

School Psychology Manpower Characteristics and Needs in Rural and Urban Tennessee: A Five Year Follow-up

JON E. DEVORE¹ AND THOMAS K. FAGAN¹

A five-year followup survey was conducted with both rural and urban Tennessee school administrators to ascertain current school psychology manpower characteristics and needs and to determine how these parameters have changed over that period of time. Psychological services continue to be reported as available in almost all districts reporting, and increases are reported in the number of full-time personnel providing service, in the number of personnel holding State Department of Education certification as a school psychologist, and in the level of desired training of psychological personnel. A substantial number of administrators continue to indicate the quantity of psychological services is inadequate to meet their needs, but the number of actual position openings has declined over the five year period and are very few in number in relation to reported needs. The possible implications of the data to overall manpower concerns, and specifically to the Master Teacher-Better Schools programs, are discussed.

Introduction

The delivery of psychological services to children in the public schools has been a rapidly expanding area, with the profession of school psychology experiencing much of its growth in the last decade. While many point to PL 94-142 as the main impetus for this growth, the exact reasons are most likely multiple in nature and variable from district to district. Not surprisingly, with the expansion of psychological services within the schools has come concern from different quarters regarding the characteristics and needs in this specific aspect of pupil personnel services. Three important studies have contributed manpower information based on data obtained from school psychologists [3], state departments of education [4], and university training programs [1]. The first study reporting manpower data obtained from local school administrators has been presented by the authors [2], with the present data representing a five year follow-up on that population. These data are particularly important since administrators strongly influence the hiring of school psychologists at the local level. Also, it was quite fortuitous that these two data collections have encompassed a five year trend of change in our educational system. At the time of the 1977-1978 survey, the full effects of PL 94-142 were being felt. Five years later, the emphasis has swung toward the Master Teacher-Better Schools plan in Tennessee, a piece of legislation recently signed into law by the Governor.

While both studies are limited to Tennessee school districts, the data have relevance to school psychology manpower considerations in other states, particularly those of similar population demographics and whose school districts may be subjected to or moving toward the same level and type of delivery of professional ser-

vices, as well as those states proposing accountability and merit plans for school personnel (e.g.: Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, etc.).

Methodology

A fourteen item survey, covering the same content areas as in the 1977-1978 survey, was mailed to the superintendent of each of the 147 Tennessee school districts. All data were gathered between December, 1982 and May, 1983. As in the 1977-1978 survey, data were analyzed according to district size within rural and urban subdivisions. Rural districts were divided into those of less than 1,000 students, 1,000 - 5,000 students, and 5,000 - 10,000 students. Urban districts were divided into those of 10,000 - 15,000 students and those districts with more than 15,000 students.

Survey Results and Discussion

Return Rate and Sample Comparability

Questionnaires were returned from 129 districts (87.7% of 147 Tennessee school districts), of which 119 were classified as rural and 10 as urban. The return rate for the 1982-1983 survey was slightly greater than for the 1977-1978 survey (83.0%). The high rates of return perhaps reflect administrator interest in this manpower area. One hundred and seven of the 122 districts that returned questionnaires in 1977-1978 did so in the present study. This represents an overlap of 87.7% in the two samples. Fifteen districts that returned questionnaires in 1977-1978 did not do so in 1982-1983, but 22 districts that did not respond in 1977-1978 did so in the present study.

¹From the Department of Psychology, Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee 38152.

Table 1

Availability of Psychological Services in Tennessee School Districts: 1977-78 and 1982-83*

	Rural						Urban				Grand Total**	
	Less Than 1,000		1,000 - 5,000		5,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 15,000		Greater Than 15,000		77-78	82-83
	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83		
Psychological Services Available	17	28	63	62	28	28	4	3	9	7	121	128
Psychological Services Not Available	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1

* N = 122 (1977-1978 survey); N = 129 (1982-1983 survey)

**Rural and Urban districts combined

An additional check to assess the comparability of our surveys was done by asking administrators to indicate the number of students enrolled in their districts at both times. Ninety-eight percent of the districts returning questionnaires in 1982-1983 reported that their pupil enrollment was unchanged during the five year period, using the classification system described above. Two percent of the districts reported a decrease in the number of students they had enrolled, with all these occurring in districts that fell on the boundary between the 1,000 - 5,000 and 5,000 - 10,000 pupil size.

