



**MASP**

Manitoba Association of School Psychologists

# SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY IN MANITOBA

## Student Ratios and Current Practices

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# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>07</b>
<b>METHOD</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>CONTACT INFORMATION</b>	<b>28</b>



# Executive Summary

This report advocates for the school psychology profession in Manitoba by presenting an analysis of current school psychologist to student ratios and outlining prevailing practices within the field. School psychologists play a crucial role in supporting students' academic, behavioural, social, and emotional growth, serving as the primary mental health experts in educational settings.

## Introduction

School psychology in Manitoba is a dynamic and integral profession, uniquely positioned to assess and diagnose neurodevelopmental conditions and address a broad spectrum of student needs. School psychologists' responsibilities have evolved from primarily special education assessments to include comprehensive mental health interventions and crisis response. Currently, the recommended school psychologist to student ratio is 1:500 to 1:1000, but Manitoba has historically had a much higher ratio, which hinders service delivery. Additionally, Manitoba is one of the only Canadian provinces without regulatory oversight for school psychologists, leading to ongoing advocacy for professional inclusion. This project aims to assess current practices in the field and the ratios of school psychologists to students across Manitoba. The purpose of this project is to advocate for adequate psychological support for student needs.

## Method

From October 2023 to May 2024, data was collected through direct communication with student services coordinators and directors of clinical services across 38 Manitoba school divisions. Additionally, an online survey was distributed to current and former MASP members to gather insights into the practices of school psychologists. Responses were obtained from 35 coordinators/directors and 75 school psychologists (representing approximately half of the profession), providing comprehensive coverage of the province's educational landscape.

## Results

The analysis revealed significant disparities in school psychologist to student ratios across Manitoba's regions, with an overall ratio of 1:1652. The Northern/Remote region exhibited the highest ratio at 1:2526, in stark contrast to the Central region's 1:1258 ratio. These discrepancies indicate a pronounced inequity in service availability, particularly affecting remote and Indigenous communities. Survey results highlighted that school psychologists are engaged in tiered service delivery, encompassing direct student interventions, whole-class and school-wide programs, and system-wide advocacy and education. However, high caseloads limit their capacity to provide individual intervention consistently.

## Discussion

Manitoba's current ratio of one school psychologist per 1652 students is far greater than the Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) recommended range of 1:500 to 1:1000. This ratio has remained largely unchanged since 2001, despite the increasing demand for diverse psychological services. Canada-wide comparisons is complicated by limited data on other current provincial ratios. Additionally, the data collection methods used in previously published research relied on subjective interpretations and responses to school psychologist to student ratios within one's workplace. The elevated ratio in Manitoba, especially in Northern and remote areas, impacts the ability of school psychologists to deliver comprehensive services, potentially exacerbating student needs and increasing long-term demands on mental health systems. Concerns about limited access, particularly for Indigenous communities, echo previous findings and highlight the need for psychologists to adhere to the CPA's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations. Recent reports from Ontario indicate that high caseloads hinder psychologists from engaging in broader system-wide interventions, with many focusing primarily on assessments due to high student ratios. As school psychologists in Manitoba face escalating demands for specialized assessments tied to new guidelines for modification and individualized programming,

their capacity to deliver comprehensive services diminishes. This shortage limits meaningful connections with students and families, impacting the overall effectiveness of support provided. The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified the role of school psychologists, particularly in crisis response and threat risk assessments, highlighting the urgent need for adequate staffing. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the mental health and educational outcomes of Manitoba's children and youth.

## Limitations

One limitation of the survey data is the potential bias inherent in the sample, as respondents may not fully represent all school psychologists in Manitoba. Self-reported data on time spent on various work activities may also skew results due to inaccuracies in estimation. Since the 75 respondents account for approximately half of the province's school psychologists, the findings are reasonably indicative of broader trends. Additionally, ratio data collection was constrained by the lack of publicly available school psychology full-time equivalent (FTE) information and protected data for federally funded First Nations schools. These factors may affect the accuracy of the reported ratios and the generalizability of the findings.

## Future Directions

Future efforts should focus on systematically tracking school psychologist to student ratios across Canada. Tracking and publishing these ratios could allow provinces to learn from one another. In addition, investigating the regulatory frameworks in place for contract-based psychological services in Manitoba schools would be helpful to understand variances in professional oversight. Lastly, future research could examine the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on school psychology practices in Manitoba.

