60 kids, I still got cut a half a day. Everybody's stretching thinner.

Participant 7 described carrying a high caseload in a way that resembled Participant 6's reflection above. He stated, "And, you know, unfortunately, there's only so much time when you're spread thin on things, that you could do anything effectively, or to the way it should be done. There's bound to be human error because of the amount of people that you have." In this statement, Participant 7 called attention to the likelihood that mistakes will be made when a school psychologist is expected to provide services to so many students.

Participant 4 also compared his school psychologist-to-student ratio with that recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists. He expressed,

I think NASP standards now are one psychologist to every 700 gen ed kids, right? It keeps going down, which is super, but like even when it was 1,000, like five years ago, I was like, 'That's a cute idea.' Oh, but I'm in a building with 1,800 kids. And I'm there full time. And I'm counting that as a blessing, right? But there should actually be two and a half of me there. So it's, it's not only like material resources. It's, like, the faculty capacity resources, and like the presence of just other people being there. I think that's the biggest. That's definitely the biggest hindrance to doing the job.

Even though Participant 4 is expected to serve only one school building, the student population results in a ratio that is much higher than recommended. Participant 8 alluded to the challenge of carrying a high caseload of evaluations when she stated, "Yeah, there's so much more to that role, then testing. And, and in my experience in some school districts, depending on the student to school psychologist ratio, you have a lot more opportunity to do things outside of testing. And in some urban districts you don't, right?" Here, she attributed the high ratio of psychologist-to-students as one reason why urban school psychologists may not always have the capacity to engage in a range of service delivery areas.

Staff turnover. Another commonly cited stressor identified by participants in urban school systems is frequent staff turnover. Eighty percent of participants acknowledged that turnover occurred not only among teachers, but among school psychologists and administrators as well. Participants identified turnover in urban schools as challenging for students and describes the way it impacts the overall school climate. For example, Participant 10 noticed that her district is always looking to hire new staff. She stated, "I mean, it's because we're always in the hiring process. We're never in the sustained process. There's very few people who make an entire career in an urban setting because it's exhausting. It's not a good fit for everybody. We

struggle to retain people. I will tell you that over one third of our department is in the first five years of their career.”

Both Participants 7 and 8 identified the frequent changes in administration in their respective districts. Participant 8 explained,

But administration, tons and tons of turnover. Teachers, it depends on the schools, honestly, in [district], we have 53 schools. So some schools are easier than others as far as behavior and where they pull they pull from the tougher schools with the weaker administrators, so you tend to see a lot of teachers leaving. Same with administrators, there's constant, constant turnover in administration. It's unbelievable. From principle all the way to the top. So we just had last summer, I think like seven of our... we have a huge administration... but seven of our upper administration, like seven assistant superintendents and three other directors left.

Likewise, Participant 7 has seen consistent turnover among administrators over the course of his tenure as a school psychologist in an urban district. He stated,

And administration is changing. So often, I think we've had like three superintendents. No. I've had four, and it's not fun. I've been here for eight years. So you're not getting anything done, right. But we talk a lot about teacher turnover, I feel like in urban education, but the administrative turnover is right there with it. If you look in the research just about how rapidly supervisors and admins turnover, especially in urban districts. And then everybody comes in with a new set of ideals and agendas and goals and like everything you do has to get placed aside.

Here, Participant 7 alluded to the changes in district initiatives that come with such frequent turnover, which can be disruptive to building staff. More so, he expressed that it often feels as though nothing is getting done when goals and agendas are changing so frequently.

Not only did participants identify high rates of teacher and administrator turnover, but they also identified turnover in related service providers, including psychologists and social workers. Participant 1 recalled,

And I noticed, particularly like last school year, one of my schools had a high teacher turnover rate. And I was like, amazed at some teachers who had been at that school for years, and are very seasoned teachers, I mean, some of the best teachers I've ever worked with. And I'm like, 'No, you can't leave.' And even in like staff. So for me, with like, our

clinical team, I've been there for four years now. So every year I've had a new school counselor, a new social worker, a new outside mental health provider. So it's like trying to build up a, you know, a good team every year is definitely, it's challenging.

From her perspective, it has been difficult to build a strong clinical team when service providers are turning over each year. Similarly, Participant 2 noticed consistent turnover in school psychologists, particularly in early career. For that reason, she has found it difficult to make connections and build relationships as a team. She shared,

Yeah, and I'll say that even as a veteran educator in my district, I even wait to establish good connections with the early year school psychologists. I wait to see if they're still around after a couple of years because a lot of people use our district as a stepping stone because there's so many positions. And we have, we have psychologists, I can't even tell you. We've gotten things better situated now with our, like collective bargaining agreement in place, but we had some pay scale issues. So every year it was: 'Welcome our 10 new staff members!' And then they're gone. Next year, 'Welcome our 10 new staff members!' So I stopped caring. I stopped, like, I'll welcome you in your third year.

These reflections among participants indicated that frequent staff turnover, be it from related service providers, teachers, or administrators, can jeopardize relationships, school climate, and even district-wide initiatives. Therefore, turnover appeared to be a stressor commonly found among urban school districts that can have a considerable strain on school psychologists.

Lack of sustainability in systems change. Relatedly, participants in this study recalled consistent challenges related to developing and maintaining systems-level change. Despite efforts to implement new processes and programs, participants expressed frustration with the frequent changes seen in school buildings, and in the district at large. Responses from 60 percent of participants indicated that this is a significant stressor commonly found in urban school districts. Participants credited this lack of sustainability not only to turnover in leadership, but also the expansive size of the system itself. For instance, Participant 10 reflected, "I think that with urban settings, you typically have larger settings. With larger settings with higher needs of

students, you typically have fewer systems, ironically. And lack of systems is frustrating.”

Participant 7 expressed a similar frustration with the frequent changes he sees in district-wide initiatives, which can have a considerable impact on staff and educators. He explained,

There's a lot of big initiatives with the MTSS and the multi-tiered systems of support and RTI. At the same time, I think we need to shore up our kind of focus on special education, and our understanding and decision making in that process, because it's like, some of the times I see decisions that are made completely arrived... Again, because of the multiple factors within such a large system and not just being isolated into one kind of school, you have multiple people do multiple things. And it's much harder to kind of make sure everybody's doing things uniformly. And it feels like we're not focusing on one initiative before starting on another initiative. And not that either are bad initiatives are both a good right but you can never fully invest yourself into one or the other to make it actually be effective. And, and it gets done, but to what extent and then how long until someone says, 'Well, that's not even a fully thought out sentence, like get it out of here.' And like a new wave comes in, right?

Participant 8 also identified this stressor when she stated, “Every time someone new comes, they want to bring a new program, they want to change the curriculum, they're gonna emphasize something over something else. And all of a sudden, the priority is math and it was reading, and then we're going to do this program and that program.” Participant 10 noticed the cyclical relationship between turnover and lack of sustainability in systems. Frequent staff turnover can result in frequent changes to school initiatives. It can also lead to stress and frustration among staff, which in turn, creates more turnover. Participant 10 stated,

But it's that, it's that feeling of ineffectiveness that's the greatest challenge due to all those things I mentioned like time, stress, needs. Lack of systems. Did I forget to say lack of systems? Let me emphasize the lack of systems. I think it's one of the big reasons that we always lose people because I think if you are a person who's struggling to adapt to that and saying, “Well, why isn't there a tier one?”

Participant 1 has also seen the negative impact of turnover on system-level changes. In her experience, turnover has resulted in difficulty developing traditions and a positive climate for her students. Participant 1 explained,

Each year when a new principal comes, they have a vision that they have for the school. And then we design all these programs and initiatives and things that we're going to do for the year. And then a new person comes in and everything we did last year is it's just gone. And I know my school has been struggling because they're trying to build, like, traditions. It's an all girls school at this time. So to build like these traditions, things will carry over every year. But it's like, we'll do something one year. And then the next year, we're not doing it again. And then I see with the, like with the middle school, because of the high teacher turnover rates, it's like, kind of, building from the ground up every year with them... trying to put systems in place. So it does impact like the systems-level practices of the school, it definitely does.

Here, Participant 1 described her efforts to help students feel more connected to their school community. Yet, the lack of sustainability in their system change efforts serves as a barrier to establishing those connections. Participant 1 emphasized that the lack of systems leads to frustration among educators and service providers and may also negatively impact the educational experiences of students.

Finally, Participant 2 reflected on her own efforts to develop system-level changes in her school building. She described attending a trauma-informed care workshop with her administrator and another school clinician. While she was eager to implement the approaches she learned at the systems-level, creating those changes was more difficult than she anticipated. She stated, "But there's a frustration to it because we all go to this training. We're in Chicago for five days. It's great. We come home and then like two months later, it's like we, ourselves, kept going back to our old ways. It's hard to sustain change in this environment."

Economic injustice. In addition to identifying the stressors they face on the job, participants also identified significant systemic barriers that continue to marginalize students and families in urban schools. Among the most commonly cited was the impact of economic injustice and lack of resources available to urban learners. In fact, all participants reflected in some way on the influence of economic injustice and growing inequities seen in urban education.

To start, Participant 10 reflected on the rates of unemployment for urban residents whose families attend school in her district. She expressed,

There are very few jobs. So how do you make enough money to get out of this situation? In addition to that there is not a great public transit system in [city]. And you're talking about how are you supposed to get from here out to where the jobs are in order to change your situation? So there's some structural city... infrastructure issues in our city, which I'm not proud of, but I do love our city. But I'm not proud of that. So the challenges our families face are really just how am I going to get a job? How am I going to get to a job? How am I going to access the things that I need?

Not only did she identify a lack of employment opportunities in the city itself, but also called attention to the structural barriers families face in securing transportation to neighborhoods where jobs are more readily available.

Another structural inequity that emerged within this theme was the disparate environmental conditions at home and in schools in urban communities. Both Participant 3 and 6 discussed the presence of lead poisoning as a significant environmental toxin related to economic injustice found in their students' homes. For example, Participant 6 described,

I would say lead is the biggest because so much comes down from that. And we are just as bad if not worse than Flint, Michigan. So lead poisoning. I mean, the ADHD, the cognitive decline, the cycles of kids that were lead poisoned. I would say poverty is a stressor. It goes right along with lead, hand in hand. You can't rule out one to pinpoint the other.

Participant 1 attended elementary school as a student the same district she currently works in. It was not until she transferred to a nearby suburban district that she noticed the economic disparities between the two settings. She shared,

So my main thing, thinking about urban school districts, was a lack of resources. I started off school in [city district], and then transferred to the neighboring district, which is suburban, a little bit rural, depending on where you are, but just growing up of what I knew of [urban district], and then as I started getting older, I was just like, 'Well, why don't [urban district] or other urban districts not have the resources of other suburban or private schools?'

Additionally, Participant 1 identified structural inequities in school buildings themselves and further described the lack of basic resources available to urban learners, which she believes can have a significant impact on their educational outcomes. She stated,

I'm realizing that sometimes this system, the school system, is not necessarily meant to help kids be successful with basic things. So like schools, having basic resources, having our basic needs, like school supplies, paper towels, toilet paper, proper ventilation. I mean, just things that you wouldn't necessarily think about when I used to think about working in an urban school district.

Participant 1 went on to describe further,

Like I knew [district], I know that crime exists in certain neighborhoods, and poverty and all those things, but actually being in the front lines and seeing how it impacts students. It really took on a different lens, because it's like, 'How can we expect students to learn when their basic needs aren't met?' Like they come to... they may have come to school with no purpose today. Like, how can you expect the child to focus in class if they don't even have, you know, their basic needs being met? Kind of like that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. So that's kind of what I started to see. And I'm seeing it more now with just some of the issues of equity that have always been there, but are now, with the pandemic, there has been more spotlight on it.

In this statement, she shared that the emergence of the global Covid-19 pandemic further illustrated the economic injustice that exists for many urban learners and their families.

Participant 2 described a similar realization when her district moved to virtual instruction in response to the pandemic. She reflected,

I think especially... and one of the things that my class and I have been talking about, especially in the past few weeks is equity. Social justice issues for our students. And just looking at public education overall. I live in a suburb and my kids have Chromebooks, my personal kids. And when this pandemic happened, my kids were able to pivot seamlessly into online learning, where my kids in [district] don't even have internet access half the time and don't have devices. And so that I think that's widened the gap for a lot of our students.

Participant 2 then continued to reflect on the importance of providing students and families with their basic needs. She explained,

We have to deal with our kids' basic needs first. Half our kids don't have the internet. So we were dealing with getting them laptops and hotspots and food. We had like a, you know, we had ways for them to take a bus to their school and we had 22 food sites. Um, we made contact with all of them. And, you know, we're like, do you have any needs at this time? You know, for some of them the lunches aren't enough and we need more or we can't print out this packet that you sent home or we can't have all five kids on the internet at the same time. I think that just coming away from this, I'm feeling particularly heartbroken about it.

Participant 4 emphasized the impact of economic injustice in urban schools and shared that his experience practicing as a school psychologist in a large urban district has helped him to think more critically about inequity in education. When asked to elaborate more about his perspective, Participant 4 explained, "I think it has helped me really think about how we structure schools and the disparity between different districts and different schools within a district. I think it has definitely made me a much more cognizant participant in school psychology."

Racism. Another critical issue participants identified over the course of the interviews was the presence of racism, which exists, not only on an individual or interpersonal level, but also structurally and within urban school systems. For example, Participant 8 stated,

There's a lot of racism out in [city]. It's palpable here. Like all of that played a role in how the administration of that district I thought treated their kids. I think it is important for kids to see professionals that look like them because there was definitely racism towards kids. I mean, truly the data that you read about minority populations with regard to suspensions, it's real.