As a final comparability check, we also looked at the title held by the person completing the questionnaire. In the 1977-1978 survey, 98% of those responding were identified as superintendents, and assistant superintendents, supervisors, or directors. In 1982-1983, 87% held similar position titles, with the remaining 13% being district school psychologists.

Availability of Psychological Services

All but one district (99% of those reporting) indicated the availability of some type of psychological services (see Table 1). Comparable figures were obtained in the 1977-1978 survey and indicate that districts continue making some type of provision for psychological services. As other data indicate, however, marked variability is evident in the manner of service delivery.

Delivery of Psychological Services

This variability is most evident in responses indicating the arrangement under which psychological services were obtained (see Table 2). Of the 119 rural districts responding, only one-half reported a full-time psychologist serving the district, about one-fourth reported a part-time psychologist serving the district, and one or more additional districts, and about one-fourth reported obtaining psychological services through a community mental health center or other agency. While the number of full-

time psychological staff has increased from 20 to 50 percent since the 1977-1978 survey, about 50% of Tennessee rural school districts still do not have a full-time psychological person on their staff.

In urban districts, over 90% of those responding to the 1982-1983 survey reported at least one full-time psychologist serving the district as a district employee. This too represents a noticeable increase over the 1977-1978 data, when 69% of urban districts reported full-time psychological staff.

Numbers of Providers and Employment Arrangements

The data (1982-1983) indicate there are about 364 persons providing psychological services in the reporting Tennessee school districts (see Table 3), with the manner in which these individuals are employed (in terms of FTEs) showing a clear trend according to district size (see Table 4).

In the smallest rural districts, about 70% of these persons were contracted on a $\frac{1}{2}$ FTE basis (i.e.: one day per week). In districts of 1,000 - 5,000 students, about 41% of the psychological personnel were still contracted on a $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ FTE basis, but about 50% of these districts also reported personnel contracted on a 1 FTE per week or greater basis. In the largest rural districts, 5,000 - 10,000 students, and in the urban districts, practically all psychological personnel were contracted on a 1 FTE per week or greater basis. While the 1982-1983 data show some improvement over that obtained in 1977-1978, the fact remains that in about fifty-three rural districts psychological services are available for three days per week or less, and in 32 of these the services are available for only one day per week. The number of children served in these rural districts is admittedly small, but most of these districts are county-wide which suggests that psychological personnel must spend a considerable time traveling between service centers, decreasing the amount of direct professional-client contact. One can further speculate that this time decrease may affect the type of

Table 2

Arrangement for Psychological Services in Tennessee School Districts: 1977-78 and 1982-83*

	Rural						Urban				Grand Total***	
	Less Than 1,000		1,000 - 5,000		5,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 15,000		Greater Than 15,000		77-78	82-83
	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83		
Fulltime Psychologist Serving Only The District.	0	5	8	29	14	23	1	3	8	6	23	66
Parttime Psychologist Serving Only The District	1	1	15	14	3	4	0	0	0	2	19	21
Parttime Psychologist Shared With Other District	8	12	21	14	6	5	1	0	0	0	36	31
Fulltime Services Through An- other Agency	**	0	**	0	**	1	**	0	**	0	**	1
Parttime Services Through An- other Agency	7	11	20	13	6	4	0	1	0	1	33	30
Other	1	2	7	1	3	3	2	0	2	2	15	8

*Will total to more than the number of districts returning questionnaires because districts could indicate more than one type of arrangement in obtaining psychological services.

**Not an option in the 1977-1978 survey.

***Rural and Urban districts combined.

Table 3

Number of Persons Providing Psychological Services in Tennessee School Districts: 1982-83*

	Rural			Urban	
	Less Than 1,000	1,000 - 5,000	5,000 - 10,000	10,000 - 15,000	Greater Than 15,000
	82-83	82-83	82-83	82-83	82-83
Number of Districts Responding to Question	28	58	24	3	7
Number of Persons Providing Psycho- logical Services	42	115	70	12	124.5
Mean Number of Providers Per District	1.50	1.94	2.92	4.00	17.79

*This question was not part of the 1977-1978 survey.