## Conclusion

The current school psychologist to student ratio in Manitoba is higher than recommended, impeding the profession's ability to effectively support students, families, and school communities. The need is even greater in Northern and remote regions. Increasing the number of school psychologists to achieve recommended ratios is imperative for enhancing educational outcomes and fostering a supportive school environment. Strengthening relationships and early intervention strategies through adequate staffing can have far-reaching effects on the wellbeing of Manitoba's children and youth.

# School Psychology in Manitoba

## Student Ratios and Current Practices

School psychology in Manitoba is a thriving and evolving profession. As Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (n.d.-c) describes, “school psychology is a specialized area of practice within the field of psychology. School psychologists have the clinical skills and knowledge base to help students in Manitoba schools succeed academically, behaviourally, socially and emotionally” (para. 1). School psychologists in Manitoba adhere to the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA)’s ethics and guidelines in addition to the Manitoba Education Professional Certification standards (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.-c). Despite being an American organization, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is another resource on which Manitoba school psychologists rely, and the NASP domains of competence are often referenced when examining the role of school psychologists. For example, the Manitoba Association of School Psychologists (MASP) website contains links to both the CPA professional standards documents and the NASP practice models (MASP, n.d.-b).

School psychologists provide accessible, publicly-funded psychological services to children in Manitoba (CPA, 2022). Moreover, they are the only school-based employees who can assess for and diagnose a range of neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, intellectual developmental disorders, and specific learning disorders (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia). This has become especially relevant with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning’s (2023b) recently released guidelines for modification and individualized programming planning for students. Additional details about the impacts of these recommendations on school psychologists’ roles will be covered in the discussion; however, it is important to note that school psychologists are the only school-based employees able to answer the question of eligibility through formalized assessment for students seeking modifications or individualized programming.

Previously, the role of school psychologists heavily involved testing for special education placement and eligibility (CPA, 2007). Over the past decades, the role has shifted to include complex assessment and diagnosis of various mental health and developmental disorders, intervention and prevention activities, and service delivery across all three tiers of practice (discussed in more detail below; CPA, 2007).

School psychologists are the most highly trained mental health experts in schools. In addition to knowledge about prevention, intervention, and evaluation for a number of childhood problems, school psychologists have unique expertise regarding issues of learning and schools. It is [school psychologists'] ethical responsibility to become involved in programs aimed at problems that are broader than assessing and diagnosing what is wrong with a child (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; as cited in CPA, 2007, p.1).

Given the complex nature of school psychologists' roles in Canada, ratio recommendations have been provided to ensure appropriate prevention and intervention activities can be carried out to enhance students' social-emotional and learning potential (CPA, 2022). The CPA (2022) recommends a school psychologist to student ratio of 1:500 to 1:1000, which is consistent with the NASP 2010 recommendation (as cited in CPA Section on Educational and School Psychology, 2014). In 2020, NASP's Professional Standards document recommends an even smaller ratio, stating:

**The ratio of school psychologists to students is a critical aspect of providing high-quality, comprehensive services and should not exceed one school psychologist for every 500 students.** In some situations, the school psychologist-to-student **ratio may need to be lower.** These include, but are not limited to, situations in which school psychologists are assigned to work primarily with student populations that have intensive special needs (e.g., **students with significant emotional or behavioral disorders, or students with developmental disorders**) or within communities that are **disproportionately affected by poverty, trauma, and environmental stressors.** Lower ratios may also be required when school psychologists are itinerant, recognizing the demands inherent in traveling from school to school and in **developing and maintaining collaborative relationships in multiple sites** (NASP, 2020, p. 12).



With these recommendations in mind, Manitoba would do well to aim for a maximum ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students. A ratio of 1:1000 would be acceptable in situations where services are less comprehensive and span fewer tiers of delivery. Historically, the ratio in Manitoba was estimated to be one school psychologist for every 1,600 students (Bartell, 2001). Given the increased breadth and complexity of a school

psychologist's role today, it would be anticipated that the provincial ratio has fewer students per school psychologist today than 20 years ago.

