

PHYLLIS PARO

State Delegate Candidate: Vermont

Statement 2

NASP Leaders have adopted five strategic goals that guide the association's work. In your state, what are some gains being made in school psychology practice related to these goals, and what are some pressing challenges?

As I sit here contemplating the NASP strategic goals, I find myself focusing on the last 6-7 years – looking at the growth we have made in moving them forward and determining where the need continues to be (both within the organization itself, but also within the state and other stakeholders).

One of Vermont's greatest gains was the implementation of a School Psychology Training Program at Castleton University (thanks to the tireless effort of our current Vermont Delegate – Shannon Newell). Until that point, the majority of our school psychologists came from out of state programs or graduated from the clinical psychology program at St. Michael's College; taking the additional courses necessary to meet the AOE School Psychologist Endorsement guidelines (at that time). Unfortunately, even with this program, Vermont (like many other states) is currently facing the real and pressing challenge of a shortage of school psychologists. We have positions open but cannot fill them fast enough. This places a huge burden on those who are currently working in the schools; with the bottom line being that many of us are set in the role of evaluator with little time to expand our roles to meet the mental and behavioral needs of our students, families, and staff.

Another of our significant gains centered around the update of the School Psychologist Endorsement. In 2015, members of VASP were invited to “sit at the table” with members of the AOE to begin the process of rewriting the licensure requirements. From these meetings, the NASP Practice Model was adopted as the guideline for licensing. Unfortunately, there are still many things happening within the state (including the current changes to SLD determination and Adverse Effect) where we have had to make some noise and invite ourselves to be a part of the decision-making groups. This is an area that continues to be a challenge and hopefully will be spearheaded by our members who attended the recent PPI. Both are eager to get started in reaching out to a variety of stakeholders including the Vermont Legislature, Vermont AOE; guiding organizations of Superintendents, Special Education Directors, and Principals; Local Mental Health Agencies; Physicians; and anyone else who has a stake in the mental and behavioral health of our youth. Although progress has been made, there is still much to be done in this area as our schools and state face the very real repercussions of an ongoing pandemic, as well as issues of inequality, poverty, violence, racism (yes, even here in Vermont), and Special Education laws that are being changed.

Finally, as an organization, VASP has worked incredibly hard at making our organization a strong and vital presence within the state. We are working to bring in new members (and keep the older ones), connecting members from various parts of the state to one another so no one feels like they are working in isolation, and providing both professional development and the ability to take on leadership positions to all who are interested.