Oklahoma School Psychological Association (OSPA) Kicked Off a Week of Advocacy Efforts with a Visit to the State Capitol

School psychologists from across the state met with Oklahoma legislators to advocate for child safety, restorative discipline practices, and increased school-employed mental health professionals.

Oklahoma City, OK—On Monday, Feb. 11, 2019, school psychologists met with legislators to promote child safety, restorative discipline practices, and access to school-employed mental health professionals. This week, Oklahoma’s certified school psychologists are engaging in advocacy activities including voting in Tuesday’s local school board and bond issue elections, presenting to district-level stakeholders on student mental health issues, and sharing about the critical need for school psychologists.

**Child Safety**

In Oklahoma, one in five children struggles with mental health issues, and suicide remains the second leading cause of death for youth. OSPA believes HB 1308 by Rep. Sherrie Conley, a bill that would require schools to develop policies to protect students expressing threats of self-harm, is vital to reducing the high number of youth suicides. To effectively implement these and other potentially life-saving policies, it is important to consider the need for increased school-based mental health practitioners. Many school psychologists receive extensive training in student risk assessment and crisis intervention and are vital members of school safety teams.

**Restorative Discipline Practices**

Oklahoma was named first in the nation for expelling special education students, and nearly half of school districts disproportionately suspended minority students. Because frequent suspensions have been linked to increased incarceration rates (“school-to-prison pipeline”), OSPA supports HB 1989 by Rep. Jadine Nolan. This bill promotes restorative discipline practices in lieu of out-of-school suspensions. With comprehensive training in systematic behavior management and positive behavior supports, school psychologists are uniquely qualified to help schools build evidence-based restorative practices.

**Access to School-Employed Mental Health Professionals**

Approximately 80% of students needing mental health care do not receive it, and of those who do, most access care at school. Current shortages of school-based mental health providers produce critical rates of unmet student needs. The recommended ratio of school psychologists is 1 to every 500-700 students, while Oklahoma’s current ratio is 1 to 5,726. OSPA believes HB 1006 by Rep. Jacob Rosecrants would help decrease this ratio by providing an enduring $5,000 salary bonus to retain highly qualified school psychologists with the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential. Additionally, OSPA is in support of laws and policies that directly address the shortage of school psychologists, such as a task force of state school psychology leaders that could aid in the development of a specific action plan to further address the shortage.

About OSPA: The Oklahoma School Psychological Association (OSPA) represents its members by promoting the education, mental health, rights, and welfare of children and youth. OSPA believes comprehensive school psychological services are necessary for the mental health and educational needs of all students.

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