Although not the focus of the present project, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the lasting impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the role of school psychologists. In addition to academic and mental health concerns, one post-pandemic change that continues to impact school psychologists is the increase in frequency and intensity of violent threats across North American schools (Cameron, 2021, 2022). The Center for Trauma Informed Practices (CTIP), which oversees Violent Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) training (a protocol used in many Manitoba schools) indicates that, in some regions, VTRAs increased by 500% from September to November 2021 compared to pre-pandemic rates (Cameron, 2021). Typically, school psychologists make up an important part of the crisis response teams in school divisions and are often directly involved with threat/risk assessments, regardless of the specific protocol. For more information about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the profession, readers are encouraged to consult school psychology journals, such as *School Psychology Review* and *Canadian Journal of School Psychology* for various articles on the topic.

In Manitoba, school psychologists continue to practice under an exemption clause in which certification is provided through Manitoba's Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning rather than a regulatory body such as a College of Psychologists. The volunteer organization MASP has

been advocating for the inclusion of school psychologists in a regulatory college for decades (Alper & Hanson, 2023). Mallin et al. (2016) optimistically wrote about a pending agreement between MASP, the Psychological Association of Manitoba (PAM), and the Manitoba Government to include school psychologists in an inclusive College of Psychologists. In 2024, such an agreement has yet to be established. Today, Manitoba remains one of the only provinces in Canada in which school psychologists are exempt from regulation.

Ultimately, Manitoba requires adequate amounts of practicing school psychologists to meet the mental health, academic, and behavioural needs of students. This project was undertaken to gather information about the current practices of school psychologists in Manitoba and gain an understanding of the ratios of school psychologists to students across the province.

## Method

From October 2023 to May 2024, the MASP research assistant contacted the student services coordinators or directors of clinical services for each of the 38 school divisions<sup>1</sup> in Manitoba by email and/or phone. Each director was asked to provide the school psychology full-time equivalent (FTE) for their division in the 2022–23 school year among other data. Responses were received from 35 directors/superintendents for the 38 divisions. School psychology FTE information for the remaining three divisions were provided by school psychologists employed in those divisions. Enrollment information for all Manitoba school divisions in the 2022–23 school year was accessed via the Government of Manitoba website (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023a).

In addition to ratio data, an online survey was disseminated to all current and recent former MASP members via the organization's email list, which asked about the activities carried out by school psychologists in recent years. Any provisionally or permanently certified school psychologist currently working in a direct service role in Manitoba was invited to participate in the survey.

1. School divisions refers to the 36 divisions that are divided into five broad regions in addition to a Francophone school division (Division scolaire franco-manitobaine; DSFM) and Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), which provides clinical services to many federally funded First Nations schools in the province.