Participant 8 then went on to state,

At [district], I think that there is a lot of focus and a lot of training for staff on trauma, on racism, on culturally responsive teaching. Today, there's constantly something where that is worked in. And I've been able to get included in a lot of the trainings for teachers on that, but you know, really looking at bias and really trying to meet kids where they're at and understand and build those relationships. I think that there's definitely, there's so much poverty and racism. There's just so much of it in [district] that you can't deny it, you have to address it.

In this statement, Participant 8 discussed the importance of addressing racism through training and teaching, which she has seen her district begin to implement. She also identified the presence of systemic racism within the district at large and gave the specific example of disproportionate suspension rates among students of color.

Additionally, Participant 10 described hearing racist remarks and attitudes expressed among staff in her school building. And yet, she has observed that many staff perceive themselves to uphold culturally responsive and anti-racist practices. For this reason, she identified the need to continue to address racism in her school setting. She stated,

And it's interesting when we have these conversations about culturally responsive practices, and I can speak directly about my school which I don't think you... I don't want to "out" anybody's like I'm trying to be anonymous, but like at my school, every person believes that they're culturally responsive or anti-racist. Oh, boy, oh boy. The things you hear. If I recorded and played that for staff at a staff meeting, every one of you would deny having been the one to say that, but I heard it with my own ears. You know, I mean, we still have a lot of work to do. We have a lot of work to do.

Participant 1 made a similar observation regarding her fellow school psychologists. She described the need for more training and conversation around anti-racism in her urban school district but has noticed pushback from other psychologists in the past. She expressed,

We want it to be like a safe space where people can learn information. But sometimes we don't have the same definitions of what, you know, equality looks like, what social justice looks like. Um, but also, like, give me examples of how we can apply those at our schools is definitely needed. Like I know, last year, we did have a school psychologist from DC, she came and did like implicit bias, and microaggressions presentation that actually went really well. I mean, she really dive deep into some uncomfortable conversations that it's funny, because prior to her presenting, you get here, people in our auditorium like, 'Oh, why do we need this training? Like, I could have stayed home today? I don't want to talk about implicit bias. What is microaggression?' I mean, you can hear these are psychologists. And so... and but then the funny thing is, once the presentation ended, you know, people were like, 'Wow, this was really good. I learned a lot. I had no idea what that was, or I didn't know that I was doing this. And now this is how I want to improve.' So for that presentation was a successful one, but we need more of them. Like there needs to be more conversation of those uncomfortable conversations.

In the end, Participant 1 noticed that the training her district held for psychologists was impactful and necessary, despite many of her colleagues showing a reluctance to participate. From her perspective, psychologists would continue to benefit from opportunities to discuss and address racial injustice in urban education. Participant 7 also identified systemic racism within his district. As a bilingual school psychologist, he has observed a lack of understanding about racial and linguistic diversity from district leadership. He shared the following example,

And one of the supervisors sends out a list of all the bilingual staff and who to refer to, what language to write, as Chinese. That's not a language. It's... there's three of us... it's a Mandarin speaker, myself, and then another girl and the other girl is my intern and she does speak Cantonese as well. And she looks at all the languages and separates all the individuals into their respective groups and subdivides Haitian Creole from French and like, you know, Cape Verdean from Portuguese. So she makes a lot of delineation, but then there's just Chinese as our three names listed here. And I had to write back and be like, 'We are not all the same. Like, these are three different languages.' And like, I'm very happy that many of my colleagues were like, 'I'm sorry, you had to say that. Thank you for clarifying.' But no word from my supervisor. So there's a lot of systemic racism within the system itself. That has driven me bonkers.

Trauma. Participants identified trauma as a significant source of stress within their school communities. Not only did participants describe the impact of trauma on urban learners and their families, but also observed the presence of secondary trauma among educators and clinicians. Therefore, the next theme identified within this domain will focus on participants' observations of trauma in urban schools.

To start, Participant 8 discussed the importance of understanding the influence of trauma on learning and behavior. She has also observed in practice that teachers may be unaware of the way in which adverse childhood experiences affect their students. She stated, "I also think you need to know a lot about trauma. You need to understand resiliency, protective factors, how trauma affects the brain, how trauma affects behavior, all of that. I don't necessarily think the teachers understand trauma and just how much kids hold inside." Participant 1 also found that

educators may not always be aware of adverse experiences their students have been exposed to, and as a result, there can sometimes be misconceptions regarding students' difficulty regulating emotions and behaviors in the classroom. She described,

And then I think the other one would be just like the behavioral slash emotional difficulties and challenges. Sometimes it comes out as like kids acting out and they get like, sent out of the classroom or, you know, they have disciplinary consequences. But what I find is, it's often there's underlying things. It's not like they're just acting out, because they just decided to that morning, like, there's, there's been like an accumulation of really negative interactions, or adults not understanding them, and just them not getting that support or attention that they need.

Participant 2 recalled the way her approach to supporting students has evolved overtime to become more trauma informed. She also described placing greater emphasis on advocating for the mental health needs of students using a trauma-informed lens.

And I would say now, probably for like the past five years, my role has been transformed again into being more aware of the mental health needs. I mean, there's always been droplets of it there. But it was always you know, now I'm more aligned with our mental health workers and we, we talk about trauma and resilience and restorative justice and all those things. So now I've kind of gotten more into the advocacy for my population rather than... So it kind of went from re-evaluate and behavior management, to like bringing in the academic piece and the intervention piece, to now like it's just become a little bit more about trauma and just recognizing that and recognizing how that's impacting my kids at my schools.

Participant 3 reflected on the difference between knowledge and practice when it comes to supporting students and families exposed to adverse or traumatic events. She also identified the importance of trauma-informed approaches and addressing the impact of vicarious trauma as a clinician. She explained,

We have so many students that have parents that are incarcerated, that have parents that have been murdered. And a lot of the remaining parents and grandparents that are raising the students are traumatized and they don't even know that they're traumatized. They don't even consider that as trauma. They just think that's just part of how life is. And I think that's, that's a big stressor. I think in a large urban district, there's lots more layers than in a small district. I think the emphasis on trauma-informed care has really brought a lot to the urban setting.

Because, you know, it's one thing in graduate school to hear about violence and stuff that these students deal with. It's another thing to sit down with a parent of a four-year-old, whose boyfriend killed her father and tell her what to say to that four-year-old. And that's something that I've done, you know, so, it changes who you are, and you need to be able to care for yourself and have a really strong knit group of psychs to help you care for the rest of you.

Participant 10 had a similar perspective regarding her students' own beliefs about adverse childhood events and the impact of trauma on learning and behavior. She reflected,

It really is the number... the amount of trauma that our kids have. The number of things that our kids see that's their norm... that they don't even know is trauma. That you... if you would say to them using our terminology, 'ACEs.' They're like 'I'm not... What are you talking about?' Because it's the norm that's there. 'No, that's called life.'

Here, Participant 10 emphasized the pervasive nature of trauma experienced by students in her urban school setting, such that it has become difficult to differentiate what is considered the “norm.”

Critical Professional Competencies in Practice

Responses from study participants shed light on the most critical knowledge and skill sets urban school psychologists may be expected to utilize. These findings emerged as participants described their day-to-day roles and responsibilities, where they spend the most time during the workday, and which practice areas require the most attention and focus in an urban school setting. Several themes emerged within this domain, which included: a) adherence to special education procedures and deadlines; b) application of clinical skills; c) culturally responsive and socially just practices; d) relationship building; and e) continuing education and professional development. Thus, the themes identified within this domain reflect essential competencies urban school psychologists ought to be prepared and ready to engage in on the job.

Adherence to special education procedures and deadlines. All study participants identified compliance with special education procedures and practices as a primary practice area. These responsibilities included testing and assessment, case management, paperwork, and participating in IEP meetings, among others. Participant 6 stated, “I do a lot of testing. Testing is always our first priority and keeping in compliance with three-year re-evaluations.” She went on to express, “if you get behind on your testing in an urban environment, it's so hard to catch up.” Several participants described that they could be expected to complete up to 100 special education evaluations in a school year. Participant 7 stated, “I think the first year started there was about like 100 assessments. Maybe like 70 came from the elementary school.” Participant 1 also reflected on assessment and special education evaluations being her primary responsibility in her urban school setting. She shared:

So I would say assessments, because that is kind of like I know, they're trying to push us away from being like, you know, ‘the testers’ where that's what we do. But I think assessment is something that we have to be knowledgeable in, depending on your school district sites you do the cognitive and educational goals. I just feel like school psychologists, that's what we're trained in. We know best practices that we are expected to be doing in those assessments. Not anyone else. No offense to the teachers. But that's just my opinion about it.

In this statement, Participant 1 identified this as a critical competency, not only because it is the practice area where she spends most of her time and focus but also because she believes school psychologists are the most qualified to do this work in schools given their training.

Participant 3 described the stress she experiences in maintaining compliance with her special education caseload when time could be spent in direct service with students or when there is a situation that requires an immediate crisis response:

We write voluminous reports and are the case managers, which means we're in charge of everybody's paper. And I think we spend a lot of time doing that, where our time could be better spent working with kids. Um, I think one of the biggest stresses is

having so many of those deadlines looming over us and yet being responsible, if we have, if there's a crisis situation where you've got five reports and you've got a student threatening suicide and that's highly stressful just in and of itself.

Many of the participants described that in their roles, special education procedures are often the first priority, and any other form of service delivery is secondary. Participant 2 also reflected on the challenge she faces balancing deadlines with the needs of her students and families. She stated,

And that's what gets really frustrating about working in an urban setting is there are so many challenges to us meeting deadlines, getting things right, you know, and so, you feel like I'm trying to meet a date rather than focusing on this child. And that's, that's where that's a challenge for me because I want to be able to help but I want to be realistic and I don't want to be... I want to be helpful, but I want to be realistic and I never want somebody to walk away thinking I didn't believe in them or, or that I was too busy to help them which is how I have felt at times.

Participant 3 explained further, “if you start doing that student yoga, that really feels good and works nicely, and you don't have your evaluations done, you're gonna get in the weeds and, and just it's not going to work well.” Likewise, Participant 6 remarked, “You’ve got to get your testing done if you want to do the fun stuff.”

Application of clinical skills. In addition to special education practices and procedures, 80 percent of participants identified the importance of engaging in intervention to support the mental and behavioral health of their students. For many participants, this could be seen as time spent providing individual or group counseling as well as crisis intervention and behavioral intervention. Participant 4 supports the mental and behavioral health of his students in a large urban school district through consultation with teachers, providing group counseling, and leading a behavioral health team. He explained,

Yeah, so I actually am the facilitator of our school's behavioral health team. So I, that's, I think, my secondary role in terms of not testing. So that's, that's the biggest thing, it's... And I think that's only afforded to me, because I am in that building full time. So I do

have the ability to run that and help people through it, and then do small groups and analyze the data with the assistant principal who's in charge of it. So I do a lot of consultation with teachers, um, because of that. And so it's more "What can I do in my classroom to help this student?" And then also running small groups for trauma, anger management, and social skills groups for kids with autism.

Here, Participant 4 identified the ways he can support students beyond just individual counseling minutes. Participant 5 has also found opportunities in her role to support her students mental and behavioral health through class-wide supports. She shared,

And I think that's something that's commonly said is just classroom management, or just like knowing how to manage different behaviors. And I think that behavior is an issue in any school district. But sometimes it can be a little bit more evident in urban districts. So teachers definitely struggle and seek support with that.

Some participants described their concerns related to providing counseling services despite the students' growing need for mental health support. For these participants, they have felt under trained to provide counseling services. Participant 6 shared her concern that too many school psychologists in her urban district are avoiding providing counseling services. She described,

You know, people were worried about doing it wrong. "I'm not well trained enough on that." Well, that's enough. And I wasn't well trained enough in my program either. But you see, you know, go to somebody else's school, watch them do it, you realize that it's, it's something you're doing all the time anyways. You just kind of formalize it and take some assessment data, see pre and post, how can you get better, that kind of thing. It's not hurting the kids to build a relationship with an adult and that at a minimum, that's what you're getting out of counseling. At a maximum, they're actually getting some counseling benefits.

Participant 9 echoed this concern. She described wanting to ensure that school psychologists in urban districts are properly trained to apply their clinical skills to support the mental health needs of students,

We have them, but they need to... we probably need to develop them more and have, you know, more training in that area. And I think, given what's going on now, it's definitely going to become more important, you know, to develop those because, you

know, besides the evaluations, we can help with the mental health, you know, it doesn't have to just be up to the school social workers and the school counselors, we should be able to be in there assisting.

Thus, while participants identified these skills are critical to their practice, they also identified limitations to their implementation in urban settings.

Culturally responsive and socially just practices. All those who participated in this study identified culturally responsive and socially just practices as important competencies in their work as urban school psychologists. For some, this could be seen as a particular focus on culturally responsive assessment practices. For others it was in one's own self-reflections, school-based consultation, and advocacy efforts. Participant 3 described learning that some assessment practices may not be appropriate and lead to disparate outcomes for her students. She shared,

I can remember my first year as a school psychologist... and we were doing some adaptive behavior measures with some students and I'm in there and you know, new little psych and I had an older African American principal. And I'm thinking, you know, now we gotta get this information and we'll go from there. And she's looking at some items, and she goes, "You know, in this community, our kids, they're not expected to do this behavior, culturally, it is not relevant for our kids." And I'm going, "Wow, I wouldn't have thought of that." So, she was amazing. She did it in a very open, non-criticizing way. But I think for psychs to be able to open their eyes to being open to hearing from other folks and I think how I've seen graduate programs do that is by starting that dialogue early, while you still have students in the program.