Table 4

Employment Arrangements (in FTEs) for Persons Providing Psychological Services to Tennessee School Districts: 1977-78 and 1982-83

	Rural						Urban				Grand Total*	
	Less Than 1,000		1,000 - 5,000		5,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 15,000		Greater Than 15,000		77-78	82-83
	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83		
0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
1/5	12	19	21	10	1	2	0	0	0	0	34	31
2/5	1	1	10	14	4	0	1	0	0	0	16	15
3/5	0	1	13	4	5	1	1	0	0	0	19	6
4/5	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	1
1	0	4	7	15	9	9	1	0	0	0	17	28
Greater Than 1 FTE	0	1	2	14	4	16	0	3	8	7	14	41
Unspecified	2	3	10	3	4	0	0	0	1	0	17	6

*Rural and Urban districts combined.

test batteries employed, the amount of time available for adequate therapeutic intervention, teacher contacts, parent conferences, etc.

Adequacy of Services and Additional Needs

Administrators were also asked to indicate the adequacy or inadequacy of the quantity of psychological services available in their districts (see Table 5). About 39% of rural and 70% of urban administrators reported the

quantity of services as inadequate. These percentages were fairly uniform across all rural and urban district sizes. An additional question requested the administrators to specify (in FTEs) the additional staff needed to meet present requirements. The number of additional staff, not surprisingly, appears to be a positive function of district size. With the exception of the smallest districts (i.e.: less than 1,000 students), the mean additional FTEs needed all fall above 1 FTE per district with the urban districts reporting a mean additional need for about 4.00 and 7.75

Table 5

Quantitative Adequacy of Psychological Services in Tennessee School Districts: 1977-78 and 1982-83

	Rural						Urban				Grand Total*	
	Less Than 1,000		1,000 - 5,000		5,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 15,000		Greater Than 15,000		77-78	82-83
	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83		
Service Adequate At This Time	12	19	32	39	15	14	0	0	3	3	62	75
Service Inadequate At This Time	4	10	32	22	10	14	4	3	6	4	56	53
Unspecified	1	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	1
Mean Additional FTEs Needed Per District	0.32	0.71	0.68	1.05	1.06	1.66	1.25	4.00	9.30	7.75	1.68	1.81

*Rural and Urban districts combined.

Table 6

Actual Position Vacancies for Psychological Personnel
in Tennessee School Districts: 1977-78 and 1982-83

	Rural						Urban				Grand Total*	
	Less Than 1,000		1,000 - 5,000		5,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 15,000		Greater Than 15,000			
	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83
No Staff Vacancy	14	26	58	59	26	25	3	3	8	5	109	118
Staff Vacancy	3	3	6	3	2	3	1	0	1	2	13	11

*Rural and Urban districts combined.

FTEs per district. The total *additional* FTEs reported as needed by these 53 administrators to meet their psychological service needs is 96.44. The desire for more staff appears to be present but, as the data below indicate, the actual occurrence of position openings is small. In our earlier survey (1977-1978), 44% of rural and 77% of urban administrators indicated the quantity of their psychological services were inadequate, and went on to specify that 82.80 FTE personnel were needed across the state to correct the staffing deficiency. These figures are quite close to those obtained in 1982-1983. It appears that administrators' perception of quantitative inadequacy in their psychological services has been fairly consistent over the five year time span and the number of additional psychological staff they need equally consistent over the same time frame.

Actual Position Vacancies

With all 129 districts responding, only about 7.5% of rural and 20% of urban districts indicated vacancies for the 1982-1983 school year (see Table 6). This involved 10 vacancies in the rural districts and 3 vacancies in the urban districts. It is clear that very few psychological positions were available in the school districts of this state at the time of the survey and, of those that were indicated, a fair number were for less than full-time personnel. These findings are particularly discouraging for at least two reasons. First, while a reasonably large number of both rural and urban administrators indicated that the amount of psychological services they are currently receiving is inadequate to meet their needs, the commitment and/or funding to hire additional professional psychological staff does not appear to be present. Secondly, the number of job openings observed in the 1982-1983 survey is below that observed for the 1977-1978 school year though perceived additional staff need is about the same for the two surveys. These few openings that are available quite probably involve situations where staff retire, leave to continue their education, move out of state, etc., reflecting replacement rather than any expansion of psychological services. Also, of direct concern to school psychology training program directors, it appears

that more than enough graduates are produced by in-state programs alone to easily absorb the number of job openings reported available.