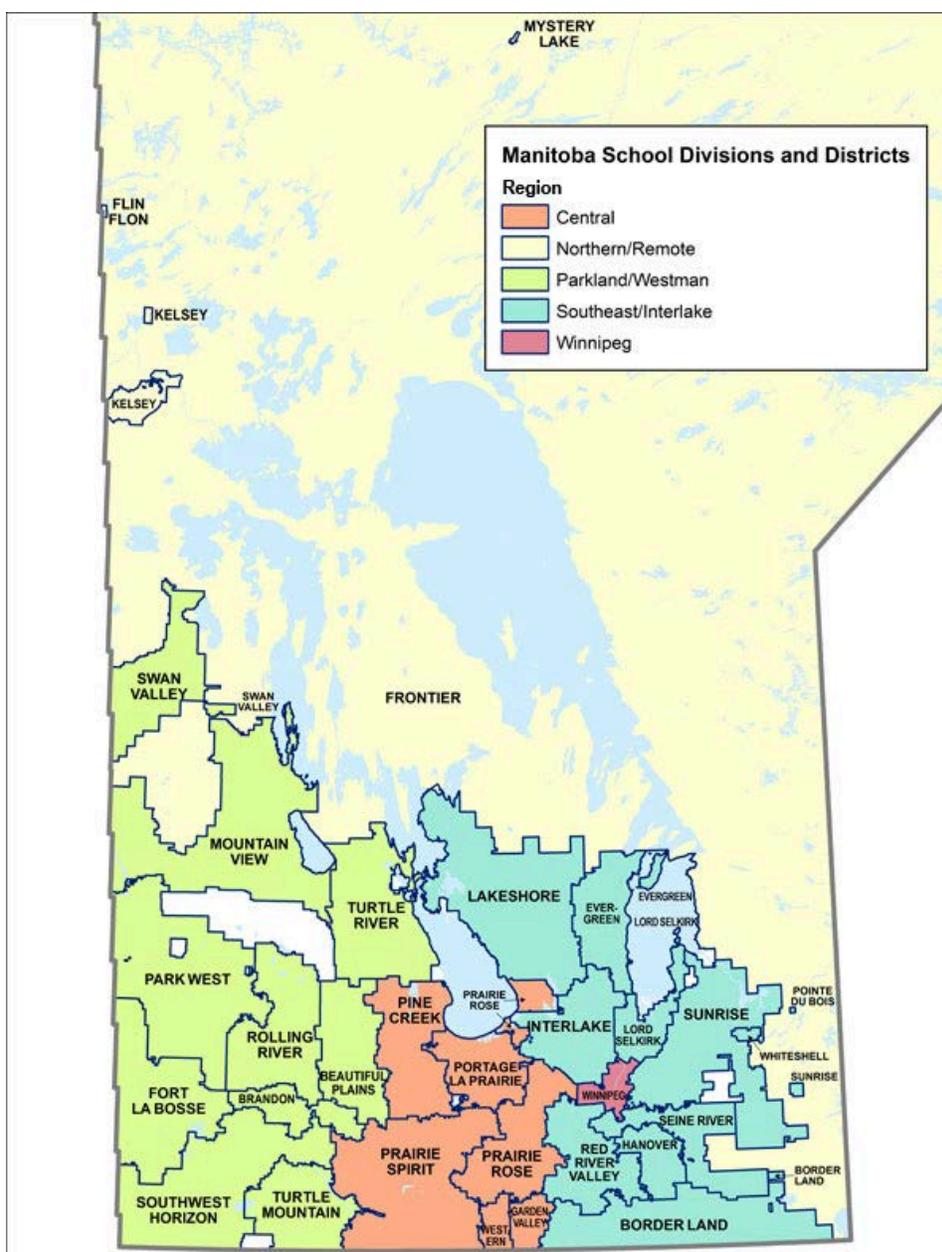
# Results

## School Psychologist to Student Ratios

The five regions of Manitoba (shown in Figure 1) have discrepant ratios of school psychologists to students. Table 1 summarizes the results.

### Figure 1

*Manitoba's School Divisions and Districts by Region (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.-a).*



**Table 1***Ratios of School Psychologists to Students*

Region	Total School Psych FTE	Total Enrolment <sup>1</sup>	Ratio
Central	12.45	15,662*	<b>1:1258</b>
Winnipeg	73.21	112,544*	<b>1:1537</b>
SouthEast/Interlake	20.55	31,804	<b>1:1548</b>
Parkland/Westman	14.30	24,783*	<b>1:1733</b>
DSFM	3.30	5,898	<b>1:1787</b>
Northern/Remote	4.78	12,076	<b>1:2526</b>
<b>Overall Manitoba</b>	<b>128.59<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>212,443<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>1:1652</b>

*Note.* 1. Enrollment numbers marked with an asterisk include independent schools that are served by school division-based school psychologists from that region. 2. Does not include the MFNERC FTE. 3. Includes all independent schools and homeschools in Manitoba, whether or not school psychology services are provided through a school division. Does not include enrollment for First Nations schools.

The Northern/Remote region of Manitoba has a ratio over double that of the lowest region, Central. In addition, there are nearly 1000 more students per school psychologist in the Northern/Remote area than there are on average across the province. This highlights a discrepancy in the service available to students living in Northern and remote communities in Manitoba compared to those in Southern and urban areas. Similarly, although ratios could not be calculated for First Nations schools served by Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) school psychologists, on average, each full-time MFNERC school psychologist serves eight schools; whereas the majority of full-time school psychologists (excluding MFNERC) who responded to the survey serve between 3-5 schools (27 of 44, 61%).

In addition to school psychologists hired directly by school divisions, some student services directors shared that their schools received contracted psychological services. It was beyond the scope of the current project to explore the nature of these contracted services, but additional examination would be warranted. One school division highlighted that in addition to their school psychology team, they hired a behaviour analyst who worked alongside the school psychologists and was especially involved in programming for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other exceptional needs. Finally, some of the ratios for the 2022-23 school year were impacted by unfilled maternity leaves or unfilled positions in general in some rural and northern divisions. As per information shared by clinical directors, the 128.59 FTE corresponded to approximately 148 individual school psychologists (this number increases to 154 with the inclusion of MFNERC).