In this example, her administrator helped her to understand why this practice might be harmful for the students in their school building, which shaped her practice going forward.

Participant 6 also described the way in which certain tests and test batteries serve to further marginalize students in urban schools. She explained,

I still give a good WISC here and there, but I try and be purposeful about who I'm giving a WISC to. But you have these people who are trained on the WISC, love the WISC, and will only give the WISC. You know, it's language loaded. What is it going to display? It

might get it kid put in, like an intellectual disability classroom. So, I think that there's still a lot of work to be done there.

Similarly, Participant 9 recalled the importance of moving away from a “core battery” of tests and measures to provide a more culturally responsive approach to assessment for each individual child. She stated,

I've also been able to hone in on, I think my assessment skills. I think that I learned from at least my training, and then I've carried it over how to be very cognizant of the instruments that I am selecting based on the background of the student that's sitting in front of me. I don't just have a core battery, you know, if I'm working with a child from a background that has multiple languages, or, you know, I've taken into consideration if there's economic marginalization, or if there's been a recent trauma. I mean, I, you know, I really try to practice in a way that's a best practice approach, just not, ‘Okay, let me get this case done. In and out.’ Because we do have a large caseload, and it's easy to get into that mentality.

In addition to assessment practices, several participants identified self-reflection, consultation, and advocacy as important skills on the job. Participant 8 shared,

It is really hard to admit some of the things you think about others, and maybe how those thoughts influence how you treat kids on a daily basis. And I think a lot of people sit there during some of these professional developments that we do and they think they're knocking it out of the park. You know, they think that they're really being kind to kids and really making the effort and that these kids love them and you sit in their classroom observing, you're like, ‘Oh my god, not at all.’ And that is a huge challenge. It's a huge challenge. And, you know, I think people in general have to really explore their implicit bias. And until you sort of understand how you stereotype and make some of the judgments you make about people... until you uncover those, then I don't know that you can honestly deal with the people that you're that you're serving, or working with. So I think just honesty and self-awareness is super important.

For many participants, it was important not only to be knowledgeable about attitudes and practices within schools that further marginalize students, but to be leaders in addressing these issues. Participant 10 expressed,

I think it's the role of the psychologist as well as the social worker to lead these conversations and lead by action and by example. And I really think it's important for someone to have a voice, and it often is the role of the psychologist and or the social worker to say, ‘This is not okay.’

I've grown so much more like even within the last, I'm gonna say five years, it's become such a focus and such a mission and a good way to really have these comments about equity and have this conversation about gaps in achievement. And let's put it out there. And let's talk about the gap, you know, between children of color and children not of color, and, and being comfortable with discomfort all the time and all of those all of those conversations, and really being a leader in my department of some of these conversations in a very hard way, where I find myself, you know, working through some sweats, right, because, you know, you have to learn to be uncomfortable.

Participant 9 also felt strongly about leading as an advocate for culturally responsive and socially just practices in schools. She described this as a critical part of her role as a school psychologist.

She stated,

So I think one of the roles is probably just being an advocate for social justice, you know, things such as, in my role, I've been able to... we have some disproportionality when it comes to gifted children who are Black in our district. Like many districts, if the states identify gifted children, because all states don't, but we do in Florida, and my school over the last five years, it took us that long, but we were able to increase the number of our Black students in the gifted program like two-fold. And last year, for the first time we had a full time first grade through fifth grade classroom setting. That took a lot of testing and a lot of work. But it was done because I want people to see, 'Oh, they're not... they don't exist.' Yes, they do exist. I'm just being an advocate, you know, watching. We also have over identification of Black students classified in the EBD, or emotional behavior disabilities program, as well as the intellectual disability program, which is consistent with what's happening in the country. So, um, you know, just being an advocate, they're bringing those metrics to the attention of the administration, helping, you know, like, I sit on some committee because we're looking at trying to mitigate these issues that we just continue to see. They've been there my whole career, so they're not anything new.

Not only has Participant 9 more closely examined where disproportionately may be occurring in her district, but she also advocates for systemic changes and action steps to address such disparate educational outcomes, particularly for Black students who are underrepresented in gifted programs and overrepresented in emotional or intellectual disability programs.

Relationship building. Another skill that urban school psychologists in this study identified as critical to their work was building trusting relationships with students, families, and

other staff. For example, Participant 2 has found relationship building to be especially important in supporting families in her urban school setting. She described,

And yeah, the trust I think the trust is is most important because I've even had I've had parents that maybe they haven't had very diverse experiences either and they kind of come in, you know, you can see them kind of look to either their family or the staff that they're familiar with kind of like 'What about her?' And I kind of get the green light, like 'Oh, she's good, she's fine.' And so I think just establishing trust and building good relationships has been key. I overheard a parent. They were talking and one of them said, you know that they were talking amongst themselves and there were no educators in the room and one of the parents was like, "Well, I need help with this or I need help with that." And I heard one of the longtime parents say "all you have to do is contact [name], she'll still take care of it for you." So it was just nice to hear that my name was brought up as a supportive resource.

In this statement, Participant 2 identified trust as a key facilitator to successful practice. By doing so, she has established herself as a valuable resource for families who otherwise may not have considered accessing supports and services.

Additionally, Participant 8 has also found it is critical to build relationships with students in her position in an urban district. She explained,

So you know, taking the time to build relationships with kids is super important. Asking them questions, you know, what do they like? They like to spend their time doing this... and that getting to know them. I think compassion, understanding your own personal bias, realizing that not everyone in the world lives the way you live, and just being tolerant and accepting that. Those are all attributes I think people need or would help them. If you're going to be rigid and inflexible and think everything needs to be done a certain way you will not make it in this setting.

Here, Participant 8 discusses the perspective taking that can take place when engaging in relationship building with students. She cautioned against assuming that students and families have the same worldview and, instead, encouraged becoming more open to the beliefs and perceptions of others. She suggests that focusing on relationship building with students can help open up one's worldview and lead to more successful practice as an urban school psychologist.

Participant 9 utilizes relationship building skills, not just with students and families, but also with teachers and other professional staff. She described,

I mean, I think I, you know, I think as far as relationships are concerned, I'm strong and building those with teachers. One thing I remember my professors saying at [program], 'You know what, you can't be stuck in the office, you need to get out, you need to know the teachers, you need to know the cafeteria workers, you need to know the custodians, you need to know these people.' And so I do. I make a point to build relationships with every school I go into, you know, the secretarial staff, the register. I mean, because I do have huge respect for all of them.

Participant 5 identified relationship building as the foundation to her success in other practices areas, such as counseling and assessment. Without this particular skill, Participant 5 believes she wouldn't be able to serve students as effectively. She shared,

Yes, I think it is key because... in my group chat we talk about, like how sometimes they find it difficult to make those relationships with students just for various reasons. But it's like you can't be you can't actually do counseling, until you have that relationship with a student, or even before testing, you know, doing something else before testing with playing a little activity get to know you activity, once kids see that you are listening to them, you want to know more about them. It's like bam, like, 'Oh, this person wants to know about who I am.' And that connection just, just works.

Participant 1 also alluded to the importance of building a connection in counseling. Despite initially feeling underprepared to provide counseling service, her focus on rapport building with students and their families has helped them build trust and make progress on social-emotional goals over time. She stated,

But with having counseling, like you can build a relationship with students, you see them once a week, every other week, sometimes they come more than need it. And then by building that rapport, you're also building that rapport with the family, the parents and families. So that has also been something that's been very successful, I guess, for me, as a school psychologist is building those connections with the students.

Participant 10 summarized the importance of relationship building as a critical skill for urban school psychologists when she said, "If you can make a relationship with somebody, you can do

anything. You know, the rest of the stuff you can learn. But if you can develop a relationship with somebody, you can do anything.”

Continuing education and professional development. The last critical skill identified by all participants in the study was the ability to identify and access research and professional development. Several participants expressed the importance of continuing one’s education to stay informed about changes in the field. For example, Participant 5 described the importance of using self-assessment tools from the NASP website to identify areas for further professional development,

The self-assessments I feel like are pretty good. When I use that, about, you know, doing some self-reflection about where you're weak and where you're strong. I think more interactive tools like that... about, well here, like let me make a program for you. Here's your self-assessment. Here's our NASP Domains. Here's how you answer these questions. And then you can if they give you more of a tailored like, ‘Hey, you might want to read these research articles.’

In this statement, Participant 5 identified the importance of understanding where she may be able to supplement her skills even with several years of experience on the job. The self- assessments have helped her identify her own limitations and explore relevant literature to help her develop in those areas.

Similarly, Participant 9 sees the need for a developmental approach to continuing education for school psychologists and has advocated for this approach in her urban district. She, too, identified the importance of first understanding one’s professional limitations and then pursuing the appropriate training. She explained,

But developmentally speaking, we kind of have to develop a program, develop a way to better understand the needs of psychs and where they are with the research, you know. And I've built a program for that. But what should a mid-career person have? What do they need? You know, that means that we might have to go to the literature and see what about a late-career that we have. So that's, that's like a hole or weakness, but I think it's

got to be developmental. So, you know, every year, we have to do a professional development plan or something. And people should be able to identify their weaknesses.

Participant 3 also shared her belief that it is important for school psychologists in her setting to continue learning about advancements in the field. She explained,

And your knowledge level can stop where you finished school and you know, that may serve you okay for the first five years, but stuff changes. And after that the psych is no longer as relevant as they could have been. And I know folks on either side. So I think with the university helping to connect folks to that continual lifelong learning professional organizations, I think is really important.

Not only did participants identify continuing education as a critical competency in their practice, but they also shed light on the sources most valuable in addressing their on-going training needs. Therefore, findings from the theme of continuing education and professional development also illuminated important considerations relevant to the second research question, which sought to explore urban school psychologists' approaches to accessing professional development opportunities in their current practice.

Participants 1, 3, and 9 all described accessing professional development opportunities through the National Association of School Psychologists and American Psychological Association organizations. For example, Participant 3 explained,

I think making sure that people are hooked up with their professional organizations can help them specialize in areas that they're interested in, after they get out. And as they're changing. And I think with all the online stuff that's available, you know, and especially with all the stuff that's available with NASP and their online communities, I mean you can have tons of whatever you want. It is there for the taking.

In this statement, she described finding a breadth of resources available from NASP, including online communities to match one's professional interests. Participant 1 shared a similar perspective,

So I know NASP has like the social justice committee. And I just discovered these

documents, actually, not too long ago, and I was looking for something else. But they have like a social justice series, that I think is really good, too, I think for like the NASP website, in general, just have really good resources on social justice, or equity or anything related to racism. But um, I mean, that's kind of the only thing I've actually used right now, as a resource.

Participant 9 identified the value in joining NASP but has found APA to be a helpful source for continuing education and professional development as the field changes. Specifically, she gave the example of moving toward a virtual service delivery format in school psychology. She explained,

So, yeah, definitely look at NASP, for sure. Because I serve on a social justice committee, so I better look at NASP. And then I also look at APA because what I've learned, which I wish I would have learned long ago, I've been a NASP member forever, ever since probably grad school or consistently since you know, my first year of independent practice. But I have not been a member of APA. But because of the pandemic, we had to switch over to virtual testing, our district decided that's what they wanted to do. And I had to conduct a great deal of research for my district to get us up and running so we can get the proper trainings. They have phenomenal resources, APA. And I know they're a bigger institution, much larger than NASP, as far as memberships go, which means they have a lot more financial resources.

However, 60 percent of participants stated that they do not typically access resources and professional development training from national organizations like NASP and APA. For instance, when asked about whether she finds material from these sources, Participant 8 stated, “Not typically, not typically, like if I it would be more so like if I want to, if I'm researching something, and I can't think of an example. But let's say I'm like googling some issue that I don't know too much about. If it takes if I find a link to APA or NASP or whatever, I'll go there. But it's not necessarily like, ‘Oh, let me try their first.’” Participant 6 also explained why she does not rely on NASP resources,

Um, so I was NCSP, I just let it lapse. I renewed it twice. I don't find it life changing in any way. And because I'm in such a large district, if something comes out from NASP, I have enough people telling me about it. You know, ‘Hey, this came out from NASP.’ I mean, their position statements are always available and always published. So like that

kind of stuff. I like NASP, the conference, but I don't feel like it's overly helpful. But pretty much everything I've done on my own has been better than what I found at NASP so I stopped renewing my membership like two years ago. Which is... I love NASP. I support them, but I don't want to pay them that much money for not being very helpful to me.

She expressed that she finds the membership fees to be too costly, and therefore, made the decision not to renew.

Participant 10 also stated that she does not go to NASP for needed research and professional development simply because she is more likely to rely on her colleagues in her district. She stated, "I don't go to the NASP, I don't go to NASP. So, I cannot even speak to it. I mean, I know, of course, I've gone to it a few times, but that's not my go-to-place. I feel like in an urban setting with 150 other psychologists, my resources are my colleagues." Likewise, Participant 5 explained that finding information through NASP is a time-consuming process, and for that reason, she does not use their website much in her own practice and instead relies on her co-workers. She stated,

No, not really. I mean, I'm a member of NASP, but it's, I don't know. I guess it's just because it's a good thing to do. It's just like expected. But I know that that's a wealth of resources. I just have never really thought to like, go there and look for things maybe a little bit in my, like, undergrad, or my like graduate program, but not during my actual practice so far. I would, it's just a matter of like sifting through everything. Because there's so much on there. It's like, 'How do I know?' And yeah, it's just time-consuming. And when I like want to find an answer really quickly, it's just like, easier to ask people.