Credentialing of Psychological Personnel

When asked to indicate what types of credentials (i.e.: certification via State Department of Education or licensure as a psychologist or psychological examiner via State Board of Healing Arts) were held by the persons providing psychological services, responses of both rural and urban administrators indicated a mixture of the two types of professional credentials (see Table 7). One hundred and ten rural districts that responded to this question reported a total of 227 persons providing psychological services. Of that number, about 61% held school psychologist certification from the State Department of Education, about 23% were licensed as doctoral level psychologists by the Board of Healing Arts, and about 30% were licensed as master's level psychological examiners by the Board of Healing Arts. The 10 urban districts that responded to this question reported a total of 136.5 persons providing psychological services. Of that number, about 65% held school psychologist certification, about 13% were licensed as psychologists, and about 41% were licensed as psychological examiners.

It is clear from these figures that dual credentialing is not uncommon, though it is impossible from the present data to delineate the exact percentage of the doctoral level psychologists or masters level psychological examiners who also hold school psychologist certification or vice versa. The mixture of both certified and licensed persons providing psychological services to the Tennessee school districts continues the general situation evident in the 1977-1978 survey. Though the two sets of data are here not exactly comparable because of changes in the wording of the question in the 1982-1983 survey, it does appear that the number of persons holding certification has increased noticeably in the five year period. This would suggest that administrators' preference to hire persons trained specifically in school psychology (see discussion below) is being carried through in hiring decisions.

Table 7

Credentialing of Psychological Personnel Serving Tennessee School Districts: 1982-83* **

	Rural			Urban		Grand Total***	
	Less Than	1,000 - 5,000	5,000 - 10,000	10,000 - 15,000	Greater Than		
Certified As A School Psychologist By State Board of Education	22	74	42	10	79		227
Licensed As A Psychologist By Board of Healing Arts	8	33	12	0	18		71
Licensed As A Psychological Ex- aminer By Board of Healing Arts	11	31	27	3	53		125

*May total greater than the number of persons providing service since personnel may hold dual credentials.

**Data for 1977-78 not directly comparable because of change in wording for 1982-83 survey.

***Rural and Urban districts combined.

*Desired Entry Level of Training
for Psychological Personnel*

Administrators were also asked what level of training seemed most appropriate to them for the personnel pro-

viding psychological services in their district (see Table 8). Both rural and urban districts were in general agreement, with about 65% of the rural and 90% of the urban districts indicating either a master's degree or master's degree with additional training as the desired education

Table 8

Desired Entry Level of Training for Psychological Personnel in Tennessee School Districts: 1977-78 and 1982-83*

	Rural						Urban				Grand Total**	
	Less Than 1,000		1,000 - 5,000		5,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 15,000		Greater Than 15,000			
	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83
Bachelors Degree Plus Certain Graduate Courses	6	3	7	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	14	5
Master Degree	5	8	29	18	17	9	0	1	4	4	55	40
Masters Degree Plus Additional Courses	5	7	15	20	5	15	4	1	3	3	32	46
Educational Specialist	***	4	***	8	***	3	***	0	***	2	***	17
Doctoral Degree	1	2	9	12	2	4	0	0	1	1	13	17
Other	0	1	2	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	5
Unspecified	0	1	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	5	3

*May total to more than the total number of districts since a small number of administrators indicated more than one entry level of training.

**Rural and Urban districts combined.

***Not an option in the 1977-78 survey.

Table 9

Desirability of School Psychology Training & Certification
in Personnel Employed by Tennessee School Districts: 1977-78 and 1982-83

	Rural						Urban				Grand Total*	
	Less Than 1,000		1,000 - 5,000		5,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 15,000		Greater Than 15,000		77-78	82-83
	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83	77-78	82-83		
Administrators Indicating "yes"	15	28	54	55	20	26	4	3	8	6	101	118
Administrators Indicating "no"	1	0	5	4	3	2	0	0	1	1	10	7
Unspecified	1	1	5	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	11	4

* Rural and Urban districts combined.

level. About one-third of the rural respondents also indicated that they would prefer their psychological personnel trained at the specialist or doctoral level, a trend also evident in the urban districts. The data reveal a shift from that obtained in the 1977-1978 survey, at which time the desired training level was generally lower, with most districts preferring only a master's degree (with no additional training) and 12% of rural districts indicating the bachelors degree (with certain graduate courses) as appropriate. In discussing our 1977-1978 survey findings, we felt the desired training level quite probably reflected a limited role perception of school psychologists as largely psychometric in nature. Even though it now appears that the desired educational level has increased over the five year period, we have no data to support a contention that role perceptions are broadening. It may well be that educational levels reported as desired by administrators for their psychological personnel reflect their awareness of the typical level of training of most job applicants, rather than expectations that higher degreed individuals will be able or allowed to expand the range of psychological services offered.