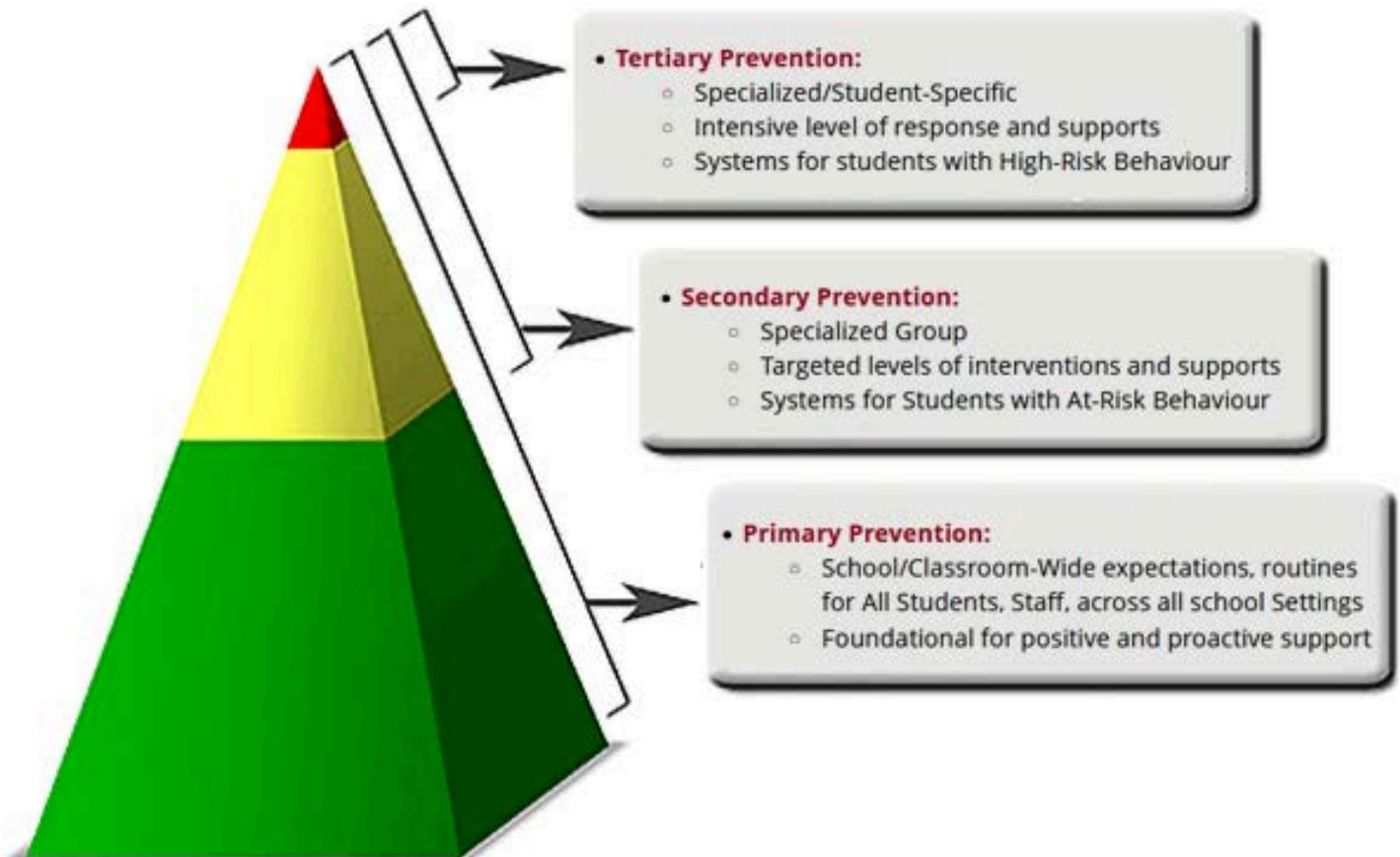
## Survey of School Psychologists

Seventy-five school psychologists completed the survey on current practices, which represents approximately half of all school psychologists working in Manitoba. Responses were received from across each of the five regions of Manitoba, as well as the DSFM and MFNERC. The proportions of respondents from each region loosely represented the true proportions of school psychologists across the province. For example, the Winnipeg region represents approximately 57% of the overall FTE for Manitoba and accounted for 59% of the survey responses.

The survey was based on the School Psychology: Practice Guidelines in Manitoba document, which can be found on the MASP website (<https://www.masp.mb.ca/>) under Standards and Evaluation (MASP, n.d.-a). Service delivery is divided into three tiers that correspond to Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning's (n.d.-b) Continuum of School-wide Instructional and Positive Behaviour Support (see Figure 2) and the Response to Intervention model (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2014). Readers are encouraged to reference the MASP guidelines document for details.