Participant 7 explained that, to him, NASP materials are too broad and that he is often looking for more specific and detailed literature in his current practice,

And I think it was really good for a lot of new folks, because it was just kind of a centralized like, bigger picture of things like much broader kinds of topics that kind of could whittle down a little bit, but never got too nitty gritty or too in the deep on any one topic or subject, which was kind of frustrating. Because at some level, then you're like, I need more than just this. And I need a little bit more tangible and a little bit more resources specific to this situation.

Rather than look to their national organizations, 40 percent of participants reported they were more likely to access professional development from their district, local, and state associations. When asked about resources available to her from NASP, Participant 6 explained, “I just don’t find they’re reflecting my needs.” She went on to describe her approach to professional development,

It might just be because we have strong professional development in the area. I'm in, if I were in a rural setting, or somewhere where I didn't have access to resources, we're in a resource rich environment in [city]. We have a [city] Association of School Psychologists that does quarterly, usually pretty good presentations in person and it's \$25 a year to be a member. We have [state] School Psychologists and we have our own lobbyists at the state level based on that. They do great spring fall conferences, awesome spring conferences, they’re usually pretty good. So like, there's always good stuff out there. We have educational service centers that are local, like in the... in the regional centers across the state, and they have free professional development all the time. It's geared towards teachers as well, but you can always find something for school psychologists as well. So I feel like we do have enough where I don't need to pay all that money. And for something I'm not really using.

Similarly, Participant 10 expressed, “And I do feel like my district is just such an exceptional place, you know, to get so many resources and yeah, just the knowledge base of having all of these people from all over the [region] coming to help us help each other out.” For Participants 4 and 7, district-level and local professional development opportunities were deemed more tangible and applicable to their needs compared to those provided by the national organizations.

For instance, Participant 7 explained,

I need a little bit more tangible and a little bit more resources specific to this situation. And I think it led me like... just through working and networking, I've learned a lot more about the local organizations and I tend to go to those specific areas for those specific resources and those specific things, just because it's a little bit, you know, less of a broad spectrum.

Relatedly, Participant 4 shared, “I think that I use the [district] Knowledge Center a lot more because it is like, it's basically NASP times ten. Um, and then I will also use the State

Association. I'm a little bit more... I think NASP tends to be a little bit too, feels like grad school all over again. So I tend to use other resources that feel a little bit more accessible and tangible.”

Research Question Four

The fourth research question in this study was, “How did school psychologists perceive their sense of self-efficacy for practice in urban settings upon completion of graduate training?” and subsequently, “What knowledge, skills, or experiences may enhance urban school psychologists’ sense of self-efficacy?” The final domain in this study, Factors that Impact Urban School Psychologists’ Perceived Effectiveness, is particularly relevant to the fourth research question. The themes within this domain illustrate important findings regarding urban school psychologists’ sense of self-efficacy.

Such findings illuminate factors that may contribute to feelings of ineffectiveness working in large urban school districts. Findings from this domain also shed light on the skills, knowledge, and experiences that may help urban school psychologists build a stronger sense of belief in their abilities to do the job well. As previously stated, findings related to the Stressors and Inequities found in Urban School Systems also provides helpful context for understanding the challenges urban school psychologists often face in practice.

Factors that Impact Urban School Psychologists’ Perceived Effectiveness

Responses from study participants revealed findings related to urban school psychologists’ sense of self-efficacy in their careers. These findings emerged as participants described the challenges they face on the job, their perceptions of their strengths and areas for growth, and factors within the environment that impacted their perceived effectiveness on the job. Several themes emerged within this domain, including a) self-confidence entering early career; b) perceived stigma and negative attitudes; c) lack of alignment with district

administration; d) stress and burnout; e) humility; f) sharing of ideas/collaboration; g) setting professional boundaries; and h) access to a network or mentorship. Together, the themes identified within this domain reflect important considerations about the needs of urban school psychologists that may enhance their beliefs about their ability to be successful in their roles.

Self-confidence entering early-career. To understand more about their sense of self-efficacy over time, participants reflected on the degree to which they felt confident about their abilities upon first beginning professional practice in urban schools. As previously noted, while preparedness describes the individual's belief that they have acquired skills and knowledge, self-efficacy refers to the individual's belief that they are capable of successfully executing these skills. Many participants described a lack of confidence and feelings of self-doubt during the first few years of their careers in urban schools. For example, Participant 10 simply stated, "When I reflect back on my confidence, um, well, I didn't have any." She went on to express,

I believe that, sort of speaking to my confidence, that I didn't have any. I was very... I was lacking. I didn't know what to say. Oh, remember the sweats that I initially talked about? When I was uncomfortable? Oh, all day every day. Oh my god, I'm sweating again. Oh, gosh, I'm so nervous. Oh, here comes another parent.

Participant 6 also described a similar mindset during early-career when she stated, "So, I was not confident when I started." She later described that, what helped her to feel more confident in her skills and abilities over time, was exploring relevant research and literature in practice areas where she felt less capable. She explained,

It definitely is something that is like, the more you practice, the better you get. But I think that what didn't happen with me in internship, although I had a very lovely, lovely, wonderful supervisor who taught me a lot, was linking it to the research. So I think what's made me confident over the years is I take these little areas where I'm super interested one at a time. So, the literature, I read an article here, I read an article there.

Participant 1 also struggled to build confidence in her skills and abilities early on. From her perspective, other staff viewed her as young and incapable, which in turn, led to greater self-doubt. She recalled,

So like, skill wise, I'm like, 'Oh, I practiced this in grad school. I got it.' But once it came to actually, like, apply it in real life was a little bit harder. I think the part where I kind of struggle with doing those early... I'm still early-career, but I'm speaking more so like my first and second year is getting teachers and administrators to respect your expertise. And I felt like as a young school psychologist, people had their own perceived notions of like, 'Oh, she's young, she doesn't know she actually had a principal, tell someone a staff member.' Or, 'Oh, she's young. She doesn't know what she's doing. So I don't trust her.' So that actually happened. Um, yeah, really bad situation. So for me that honestly killed my confidence.

Half of all participants described experiencing imposter syndrome at the start of their careers in urban schools. For these participants, they recalled a feeling of inadequacy despite having completed several years of training in the field. For example, Participant 7 shared, "I feel like I might have felt more confident at the beginning. Which is ironic. Because, you know, you got that, like, 'I just graduated, I'm ready to do this' level energy. Like, let's take off. Knowing these kids for a couple years I was like this couldn't be any harder, right?" In his experience, he grew less confident within his first few years of independent practice because he became exposed to more challenges and problems he had not encountered in training. He described further,

I started thinking, "I don't know anything, right?" Every day, I'm running into a new problem or situation. And I found myself still like, you know, it wasn't necessarily a new problem, but it was a new aspect of the problem I didn't fully think about the first time right? So every time you're given a problem, there's another layer that gets revealed underneath it that like, "Oh, maybe I could have gone deeper last time." Like there's a little bit more every day into it. And so I think I lost more confidence in things.

When asked about his level of confidence at the start of his career in an urban district, Participant 4 recalled the struggle he faced to overcome self-doubt. He shared,

You like, think that you don't know anything, when in fact, you actually know a lot. And

so you have to kind of get past that mind hurdle, which I think takes people probably different lengths of time and different experiences. But that initial outset was those first couple years was a real struggle of like, 'Am I doing this right? Am I gonna mess something up?' Um, so yeah, I mean, there's a lot of self-doubt and a lot of questioning what you're doing.

Even though Participant 5 anticipated she would experience imposter syndrome she, too, has struggled to overcome feelings of self-doubt and questioned her skills and abilities. She expressed,

Definitely a good amount of imposter syndrome. Which, you know, they, they told us that we would experience that, but some things, you just kind of have to get to that point to actually even know what it's like. So, even though I had so much good training, and had like, two years of experience in this district that I was going into to work full time, there was still so much that I felt like I didn't know. And, yeah, there's just always that sense of like, "I should know this?" You know?

Overall, there were no participants in this study who expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy at the start of their careers in urban schools. Instead, most recalled difficulty building confidence at the start, and a few participants even characterized this experience as imposter syndrome.

Perceived stigma and negative attitudes. Participants' recollections of stigma and negative attitudes about urban schools also emerged as a theme in this domain. Forty percent of participants reflected on the negative perceptions they have heard about urban learners and their families, urban school psychologists, and urban education as a whole. Participants, at times, recalled their own negative views and beliefs about urban education prior to working in their current positions. For example, Participant 3 shared, "Now, there wasn't always a very positive spin on being in an urban setting. I remember a few times, having one professor, who was just one of the professors who was not reflective of the whole program, but was saying, 'Yeah, you know, you're in the urban setting and that's kind of like the doctors practicing on the cadavers.'"

When first looking for a full-time position, Participant 6 felt as though there were more promising opportunities for school psychologists in suburban districts. She described,

I wanted any place but [district] and now I just love my job so much. It's so funny. I wanted to like, you know... I felt like I had been pigeon-holed into urban. I taught in urban. I did all my experiences in urban and I was kind of resentful that I didn't get placed in the suburbs when all these other places people were getting placed in these, you know, 'luck suburbs,' and I was hearing about their RTI processes, and I felt like I was a little bit robbed of those experiences. And so when I went to get a job, I really wanted to get a job in a suburban setting just to see what it was like, to see what the "promised land" was like.

When her peers were offered positions in nearby suburbs, she recalled feeling resentful because she was not getting the same opportunities. Eventually, she did take a position in a suburban district but decided after a few years to return to her current setting where she has been practicing ever since. She went on the share,

You know, there was such like a disrespect for the urban school psychologists. You know, they don't do any, like, 'Wow, you do that, but also, they're not as good as the people in the suburbs.' And now that I've worked in the suburbs, I think that's probably why I wanted to work in the suburbs like, 'Oh, I want to see like all the magical things they're doing.' Yeah, I do more magical things in a day than half these suburban school psychologists. So I think it just comes to like having confidence in ourselves and knowing your worth, and not like putting yourself down because you're an urban school psychologist, you have just as strong of a skill set, if not stronger than anyone else, because of the way you've practiced.

Two participants reflected on their own negative views of urban education and the families they serve prior to working in urban schools. Participant 5 recalled the way urban schools have typically been framed from a deficit perspective. She shared,

I don't know about practicing necessarily, but just urban districts in general. I definitely had my preconceived notions. Just the typical things that you hear that you know, it's underserved, underfunded, that there's just so many students that are underachieving. Just a lot of 'under.' Yeah, it was kind of like that, that general stereotype that I think on some level I also believed in.

And Participant 8 shared, “It was scary. Like, I’ll tell you very honestly, like I was nervous going to [district] because it is a major city. I mean, it’s low SES. And you just hear of all the trauma and I’m just like, I don’t know, like, can I do this?” Participant 1 also provided a more specific example when she reflected on her prior beliefs about parental engagement in urban education, and the way these views and beliefs have shifted over time. She stated,

I know before I had this mentality that ‘Oh, parents don’t come because they don’t care.’ But as I got to understand more individual families, it’s not that the parents don’t care, it’s that they have a job that they can’t afford to take off. And if they took off, that means that they may not have dinner tonight or tomorrow, or some other resources. So I definitely have shifted my mindset of how I thought of families not being involved, because there’s so many other factors that are going on that school, not to say it is not a priority, but there are other things that have to get taken care of before school.

These reflections underscored the deficit thinking that often accompanies urban learners instead of focusing on the structural inequities that often further marginalize families in urban communities. Participants’ statements also indicated that they themselves are not immune to these negative perceptions and stigmatized views, which may influence their practice as school psychologists in urban schools.

Lack of alignment with district administrators. Another factor that has impacted participants’ sense of self-efficacy was a perceived lack of alignment with district initiatives or disagreement with the decisions made by administrators. Be it by building principals or district leadership, participants described feeling frustrated and less capable of performing in their roles when their needs appeared to be overlooked. For instance, Participant 3 expressed, “With 40,000 students, you know, you’ve got this director of special ed off somewhere in a big corner that’s making decisions that may not work or make sense for the people that are working in the buildings. So that’s a big stress I think, too.” Participant 1 stated that she considered leaving her position altogether because of her frustrations with district leadership. She explained,

I am getting to a point though, to be honest, where I do want to leave at some point just because of some of the disorganization and the mistrust within the district from our district leadership. So not necessarily at my schools. I actually love the charter school that I work at. The CEO told me I can never leave. And then the high school I'm... this is my second year there. But I really do like it there and love working with older students, but just some of the things that are having the district level just doesn't resonate well with my I guess, morals and beliefs of how students and staff should be treated. I think that we also deserve more in this district and what they're offering. And I'm just kind of getting to a point where I know that I have other options where I could be resourceful and being seen as I guess a key stakeholder in my district being appreciated, you know, from the district standpoint.

Here, she shared her belief that she might be recognized as a key stakeholder by administration in another district, which has not been her experience in her current position. Participant 7 also described feeling as though his ideas have been overlooked by leaders in his large urban district.

He shared,

So the folks who sometimes we're pitching our agendas to people who don't fully understand what we want to do, and for that reason, they don't push our agenda ahead and they take someone else's. And then ours, we're still trying to do it without the support and funding and access and time to actually get going. And it never gets where it needs to go.

In this reflection, he explained that his ideas as a school psychologist in the district are not fully understood, and therefore not adopted, by administrators. This experience has led him to feel less capable of advocating for meaningful change.