Desirability of School Psychologist Certification

In response to a separate question, administrators indicated a clear preference for psychological personnel whose training had been specifically in school psychology at a university officially approved by the State Department of Education (see Table 9). This was evident across all districts, with about 92% of rural and 90% of urban districts indicating in the affirmative. These figures are almost identical to those obtained in the 1977-1978 survey and seem to indicate that even though an upward shift in the desired level of training has taken place, administrators also continue to desire psychological personnel trained specifically in school psychology.

Discussion

The manpower data gathered in this survey clarify the

present school psychology manpower situation in rural and urban school districts in Tennessee, as well as provide a comparison of how these parameters have changed over the last five years.

While much of the data show agreement between rural and urban districts, and with the data obtained in the 1977-1978 survey, some apparent changes are observed over the last five years. About 50% of rural and 90% of urban Tennessee districts report at least one FTE psychologist providing services to the children of their district. Additionally, there has been an increase in the percentage of providers who hold school psychologist certification in addition to any license held. Also, both rural and urban administrators indicate a desire for their psychological personnel to have a higher overall level of training, with well over half preferring at least a master's degree with additional training and about one-third preferring specialist or doctoral level training.

On a somber note, while almost 100% of districts report availability of psychological services, a substantial number of both rural and urban administrators voice discontent with the quantity of psychological services they are currently receiving, as they did in 1977-1978 as well. However, the comparative lack of current position openings continues to suggest the availability of, or resolve to commit, funds for new staff is not present.

Since the initial study, a significant legislative plan has been approved in Tennessee which has implications for the practice of school psychology. In early 1984, the governor's Master Teacher Plan was approved by the legislature. Included in the plan is a step-series of evaluations with salary incentives for certificated teachers. Since the new law affects all certified personnel, school psychologists in the future will be expected to comply with the major aspects of the program. The Master School Psychologist Program (MSPP) has been interpreted to be available only to full-time and state department of education certificated school psychologists. Thus, entrance into the program, step-evaluations and financial increments on the career ladder will be made available only to the school psychologists in those districts employ-

ing full-time services and from certificated persons. It is unknown as to what impact this will have upon district administrators seeking school psychologists, since the incentives to the administrator or district to do so are far less clear than the incentives to the participating school psychologist. At the very least it can be anticipated that the practitioners themselves will be placing priority on obtaining certification (if not already achieved) and full-time positions (unless for other reasons they prefer part-time employment). It is unlikely that persons working part-time to several districts would be eligible, even if the total working time equals a full-time equivalent. It is possible, however, that persons employed full-time in some type of joint *agreement* among the districts could be eligible despite the part-time nature of their services to each participant district. Future survey research on manpower, therefore, will likely observe: 1) Further increased full-time services in the rural districts, especially those close to full-time at present; 2) the establishment of joint agreements in rural areas for the delivery of school psychological and perhaps other specialized services (at present almost no such agreements exist in the state for any services); 3) an increase in the number of practitioners holding State Department of Education certification as a school psychologist regardless of other

credentials obtained from the State Board of Healing Arts.

Since similar incentive programs and accountability measures are being considered in other states (e.g.: Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi), the manpower implications will have much wider influence than to the manpower situation in Tennessee alone.

References

1. Brown, D., & Lindstrom, J. The training of school psychologists in the United States: an overview. *Psychology in the Schools*, 1978, 15, 37-44.
2. Fagan, T.K., & DeVore, J.E. A survey of school psychology manpower characteristics and needs in rural and urban Tennessee. *Research in Rural Education*, 1983, 1, 67-70.
3. Farling, W., & Hoedt, K. *National Survey of School Psychologists (Project No. 9-E-150)*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1971.
4. Kicklighter, R. School psychology in the United States: a quantitative survey. *Journal of School Psychology*, 1976, 14, 151-156.