Likewise, Participant 10 recalled frustrations with what she perceives as a lack of action taken by leaders in the district in addressing critical issues. In this example, she is referring to efforts to advocate for anti-racist practices in her district. She stated,

But I think that it really is up to us in many ways, as well as administrators who I think have a huge role to play. You know, it has to lead from the top down. I think we need to be right there and saying, 'What actions can we take?' Moving from the... to say, 'Okay, I'm done talking about this. I'm done having this conversation. What actions?'

Participant 8 also identified a need for more support from her administration in advocating for changes in the district. She has found that school psychologists can be influential participants in

those efforts, but that strong backing from leadership is needed in order to succeed in creating change. In the statement below, she also provided an example of pushing for more culturally responsive and anti-racist practices in her school. She described,

And that comes down to, in my opinion, the administration. That's where you're where your principal really needs to challenge those teachers. Not us. We can be powerful. We can have the conversation in a professional development. But as far as, 'You need to take a hard look at yourself.' That's got to come from administration.

Stress and burnout. Another theme that emerged within this domain was participants' experiences of stress and burnout. The stressors and inequities previously described provide context for understanding the pressures that urban school psychologists often face on the job. Participants expressed that careful consideration ought to be given to the ways in which these feelings affect one's perceived effectiveness so that efforts can be made to prevent burnout. For example, Participant 10 recalled often feeling ineffective on the job because of the demands of a high-stress environment. She stated,

I see the challenges on the job. I think everyone probably says, it really is time and stress, right? I don't have time to meet the needs of everyone that I should be meeting the needs of, and it causes me stress that I'm not able to do that. So I feel as though I'm doing everything not well. I have really busy days where I'm exhausted or I'm eating my lunch at the end of the day when buses are coming because there's just been a whirlwind of activity. But have I really done any effort? What have I done that's really effective?

Having worked for more than twenty years in her district, Participant 2 had found that school psychologists in their early careers often struggle to manage workplace stress. She explained,

And I think particularly, there are people like me twenty years ago that didn't know what it is, that don't know what it is, and don't have a good understanding. It's stressful if you don't know, your higher mission and your higher goal. So they come in and they feel all this pressure and things are overwhelming and things are... you're very busy. You know, you're working at home and you know, especially in your early career.

She went on to describe that when faced with stress and pressure on the job, early-career school psychologists in her district also tend to have difficulty creating a healthy work-life balance,

which can further contribute to feelings of burnout. Participant 3 noticed that, because school psychologists are often in a helping role, they can struggle to take care of themselves first. She shared,

I think most people that go into school psychology are good people that want to help others. And I think they often feel like they have to help everybody and then they internalize those problems. And that doesn't make them a good helper because then they then get stressed out themselves. And I think that I think that's something that, entering the field of school psychology, you need to know because that's an important part of it I think.

To Participant 3, it is important to discuss the reality of entering a helping profession and engaging in self-care early on.

Humility. In addition to the factors that lead urban school psychologists to feel ineffective, they also described several factors that have enhanced their sense of self-efficacy over time. Practicing with humility was identified by 50 percent of participants as essential to feeling effective and capable in their role. In fact, these participants oftentimes have found there to be considerable drawbacks to being perceived as “the expert” in their schools. For instance, Participant 3 expressed,

I think it's important to be humble, number one, coming out. And number two, also be aware that a lot of the people that you're working with may have a lot, and not psychs, but building folks may have a lot more knowledge than you have. So coming out and being aware of the knowledge that the teachers might have, and learning from that, as opposed to say, ‘Well, I think you should do this intervention because I learned about it in my class.’ Because they're gonna go ‘Oh, she's cute, but she doesn't know anything then that we're not going to listen to her.’

Here, Participant 3 expressed that few school psychologists should be expected to know everything, especially in the early part of their career. Instead, she believes that school psychologists in her setting tend to find more success and are more effective when they are open to the perspectives and experiences of others.

Participant 7 made a similar connection when he reflected on the limitations to identifying as the expert. He shared,

Well, yeah, like think about, you know, I mean, how many times in your program would have been like. 'When you go to the table, you will be the expert. You'll be the expert in special ed, you'll be the expert in assessment, you'll be the expert in statistics, you'll be experienced in development, you'll be the expert in mental health.' You're everything right? I don't want to be everything because I don't know everything. So you know, in these programs we pump everybody up and we self-inflate ourselves to the point in which it becomes a deficit, like we're not taking in other people's perspectives.

Likewise, Participant 10 found practicing with humility to be an important piece to culturally responsive practice in urban schools. Consistent with reflections from Participants 7, she also stated that, when leading with expertise, school psychologists may fail to consider the values and beliefs of the families they serve. She stated,

And I tell the new people all the time. Don't feel like you need to be an expert. Yeah, because nobody needs another expert. If I'm honest with you. You need to show you need to instill to a parent that you're competent. Like I don't want you to come across incompetent, because that's different. But you don't need to be the expert, you don't need to know everything. And I think that's so important to really give yourself. Allow yourself grace, allow yourself permission to say, 'I don't know. Let's talk.' I think it's worth repeating about, about giving yourself permission to not have all the answers and not only giving yourself permission, but with the understanding that part of being culturally responsive in an urban setting is understanding that our kids don't need to be saved. There's nothing wrong with them. And if you come in and think you're gonna save everybody, it's gonna be met with more resistance.

Here, she states the importance of practicing competently while also acknowledging that school psychologists may inadvertently do more harm than good when they presume to know what a family wants or needs for their child.

Along the same lines, Participant 8 has found inflexibility to be detrimental to effective practice in her urban school setting. She shared, "I think compassion, understanding your own personal bias, realizing that not everyone in the world lives the way you live, and just being tolerant and accepting that. Those are all attributes I think people need or would help them. If

you're going to be rigid and inflexible and think everything needs to be done a certain way you will not make it in this setting.” Thus, while participants reflected on the importance of building competency and confidence over time, they also emphasized the importance of recognizing that school psychologists cannot be expected to know it all. In fact, when acting as the expert in the room they may fail to effectively meet the needs of urban learners and their families.

Sharing of ideas and collaboration. Relatedly, engaging in collaboration and sharing ideas with colleagues and other stakeholders was identified as another key facilitator to enhancing participants’ sense of self-efficacy over time. For example, Participant 10 shared her perspective,

And the people in the program and school psychology programs, who have collaboration and consultation as their strength, I think do better do better because... well it goes hand in hand... I relate that to relationships, right? If you can make a relationship with somebody, you can do anything. Like even if I’m forgetting or I’m panicked because I’m nervous or I don’t know the answer. So now I’m scared and I’m nervous. And I’m afraid to say something wrong. Put that all aside. Have a conversation.

Participant 3 also identified collaboration as a facilitator to success in her experience as an urban school psychologist. She explained,

Because for people to be able to want to work with you and listen to you, they have to feel like they’re heard first. Because if they’re not heard first, they don’t care what you say. They’ll be like, “Oh, okay” you know? And then they’ll go off and do whatever they want. And then forget to bring data to the next meeting. So I think that’s an important piece.

Here, she elaborated on what she perceives as a need for her colleagues to be heard as well. By engaging in an open exchange of ideas with other educators in her building, she has felt more effective over time. She went on to explain that thus openness to others’ ideas is especially important during the first few years on the job. Participant 8 also reflected the benefits of sharing ideas with her colleagues in an urban school setting. She described,

But I, you know, it's funny, like in this role in our role and in the counselors' roles, the teachers and the principals and they look to us like we have sort of the magic answers and we don't, and I so I do like to work together as a team, because I'm not going to always think of everything. I'm not always going to have the best answer, but I think if we can collaborate, then we can better serve our kids.

She gave a specific example of the way in which conversation and collaboration with a co-worker challenged her to reflect and expand her own worldview. She shared,

My young, like 25-year-old colleague, he was really helpful for me because he really challenged me the way I thought and, and the way I looked at things. And just being able to, like get outside of our own. Like I said, being able to look at yourself, be reflective, be self-aware, understand where your bias is, understand what you really truly think about other people. Be willing to kind of let some of that go.

In this reflection, she emphasized that conversations like this one were important in helping her become more open-minded and better serve her students. "You have to really take the time to be open minded," she stated. Participant 4 reflected on his desire for more conversation with colleagues, which he believed would have given him a better perspective about his students' needs. He explained,

I think having more frequent check-ins with our like, coordinators, which are like our managers, who are also psychologists would have gone a long way as well, and not in like, an evaluative sort of way. I think. Just that open conversation around like, this is your first year, what's going on? How are you handling X, Y, and Z and having some pretty structured and pointed questions, I think would have helped me think about like, 'Okay, I'm not just doing this because I have to, and I'm on a deadline, like, what's the larger scope of this?'

Participant 6 shared that she did not always see collaboration among colleagues to be highly valued throughout her career. When working in a nearby suburban district, she found there was not always an open exchange of ideas among stakeholders, but that the culture of her current urban school district is much more collaborative.

And sometimes there wasn't a sharing of ideas or a common good. In [district], it does not feel that way. The culture of the psychologists is that we are all good at something.

We can all be helpful in some way. But we all are terrible at something too. And there's going to be someone better than you. And you can always learn from your colleagues.

In this statement she described the opportunity to learn from others in her district, which in turn, can enhance school psychologists' ability to effectively meet the needs of students and families.

Setting professional boundaries. Responses from 60 percent of participants indicated that setting and communicating professional boundaries has helped them to feel more effective over time. They also suggested that setting boundaries on the job appears to be more challenging during early career. However, learning to explicitly communicate the bounds of the role of the school psychologist to supervisors, administrators, and other staff was related to stronger feelings of effectiveness for those in this study. For instance, Participant 9 reflected on the difficulty early-career school psychologists find in communicating their needs for fear of being perceived as difficult. She expressed,

So, but I think, you know, they don't always get the support that they need. Because it's hard to work in an urban district. When you come in, you get cases thrown at you. They may give you three, four or five schools, you're brand new. Like the person that called me Friday, you don't want to make the principal mad, you don't want to, you know, make waves if something goes wrong, so you just go along with it. You know, they struggle with stuff, you know, saying like, 'I don't want to be perceived as difficult.'

Participant 9 went on to describe that she had to overcome this perception and state her professional needs and expectations. Ultimately, she found that pushing the limits and expectations of school psychologists can be detrimental to the students and families they serve. Similarly, Participant 1 had to learn to clearly communicate her role to new administrators as they cycled through her urban school buildings. She explained, "And it is hard, because every principal that comes in has expectations of what they think a school psychologist is, you know, what, what they are, what do they do, their expectations. And then when meeting with them,

you're like, 'No, that's not actually my job. This is what I do.'" She described the challenges she faced when she did not set boundaries on the job,

Because I felt like my first year, I would say, 'Oh, yeah, I can do that. Or I can do this.' And eventually, I felt so burnt out by the middle of the school year. And I'm just like, I can't go on the rest of the year like this. So setting boundaries is definitely, definitely key, as I kind of learned over time, because people will ask you to do things. And I feel like as early-careers, we're like, eager to get out in the field, and you know, make everyone happy. But we have to also remember ourselves and our limits of what we can do as well.

In this statement, she emphasized the importance of acknowledging one's limits as a school psychologist. Participants suggested this may be especially important in districts where resources are less readily accessible.

Participants 3 and 5 also identified the importance of clearly defining one's role in the school setting. Participant 5 shared her perspective,

I think, for us, like we interact with so many, so many different people that we have to know how to deal with that angry parent who may be mad at us about our, you know, assessment report or that principle that wants you to do something that's not in your job description, or I mean, it's just so many things that happen within a school day as school psychologists. We have to know how to navigate through those issues and kind of like, say, "Okay, this is what my role is, and this is what I do not do for my role." But yeah, it's a lot of things that grad school does not teach you.

Participant 3 emphasized this challenge when she shared her own realization that even though urban schools are often fast-paced and demanding, it was not always her responsibility to address every problem or concern. She stated,

I think one of the most important things and we just talked a little bit about it was thinking that you can get everything done. And please everyone. I think that's a big thing because I think in graduate school, students are used to pleasing their professors and doing well and getting good grades and all of that and when you come into an urban setting, it's messy, and you can't do everything. And if you try and do everything, I'm sure you're going to stretch yourself out unbelievably. I remember when I'm... maybe it was my like, second or third year, I and I had this epiphany and I thought, 'Oh, that's a problem. That's not my problem.'

Participant 3 struggled to let go of the belief that she should be expected to please everyone on the job, in large part, because she benefited from that mentality in training. However, in order to be effective and sustain her practice in a stressful environment, she needed to learn to set boundaries.

Access to a network or mentor. The most commonly cited facilitator to effective practice and developing a stronger sense of self-efficacy as an urban school psychologist was access to a network or mentor. In fact, every participant in the study described, in some way, the value they see in receiving support from other school psychologists with experience in urban schools. For instance, Participant 3 stated,

And its um, yeah, and I think burnout is a huge issue in training as well. Because if we don't, one of the things that we've done in [district] is we really upped our mentorship programming, because you know, it's really expensive to hire somebody, train them for a year and then have them leave, right? And it's a hard flippin' job to do. There's so many things that you need to learn and negotiate. In [district] we have mentors for our first years, we also have second and third years, our first, second and third years all meet together like once a month to go over issues that they have just as new folks just so we can support them and keep them here.

Her statement shed light on her belief that strong mentorship within the district may help to retain school psychologists in an environment where turnover is common. Participant 2 also indicated that a supportive network and mentorship helped her to want to stay in her district over many years. Not only that, but her colleagues have been essential in helping her acquire needed knowledge and skills over time. She shared,

One of the things that I really appreciated and what really kept me in [district] is we have 80 psychologists and it's just such a rich environment for mentorship. And so when you ask before if I was like, you know if there was anything that I was ill prepared for, when you can reach out to three lead psychologists and your mentor and your cohort that all went to [district] with you and you meet every you know, we met for 'Taco Tuesdays' and we talked about what we were doing and we helped each other.

As a new psychologist to the district, Participant 1 recalled experiencing nerves and worry about her skills and performance on the job. She found that mentorship helped her overcome these challenges to build more confidence. She described,

There were times where I'm in IEP meetings and I'm like, looking at the parent like, being really nervous. I mean, that first two years is... I mean, very eye opening. And I think that's how you learn how to get better if you, you know, maybe if someone does make a negative, you know, remark about you that's like, 'Okay, well, I have to be better.' Or having a mentor, having a mentor there to also to kind of help you to build your confidence.

Participant 10 reflected on her own feelings of isolation during the early part of her career in a large urban district. She began to provide mentorship to new school psychologists to help them navigate stressors in their first few years on the job. She explained,

However, my experiences, I reflect on them and I say they're great. But really, I also learned what I don't want, what I wouldn't want to repeat. I wouldn't want any of our new people to feel like that. Like I literally felt all alone. Like I, I didn't know who to call. And I share that story with every new person who I mentor. Yeah, I never want you to feel that way. I am a phone call and email a text away. Just pick up the phone and ask the question and we'll go from there.

Participant 9 has also found value in the mentorship now offered in her district, and believes it is important to extend that support to her colleagues, especially those struggling to adjust during early career. She shared the following example,

I have a number of psychs that if they have an issue, or they need to consult, my phone is always available. And they call me. Like, Friday, I had a conversation with a psych for like, over an hour. She was concerned and she's a second year, so she was concerned about, you know, about how a meeting went, and I just have to take the time to just listen to her. But you know, a lot of them know that they can call me and, you know, obviously get to stay confidential. But you know, if there's something that they want to discuss or they're having a hard time with something, I'm there to listen.

Not only did participants reflect on their own experiences accessing mentorship or a network of supportive colleagues over the course of their careers, but they also described providing that same support to new school psychologists in their district. Thus, participants' responses indicate

that strong mentorship is a key facilitator to helping build capacity among school psychologists in urban setting.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to utilize qualitative methods to understand urban school psychologists' perceptions of their training and professional practices. Through their storytelling and reflections, participants provided valuable insights regarding opportunities to enhance training and build capacity for successful practice in urban schools. This chapter will discuss the results from this study in greater detail from within a social cognitive theoretical lens. Essential considerations for both urban school psychologists and the trainers of urban school psychologists will be presented. Lastly, this chapter will also present study limitations and discuss possible directions for future research.

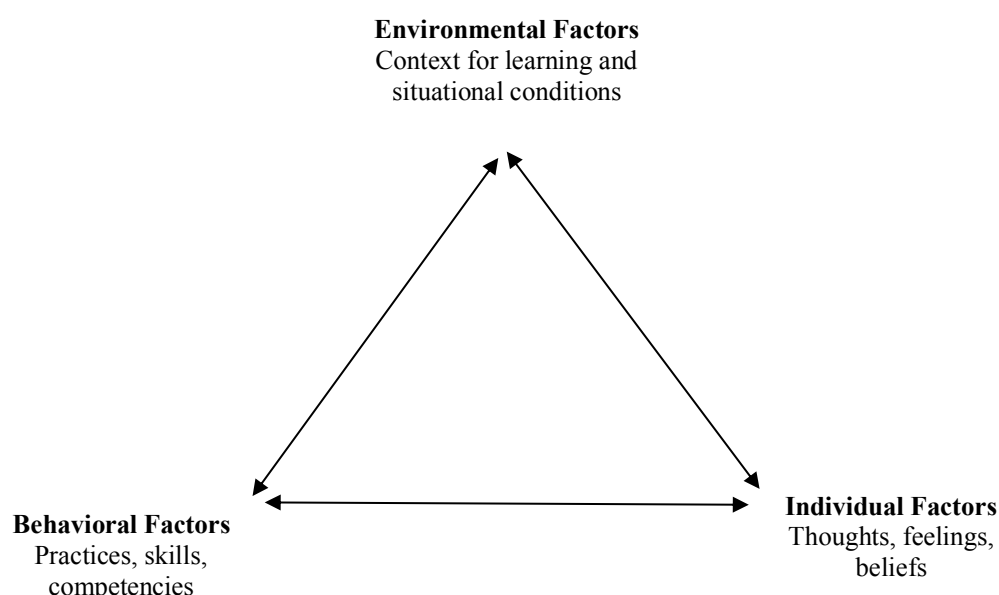
Application of Theoretical Framework

This study's design and the analysis of findings have been framed within Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986). This theory posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the individual person, environment, and behavior, otherwise known as *reciprocal determinism* (Bandura, 1986). Representing a departure from the behavioral theories that came before it, social cognitive theory is rooted in the idea that the individual learner is proactively engaged in their own growth and development (Pajares, 2002). In other words, this theory also accounts for the individual's cognitive processes such as thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Together, framing the results of this study through a social

cognitive lens highlights where there may be opportunities to enhance training by focusing on the learner's individual cognitive processes, improving behavioral competencies, and bettering the environmental conditions in which individuals learn (Pajares, 2002).

Figure 1 demonstrates the bidirectional interaction between individual, behavioral, and environmental factors that work together to shape the learning process. From a social-cognitive lens, it would not be sufficient to only focus on one component of training. Instead, consideration should be given to each of these factors and the reciprocal interactions among them. Results from the present study offer insight into these factors as they relate to training and development for urban school psychologists. For example, important environmental factors were identified from participants' descriptions of their graduate program contexts and situations conditions that enhanced their training. Behavioral factors were identified from participants' perceptions of needed skills, practices, competencies. Individual factors such as participants' motivations and self-efficacy beliefs were also explored as they related to participants' perceptions of their training and professional practice. A more detailed description of study findings across each of these relevant factors will be presented in the implications for training below.

Figure 1. Example of Reciprocal Determinism in Graduate Training



Implications for Training

The present study reveals important implications for the trainers of school psychologists. As previously noted, few accredited and NASP-approved programs in the United States offer dedicated training in urban school psychology. However, with a deeper understanding of urban school psychologists' perceptions of their training needs, trainers of school psychologists may be better suited to prepare these practitioners to be effective in their roles. It is possible that trainers can incorporate findings from the present study into more focused training opportunities for graduate students interested in urban education. To do so, a closer examination of the environmental, behavioral, and individual factors that may enhance graduate training for urban school psychologists is provided below. While each of these factors is described independently over the course of this chapter, it is important to restate that these factors are dynamic and reciprocal in nature. Together, they interact to shape the learner's growth and development over time.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors refer to the stimuli and situational variables surrounding an individual that influence the learning process. Participants identified several contextual factors and environmental conditions within graduate programs that may support effective training and preparation for school psychology practice in urban schools. Among the most commonly cited was the opportunity to gain exposure to urban school settings through fieldwork experiences and supervision from practicing urban school psychologists. Such practicum and internship experiences facilitated a better understanding of the role through careful observation of a practicing urban school psychologist and the systems in which they work. Therefore, graduate students may benefit from observing both the physical and social environments within urban school buildings.

Beyond exposure to school buildings, Participant 7 also recalled the value of exposure to the larger school community as a graduate student through patronage at local shops, learning about neighborhood organizations, and eating at nearby restaurants with his supervisor. These experiences helped him become more embedded in the community, gain insights into the stressors his students face, and laid the groundwork for more robust connections with families. This finding also highlights that trainers and supervisors could frame fieldwork training experiences ecologically to help emerging urban school psychologists better understand students' communities and the environmental influences impacting urban systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Grapin, 2017).

Furthermore, several participants shared their belief that strong partnerships between graduate program faculty and practicing urban school psychologists may help inform training

needs for those interested in practicing in an urban district. This finding supports current efforts to create such partnerships between universities and large urban communities like those in Boston Public Schools and Chicago Public Schools (Adamowski, 2019). Participants in this study further emphasized the importance of collaboration between practitioners, field supervisors, and university faculty in preparing school psychologists for practice. Specifically, some participants called for opportunities for ongoing dialogue between urban practitioners and university faculty. They believed more consistent communication and interchange between these groups would ultimately enhance training and preparation for urban school psychologists.

Some participants also recalled the value they placed on learning in the classroom from those with direct practice experience in the field. Faculty within university training programs may consider more dedicated opportunities for partnership with urban districts, especially in programs where practitioners in these settings provide fieldwork training and supervision. Relatedly, a sense of community within a cohort of other graduate students and faculty with shared interests was also identified as an experience that enhanced training overall. Thus, emerging urban school psychologists might benefit from dedicated space to discuss and explore issues related to urban education and a trusted community of colleagues. In this study, participants noted the value of listening to and learning from the insights of their peers whose backgrounds differed from their own.

Furthermore, participants discussed the pervasive presence of trauma, economic injustice, and racism found in their urban school systems, which prior research has indicated can have deleterious effects on educational outcomes for their students (Busby, Lambert, & Ialongo, 2013; Mathews, Dempsey, & Overstreet, 2009; Noguera, 2011; Silva-Laya et al., 2019). However, many reflected on the limited discussion of social justice issues during graduate training. Often

participants were required to take a single course on diversity or multicultural psychology as a part of their required course sequence. Results from this study underscored the value of learning within a social justice framework so that issues of racial injustice, economic injustice, and inequities in education can be considered across all aspects of a training program. Participant responses in this study specifically underscored the need to better understand the impact of systemic inequities in education and understand how these systems interact to create greater structural inequities for students from marginalized backgrounds.

Shriberg (2012) argues that social justice goals are inextricably linked with the goals of school psychology: to create safe, equitable, and accessible learning environments for all students. Several leaders and scholars in the field of school psychology have contributed to a deeper understanding of what it means to utilize a social justice framework in school psychology training, including Li et al. (2009), Radliff, Miranda, Stoll, and Wheeler (2009), Miranda et al. (2014), Moy et al. (2014), and Grapin (2017). Common factors within these frameworks for training include community-based partnerships, faculty commitment to social justice issues, advocacy work, research focused on advancing equitable service delivery, and learning from within a diverse faculty, cohort, or student body. Findings from the present study are well-aligned with many of these previously identified factors and further emphasize the importance of training from within a social justice framework as critical to effective practice in urban schools.

Behavioral Factors

Behavioral factors in social cognitive theory refer to the actions taken by the learner with feedback and reinforcement from others, such as level of practice in a particular skill. This reflects an important component to the learning process because school psychologists must learn to act as practitioners, not just learn about school psychology. In graduate training, students have

the opportunity to put their skills to the test before becoming independently licensed. Findings from this study revealed a number of essential skills for urban school psychology practice that can be prioritized in training and professional development. Notably, many participants believed there to be a gap between what they learned in their graduate courses and what they were expected to do in practice. Through these reflections, valuable findings emerged regarding the knowledge and skills they perceived to be most critical to successful practice. Therefore, trainers may give these practice areas more dedicated focus when students are training for this setting.

The first critical practice area identified by participants in this study was mental and behavioral health intervention. Participants described the importance of providing services through group and individual counseling, crisis intervention, responding to unexpected behaviors in the classroom, and providing social-emotional learning opportunities. These findings are consistent with the literature, which points to schools as a central access point for mental health service delivery (NASP, 2020). This service may be especially valuable for urban learners who have historically faced barriers in accessing quality mental health care in their communities (Atkins et al., 2006; Miranda, 2017). Therefore, urban school psychologists have a unique opportunity to engage in evidence-based practices to support students' mental and behavioral health needs.

Nevertheless, participants' statements in the present study reflected the need for more dedicated training and preparation in these practice areas. For instance, even though Participant 1 had taken a counseling theories course in training, she still felt uncertain about her ability to engage students in counseling effectively. Other participants also recalled limited training in actually delivering behavioral and mental health services. Alternatively, three study participants all received prior training providing mental health treatment within psychiatric or community

health settings, which they directly attributed to their preparedness to provide these services in schools. These findings reveal the importance of offering more of a skills-focus in training for behavioral and mental health intervention, not only in individual counseling but also in other forms of service delivery and perhaps various clinical settings.

Another example of participants' perceived disconnect in training was related to traditional special education evaluation procedures. Most, if not all, participants identified these procedures as their primary responsibility as an urban school psychologist. Some participants found that their programs did not emphasize training for more traditional standardized testing and assessment practices and related tasks such as case management, report writing, and eligibility meetings (Hussar, 2015; Murphy-Price, 2016; Stoiber & Vanderwood, 2008). While it is critical to be knowledgeable about various service delivery models and advocate for equitable assessment practices, urban school psychologists in this study emphasized that training for traditional special education procedures remains critical to their practice. This finding suggests that more targeted training with opportunities to practice these skills may be essential to ensure readiness on the job.

Urban school psychologists also identified the need to train in culturally responsive approaches to service delivery (Johnson, Bahr, & Navarro, 2019). This finding is consistent with previous studies identifying the need for more culturally responsive practices in urban schools and the field at large (Bottani et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2020; Jones, 2014; Nieto, 2013). Without training and development in these approaches, urban school psychologists may be ill-equipped to implement and advocate for effective practices that meet the needs of a diverse student body (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). Other examples of culturally responsive practices identified in this study included moving away from a standard assessment

battery in favor of less culturally biased measures, culturally responsive consultation and problem-solving with families and educators, and engaging in conversation with others to address discriminatory practices in schools.

For example, in her chapter in *Best Practices in School Psychology*, Jones (2014) recommends using culturally responsive micro-skills and interview techniques in practice. Opportunities to review and practice these skills and techniques may be especially advantageous in urban school settings. Furthermore, tools and resources like the *Jones Multicultural Interview Schedule* may also be helpful for urban school psychologists in understanding a student's cultural influences in both assessments and intervention services (Jones, 2009). Overall, many participants described developing these practices over time with professional experience but had less focus on these skills within the context of their graduate training. This finding suggests that a greater emphasis on implementing evidence-based culturally responsive practices in graduate programs may better equip emerging urban school psychologists to effectively support their students and families.

Furthermore, Participants also identified the importance of achieving greater independence in their fieldwork experiences over time. Participant 4 recalled the noticeable shift in the level of responsibility he experienced as an intern to the responsibility he had in his early career as an urban school psychologist. The significant increase in responsibility led him to feel unprepared to meet the demands he faced in his first year in an urban district. These findings suggest that it may be critically important for those interested in working in urban settings to learn and practice their emerging skills directly within these systems and receive a developmental sequence of training and supervision that culminates in greater independence by the end of internship. Otherwise, the transition from internship to independent practice in an

urban district may feel even more challenging. Without dedicated opportunities to demonstrate their skills and receive feedback from their supervisors, emerging urban school psychologists may feel ill-prepared to enter the field as independent practitioners.

Individual Factors

From a social cognitive lens, learning is also shaped by individual factors (Bandura, 1986). These factors would include the individual's thoughts, feelings, values, or beliefs, which interact with both behavioral reinforcement and environmental factors to influence growth and development over time. To explore these factors further, participants were asked to reflect on two salient cognitive processes within social cognitive theory: motivation and self-efficacy. Graduate students' beliefs may have important implications for training and practice. For example, individuals may have little incentive to persist in the face of stressors and challenges if they believe that they cannot be effective and sustain their effectiveness over time (Bandura, 1994; Pajares, 2002). More so, individuals may choose to avoid altogether engaging in practices that they believe are ineffectual or inconsequential.

Several findings from this study contributed to further understanding about the influence of individual factors in training for urban school psychology practice. First, participants were asked to reflect on why they chose to pursue school psychologist positions in urban school districts following the completion of their graduate training. Responses to this question also revealed factors that have contributed to urban school psychologists' continued motivation to practice in this setting over time. Most participants connected their motivation to pursue practice in an urban school district with some identified value or benefit to working within this particular setting. For many, their decision was motivated by the belief that they could have a positive impact in their role. Some participants in this study were motivated by the perceived challenge of

practicing in this setting and believed that a more significant challenge on the job would result in a higher level of engagement in their professional work. Others were motivated by their belief that there was a range of opportunities afforded to school psychologists in urban schools, given the expansive size of the district itself.

Be it the perceived challenge, range of opportunities, or the impact they may have on the job, participants in this study believed there to be at least some qualitative differences between urban school districts and school districts in other geographic settings (APA, 2005; Foote, 2005; Lee, 2005). More so, findings from this research question revealed that several participants made distinctions between urban school practice and other settings before entering the field as full-time practitioners. It is possible that participants identified differences between urban districts and other settings based on personal experiences, fieldwork training, or the literature examining urban education. However, it is unclear from the present study where these perceived distinctions emerged. Still, participants who cited impact, challenge, and range of opportunities appeared to have some belief that their skills and interests were a good fit for working in urban education.

Comparatively, three study participants reflected on the accessibility of their positions in urban schools. Be it geographic proximity to their homes or the availability of open positions in the district, these participants shared that they did not necessarily reflect on the goodness of fit between their skills, interests, and professional goals and the role in an urban school setting. Participant 1, for example, applied for her position in an urban school district following a change in personal circumstances. Upon looking for open positions, the only district still hiring was the urban district she currently practices in. Similarly, Participant 3 initially worked in a suburban district but chose to pursue her position in an urban district because a change in personal circumstances necessitated finding a position geographically closer to home. Both of these

participants later reflected that they lacked foundational knowledge and understanding that may have helped them to better serve their students, particularly related to social justice issues and inequities in education.

Given these findings, trainers of school psychologists might consider engaging graduate students in a closer examination of potential differences in practice settings. A few participants even expressed that they would have benefitted from more explicit discussion and feedback about what professional practice settings would have matched their skills and interests. More specifically, ongoing opportunities for self-assessment and exploration into students' motivations for practice in urban schools may also be warranted (Daly et al., 2011). In doing so, emerging school psychologists would be encouraged to reflect on their *why*, with particular emphasis on the attitudes, goals, and beliefs that factored into their decisions to pursue practice in this setting or another (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

This study also revealed that participants began to experience more self-doubt and less self-confidence about their skills and abilities as they entered early-career, which some described as feelings of imposter syndrome. Limited self-efficacy served as an example of an individual factor identified in the present study that may have a considerable impact on professional practice. Again, without strong self-efficacy beliefs in expansive, fast-paced, and demanding environments like urban school systems, school psychologists may avoid practices that they feel incapable of successfully engaging in. Findings from this study offered insight into how participants' sense of self-efficacy evolved over time and offered insight into factors that inhibited and facilitated their perceived effectiveness during their careers.

One common reflection shared by participants from this study was a perceived lack of alignment with district or administrator initiatives as an inhibitor to strong self-efficacy beliefs.

When participants perceived dissonance between their own goals and the district-wide agenda, they were more likely to feel ineffective in their roles. Two participants revealed that they recently considered leaving their positions altogether because of a lack of administrator and district-level support. Such challenges can be exacerbated by ever-changing leadership and a lack of sustainability in systems-change efforts, which were identified as significant stressors in this study and the literature as a whole (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Papay et al., 2017). Urban school psychologists may benefit from dedicated training in systems-level consultation skills to advocate for needed change, pursuing leadership positions in urban districts, and leading building or district-wide initiatives to improve workplace culture and climate in these settings.

Relatedly, a significant factor that has the potential to impede urban school psychologists' self-efficacy beliefs as they enter the field is the experience of stress and burnout. In addition to staff turnover and unstable systems, participants identified many factors within urban school settings that further contributed to stress and burnout and have been previously explored in the literature, including time pressures and growing caseloads (Stoiber & Vanderwood, 2008; Graves, Proctor & Aston, 2014; Lee, 2005). Feelings of stress and burnout can significantly impact individuals' beliefs about their ability to be successful in their efforts (Pajares, 2002). Results from this study point to the need for opportunities to explore indicators of burnout, address one's mental health and well-being, and engage in dedicated efforts to facilitate stronger self-efficacy beliefs in the face of stressors.

Another insight from the present study was participants' perceptions of negative attitudes and stigma surrounding urban schools, the children and families who attend urban schools, and careers in these settings. Notably, some participants reflected on their own negative attitudes and biases and how this may have impacted their practice. Others recalled observing these attitudes

and beliefs from faculty, colleagues, and peers. This finding is consistent with previous literature that has pointed to how urban schools and urban learners are often framed from a deficit perspective (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2018; Foote, 2005).

Participants' reflections in the present study illuminated that deficit thinking can be a significant barrier to effectively serving students in school and resulting in harmful practices towards marginalized communities (Ahram, Stenbridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). As such, it may be vital for trainers in graduate programs and emerging urban school psychologists to adequately identify and address deficit language surrounding urban education and utilize a social justice framework in exploring systemic disparities found within these educational settings. Previous studies have pointed to the vast number of strengths and assets found for students in urban schools, including the use of effective problem-solving skills, enhanced resiliency, strong caregiving skills, and well-developed cultural values and belief systems (APA, 2005; Williams & Newcombe, 1994). Therefore, beyond just addressing harmful deficit language, efforts to identify and explore these strengths should also be prioritized in training. School psychologists in urban settings should be skilled in fostering opportunities for urban learners to utilize such strengths in the school setting.

This study revealed that fostering feelings of connection through shared ideas and collaboration with others served as potential facilitators to enhanced self-efficacy beliefs for urban school psychologists. These are skills and practices that can be encouraged early in graduate training to help build capacity for emerging school psychologists. Participants emphasized the importance of open dialogue, not only with educators but also with caregivers and urban learners themselves. Asking for input and receiving feedback from other individuals in the school setting may foster stronger self-efficacy beliefs, especially during early-career. This

finding suggests that dedicated training experiences involving the development of interpersonal skills and teaming may be especially valuable.

In this study, urban school psychologists also found that reliance on a network of other practitioners in urban schools has contributed to finding success in their roles. When faced with self-doubt, gaining reassurance and insight from more experienced professionals was cited by participants as a critical facilitator to their growth and development. Furthermore, these networks also served as a place for early-career urban school psychologists to seek social support and fostered a greater sense of connectedness to other professionals with shared interests. Thus, trainers of emerging urban school psychologists may consider facilitating more opportunities for mentorship and networking with experienced professionals in this setting.

Participants also found that learning their professional boundaries helped them to feel more capable of being successful in their role. While still emphasizing the value of relationship building and collaboration with others, participants recalled the importance of learning the bounds of the school psychologist's role and communicating those bounds to others. This was a noticeable shift for many participants from their mindset in graduate training to early-career practice. However, without first recognizing and then communicating one's limits, the demands of the job may become more challenging or altogether unmanageable. Participants recommended taking the time to work with colleagues and supervisors to identify one's major responsibilities and then determining where there may be the opportunity to engage in additional tasks and activities.

The final facilitator to enhanced self-efficacy for urban school psychologists was practicing with humility. Participants reflected on the challenges that often come with being perceived as the "expert" across a wide range of practices and domains. While competency

across the domains of school psychology practice is critical, participants have found it unrealistic to develop true expertise in every practice area. They found that the expectation of being the "expert in the room" often resulted in stronger feelings of self-doubt. Instead, participants encouraged a shift toward practicing with humility. This shift in mindset helped the urban school psychologists in this study acknowledge their professional limitations, become more open to feedback, engage in collaboration with others, and ask for help when they needed it. Those who began to focus more on practicing with humility also began to feel more confident in their skills and abilities over time.

Implications for Practicing Urban School Psychologists

Many participants described feeling underprepared and having little self-confidence at the start of independent practice. However, they also acknowledged that urban school psychologists should not be expected to learn everything they would need to know for practice during graduate training alone. Instead, participants emphasized the importance of first building a strong foundation in graduate school and then growing and developing new knowledge and skills with time and experience on the job. Findings from the present study suggest that urban school psychologists should continually identify their areas for professional growth and access the needed materials, resources, and training experiences in practice.

Participants' preferred sources for professional development and continuing education material were varied. While some believed the resources provided by the National Association of School Psychologists and American Psychological Association to be beneficial, others found that these organizations do not fully meet their continuing education needs (Graves, Proctor, & Aston, 2014). Instead, many urban school psychologists in this study relied more heavily on their district and state organizations' resources, materials, and training experiences. Thus, urban school

psychologists may benefit from connecting with their local associations and nearby universities and availing themselves of opportunities in or near their school districts to explore professional development opportunities (Freedheim, 2003).

Finally, findings from the present study also reveal the importance of considering various factors that shape professional growth and development. Practitioners strive to develop competency across all domains of school psychology practice. Still, they should also engage in continual self-assessment and reflection regarding the influence of their thoughts, feelings, values, and attitudes. Dedicated opportunities to assess these individual cognitive processes may begin with graduate training into early-career practice but should also be extended to more experienced school psychologists. Practitioners may enhance and develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs by engaging with the facilitators described above. While much emphasis is given to knowledge and skills in continuing education training, opportunities to explore and examine cognitive processes like motivation for practice and self-efficacy beliefs should also be prioritized.

Summary

Together, the findings from the present study contribute to an initial "blueprint" or framework for the training experiences that may be particularly valuable to emerging urban school psychologists in graduate programs and during the early stages of their professional practice. Specifically, these opportunities may include a focus on fieldwork and community-building in urban schools, foundational knowledge about the impact of structural inequities impacting urban education, skills-focused training in culturally responsive assessment and intervention practices, and training in anti-racist school-based practices. Trainers of school

psychologists interested in urban education should consider designing opportunities within a social justice framework.

Emerging urban school psychologists may also benefit from connections to special interest groups, mentorship with urban practitioners, and partnering with nearby urban school districts. Finally, training may also provide opportunities for ongoing reflection, practicing competently but with humility, engaging in practices to support one's own well-being in the face of professional stressors, identifying and addressing deficit thinking, and emphasizing interpersonal skills for effective collaboration. A thoughtful exploration of all the influences that shape learning, including environmental, behavioral, and individual factors, may provide a more holistic approach to training and ultimately enhance school psychology practice in urban schools.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to the present study. First, there were limitations in the study sample with respect to representation across regions of training and practice among participants. Several participants came from both training programs and urban districts located in the Midwest and East Coast regions of the United States. It is unclear whether representation within the sample from practitioners in other regions would have offered varying perspectives. Furthermore, the small sample recruited for this study is limited in its representation across racial and ethnic diversity, gender, and age groups. Together, these limitations impact the maximum variation within the study and may limit the transferability of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Another limitation to this study was that the protocol and study design was developed primarily by the primary researcher who identifies as white, female, and has not practiced full-time or independently as an urban school psychologist. Collaboration with practicing urban

school psychologists during the study design may have produced more nuanced interview questions and enhanced study findings. While rich data was collected across interviews, there may be factors related to graduate training and professional practice not captured due to the primary researcher's positionality. Another limitation in the present study is that data collection occurred with each participant over one single video-conference session. Thus, the data collection and analysis were subject to the participant's views and beliefs at the time of the interview. Had the data collection occurred over multiple interviews, the participants and researcher could have returned to previous statements and explored topics over time, which might have elicited more rich descriptions of participants' experiences.

Finally, this study relied solely on participant self-report to explore the research questions posed. While the participants in this study seemingly provided authentic insight into their views and beliefs, self-report data may affect the overall accuracy of the results due to the qualitative methodology. It is possible that participants, at times, withheld their genuine opinions about their graduate training and current professional practices. This could be due to social desirability bias or the primary researcher's presence in the interview process. For example, the researcher's positionality (e.g., age, gender, level of experience, education, race) may impact how participants engaged, and ultimately, either shared or withheld certain information. Additionally, although the interview questions were administered using the same protocol across interviews, the researcher's subjectivity is essential to consider concerning the varied use of probes or follow-up questions that could impact the depth of information shared.

Future Directions

There is a shortage of research that explores outcomes related to specialized graduate training for urban school psychologists. Future research is needed to better understand the

experiences of graduate students who attend programs with a dedicated urban school psychology focus. A qualitative case study design may explore, in detail, the experiences of graduate students in such programs. More so, research that compares outcomes between participation in a specialized sequence of training and a non-specialized sequence may provide further insight into the effectiveness of these training programs for urban school psychologists. One salient finding from the present study was the need for urban school psychologists' voices and perspectives to be heard by the field at large. Therefore, future research should involve direct partnership with practitioners in the field to collaboratively explore topics and issues related to their professional development needs.

There were undoubtedly views and experiences not represented in the present study due to the limitations mentioned above in the participant sample. Future research may aim to recruit participants from a broader scope of training programs and practice settings and across age, experience, education, race/ethnicity, and gender identities to ensure greater representation among participants and increased transferability of results. Future studies may focus on a cross-comparison between early-career, mid-career, and late-career urban school psychologists to identify whether differences emerge based on experience level. Furthermore, a cross-comparison of school psychologists' motivations, preparedness, and self-efficacy beliefs across geographic settings (e.g., urban, rural, and suburban school districts) may highlight where training needs are aligned and where they diverge.

Finally, the present study provided an initial exploration into the influence of the individual cognitive processes (motivation and self-efficacy beliefs) that may impact training and preparation for urban school psychology practice. More research and study into these and other individual thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes throughout participation in training programs may be

especially beneficial to trainers in the field who are charged with ensuring that emerging school psychologists are ready and able to engage in their roles and responsibilities effectively. A more formal exploration of these individual cognitive processes may also be valuable to emerging school psychologists themselves and to current practitioners in assessing their effectiveness on the job. Future research should explore these processes more in-depth within the context of school psychology training across practice areas and within various geographic settings.

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC INQUIRY FORM

Gender:

Female

Male

Transgender

Other (*please specify*):

Age:

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60+

Race:

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

White

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Multi-Racial

Other (*please specify*):

Highest level of degree obtained (e.g., Masters, Masters +60, Specialist, Doctorate):

Year graduated with highest degree:

In what state was the school psychology program located?

Did your graduate program have a specific urban focus/mission?

Yes

No

Unknown

Did you attend more than one school psychology graduate training program? (*If yes, select one program to focus on for the purpose of the interview*):

How many years have you been practicing as a school psychologist?

How many years have you practiced as a school psychologist in an urban district?

In what city and state are you currently employed?

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Explain the Purpose of the Study:

“I am studying the training needs and experiences of urban school psychologists. It is my hope that studying the experiences and perceptions of urban school psychologists will help us better understand the ways in which trainers of school psychologists and school psychology training programs can better support their readiness for practice in this setting. For this study I am conducting individual interviews.”

“The interviews may be conducted over the course of one full session, or two to three shorter sessions. Altogether, the interview will be approximately two hours in duration. During the interview, I will ask questions about your views, beliefs, and experiences prior to entering your school psychology program, your training experiences while in that program, and how you have made meaning of those experiences since successfully completing graduate training.”

“The interviews will take place at an agreed upon location where privacy can be maintained. If you think you might be interested in participating, I would like to go over the informed consent form with you.” [If yes, proceed. If no, confirm that the individual is not interested in participating and end by thanking them for their time and consideration.]

2. Proceed with Interview:

“First, do you have any questions about the interview or the study?” (Answer any questions the participant may have regarding the interview or research.) “I am now going to begin recording the interview. I will turn the tape recorder off at any time should you ask me to.”

3. Complete Demographic Inquiry Form (see Appendix A)

4. Interview Part I: History

- 4a) Tell me about your decision to pursue school psychology as a career.
- 4b) Were there any particular factors or experiences that influenced your decision to pursue school psychology?
- 4c) Tell me about your decision to attend [individual's training program].
- 4d) What were the most important factors in your decision to enter the program?
- 4e) Tell me about your beliefs regarding practice in an urban school district prior to beginning your graduate training.

5. Interview Part II: Experiences in School Psychology Program

- 5a) Tell me about your experience in your school psychology training program.
- 5b) Tell me about your professional relationships during your time in the school psychology program (relationships with, faculty, supervisors, program students, etc.)
- 5c) What are your perceptions of the classroom experiences you had in the training program?
- 5d) What are your perceptions of the fieldwork experiences you had in the training program?
- 5e) Tell me about your first practicum.
- 5f) Tell me about your internship.
- 5g) Did you have any training experiences that explored urban issues. If yes, describe those experiences.
- 5h) What were your beliefs regarding working in an urban school during your graduate training?

5i) How prepared for independent practice in an urban school did you feel upon completion of your degree?

5j) Do you believe you could have felt more prepared for practice in your current job setting?

If yes, what content do you think would have better prepared you?

If yes, what type of field experiences would have better prepared you?

6. Interview Part III: Experiences Upon Completion of Training

6a) Tell me about your job search following graduation. What were you looking for in your first position?

6b) Describe each of the school psychology positions you have held up until your current position.

6c) Tell me about what led you to take your current position in an urban district. Why did you choose this position?

6d) What were the most important factors in your decision to take this position?

6e) Describe your major roles and responsibilities.

Tell me where you focus most of your efforts during the day.

What are the skills you are using in practice?

6f) Tell me about the challenges you face.

Do you think any of these challenges is unique to the urban setting? If so, explain.

6g) Tell me about the ways in which you believe you are successful in your role.

What are the facilitators to successful practice in an urban setting?

6h) How confident were you in your ability to be successful in this role?

6i) Tell me about the training experiences that helped you to feel more confident. Explain why you do not feel as confident in this role.

6j) How (if at all) do you believe you could have felt more confident?

6k) Now that you are in practice, how do you perceive your graduate training experiences overall?

6l) How do you feel about your decision to practice in an urban setting?

6m) How do you currently view urban school psychology? Tell me about your beliefs regarding practice in this setting currently.

6n) What are your beliefs regarding specialized training programs for urban school psychology?

6o) What are your thoughts about the resources, materials, and professional development offered by the National Association of School Psychologists for urban school psychologists?

6p) What are your thoughts about the resources, materials, and professional development offered by the American Psychological Association- Division 16 for urban school psychologists?

6q) What are your thoughts about the resources, materials, and professional development offered by your state association for urban school psychologists?

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

[Greetings],

My name is Kiley Callahan, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of School Psychology at Loyola University Chicago.

I am writing to inquire if you would be interested in participating in an interview for my dissertation research project entitled “A qualitative exploration into school psychologists’ perceived self-efficacy, preparedness, and motivation for practice in urban schools.” The purpose of this study is to enhance graduate training and preparation for school psychologists in urban settings. As a school psychologist with professional experience practicing in an urban school district, I am interested in understanding your views, beliefs, and experiences related to your training and professional practice.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire and to participate in an individual interview with me, the primary researcher. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes to complete and can be completed in one full session or broken into three 30 minute interviews, depending on your preference. Interviews will either be conducted face-to-face and in a mutually agreed upon setting where participant privacy can be maintained or over an online video conference platform (Zoom). Interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will be compensated with a 25.00 gift card upon completion of the interview.

If you are interested in participating, please email me directly at kcallahan3@luc.edu. Please feel free to forward this message to your colleagues in urban school districts who may be interested in participating.

Respectfully,

Kiley Callahan, M.Ed.

Doctoral Student in School Psychology

Loyola University Chicago

APPENDIX D

STUDY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: A qualitative exploration into school psychologists' perceived self-efficacy, preparedness, and motivation for practice in urban schools

Researcher: Kiley Callahan, M.Ed. (kcallahan3@luc.edu)

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Markeda Newell, Ph.D. (mnewell2@luc.edu)

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the graduate training needs of urban school psychologists. I am interested in understanding your perspective on your graduate training experiences and how they have shaped your professional practice currently. Ultimately, I am interested in examining your perceived level of preparedness, confidence, and motivations for practicing as a school psychologist in an urban school setting.

Procedures: If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire and to participate in an individual interview with the researcher. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes to complete and can be completed in one full session or over the course of three 30- minute interviews, depending on your preference. The interview will be comprised of three sections. The first part of the interview will ask questions about your experiences before entering a school psychology training program (e.g., “Tell me about your decision to pursue school psychology as a career”). The second part of the interview will ask about your experience during the school psychology training program (e.g., “What were your beliefs regarding working in an urban school during your graduate training?”). The third part of the interview will ask about your experience as an urban school psychologist and how you view your graduate training experiences since beginning your professional practice (e.g., “How do you currently view urban school psychology? Tell me about your beliefs regarding practice in this setting currently”). The interview will occur either in person or over an online video conference platform. If the interview is being conducted over video conferencing, only audio recording will occur. Afterwards, the audio recording will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. At this time, the researcher may solicit feedback from you directly on initial and emerging findings in order to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of your responses are accurate and valid.

Risks/Benefits: There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Both the participants and society stand to benefit from this study. Participants will be presented with the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of school psychology graduate training by providing valuable insights, beliefs, and perspectives regarding their own training experiences and professional practice. Such information may yield important implications for the trainers of school psychologists and add to the fund of information and literature on best practices and standards for graduate training of practitioners with an interest in urban settings.

Compensation: Upon completion of the interview, you will be compensated with a \$25.00 gift card to either Target or Amazon. Compensation will only be provided upon completion of all three interview sections.

Confidentiality: There are two types of data that will be collected in this study. The first is demographic information about each participant. The questions on the demographic questionnaire will be presented verbally to you by the researcher. The information collected on the demographic questionnaire will include: age, gender, race/ethnicity, geographic region the school psychology graduate program attended, dates of attendance, degree obtained (e.g., masters, specialist, doctorate, etc.), number of years of practice as a licensed school psychologist, number of years of practice in an urban school district, and geographic region of the urban school district. The second form of data collected are the contents of the individual interview which will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Your identifying information (name, age, address, etc.) will not be stated in the audio recordings nor will it appear on the demographic questionnaire or the transcript document. The data in this study will be coded. The researcher will assign you a four digit study number that corresponds with the study number of your demographic questionnaire and interview transcript. This number will also be used as the file name for the digital documents (e.g., audio recording, interview transcript). Your name will only be known to the researcher, and pseudonyms will be utilized upon writing and reporting the

results of the study. During research, the audio recordings and interview transcripts will be stored on a password protected hard drive only accessible to the researcher. Completed demographic questionnaires and hard copies of the interview transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet only accessible to the researcher. All digital documents will be deleted and hard copies shredded upon completion of this study.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions: If you have questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact Kiley Callahan at kcallahan3@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Markeda Newell, at mnewell2@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT SCREENING SCRIPT

[Greetings],

My name is Kiley Callahan and I am a doctoral student in the School Psychology Program at Loyola University Chicago. Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. As I stated in my email, for my dissertation I am studying the training needs and experiences of urban school psychologists. It is my hope that studying the experiences and perceptions of urban school psychologists will help us better understand the ways in which trainers of school psychologists and school psychology training programs can better support their readiness for practice in this setting.

Before we move forward with study procedures, I must first conduct a brief screening to ensure that you meet criteria to participate in the study. For the following three questions, please answer 'yes' or 'no.'

- 1. Are you currently a licensed school psychologist?*
- 2. Do you have at least one year of full-time professional practice as a school psychologist in an urban school setting?*
- 3. Did you obtain your graduate degree from either a school psychology specialist-level or doctoral-level program (Ed.S, Ph.D., Ed. D, etc.) accredited by either the National Association of School Psychologists or the American Psychological Association?*

[If the individual answers 'yes' to all three questions, inclusion criteria has been met and you may proceed with the study description and consent procedures].

[If the individual does not answer 'yes' to all three questions, inclusion criteria has **not** been met. Thank the individual for their time and explain that they do not meet criteria to participate in this study.]

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VITA

Dr. Kiley Callahan was raised in Medford, Massachusetts. Before beginning her graduate program at Loyola University Chicago, she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Applied Psychology and Human Development at Boston College in 2014. Upon completion of her undergraduate degree, Dr. Callahan worked as a Research Assistant and Youth Counselor at Massachusetts General Hospital.

During her time in the School Psychology Ph.D. program at Loyola University Chicago, Dr. Callahan served on several research teams. Her primary research focus has centered on school-based mental health supports for children and families and training for school psychology practice in urban school districts. In 2016, she was accepted into Loyola University Chicago's first cohort of Urban Fellows. Dr. Callahan completed two years of practicum training in Chicago Public Schools and a psychology externship at DePaul Family and Community Services. In 2020, Dr. Callahan was awarded the Paul T. and Concetta Mooney Fellowship and was inducted into the Alpha Sigma Nu Honor Society.

Dr. Callahan is currently completing an APA-accredited pre-doctoral internship at a public therapeutic day school through the Illinois School Psychology Internship Consortium. She looks forward to returning to Boston, Massachusetts where she will begin her career as a school psychologist.