**Figure 2**

*Continuum of School-Wide Instructional and Positive Behaviour Support* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.-b, n.p.)



Overall, school psychologists reported overwhelming engagement within each of the three tiers of service delivery assessed.

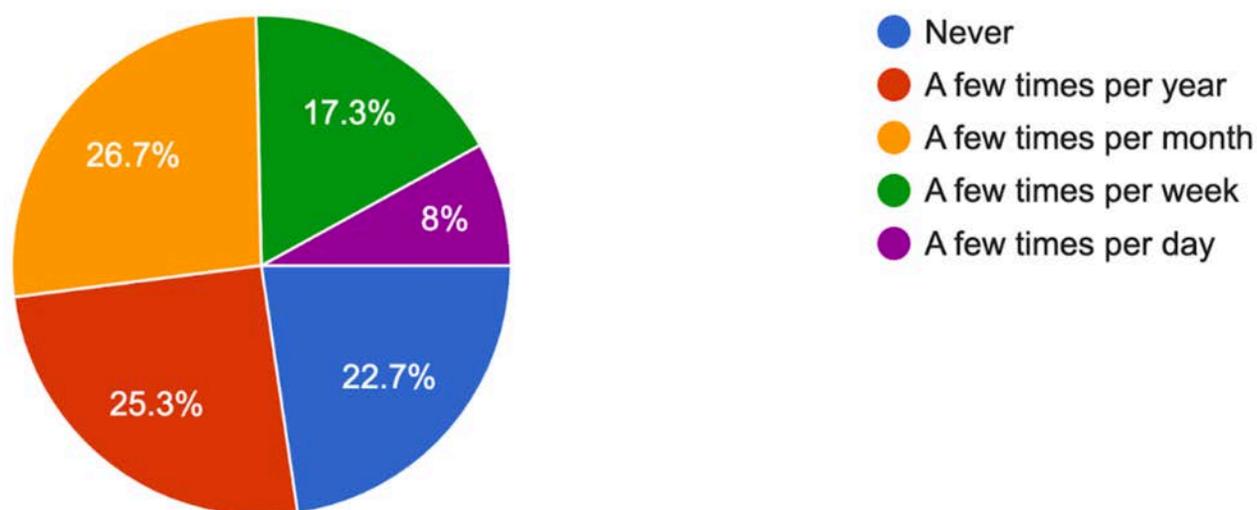
### *Tier 3: Student-Focused Direct and Indirect Services/Interventions*

In general, much of a school psychologist's role falls at the tier 3 level. Over 97% of respondents engage in the following activities at least a few times per month, many of whom engage in these activities weekly or daily: consultation with teachers and administrators regarding specific students, specialized psychological assessments, and program planning following assessments. Over 70% of respondents reported engaging in caregiver collaboration and goal setting at least a few times per month. While all respondents indicated they make referrals to other agencies and professionals as needed, most respondents (60%) reported doing so a few times per year. Over 98% of

school psychologists reported engaging in interagency networking, with most (84%) at frequencies between a few times per month to a few times per year. Finally, the frequency of individual intervention or counselling yielded divided answers, illustrated in Figure 3 below.

### Figure 3

*School psychologists' responses (n = 75) to how frequently, on average, they engage in individual intervention/counselling with students.*



Approximately half of the school psychologists reported engaging in individual interventions with students a few times per month or more, while the other half either stated they never do or only do a few times per year. Looking at rates of direct intervention or helping design interventions for various concerns, over 80% of respondents reported doing so multiple times per year. The most common areas of concern were in academics, inattention/hyperactivity/impulsivity, and externalizing behaviours (such as aggression, violence, swearing, and fleeing). Less common areas for intervention were for suicidality, anxiety, and depression, although at least 88% of school psychologists endorsed being involved in these types of interventions from time-to-time if not every school year.

In terms of the types of assessments that school psychologists perform, all respondents indicated that they assess for Intellectual Developmental Disorder, with 88% indicating doing so many times per year. Similarly, 96% of school psychologists reported assessing for Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs) at least once per year, with most doing many SLD assessments in a year. Over 90% of respondents reported assessing for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) at least once per year. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and mood-related disorders, such as anxiety and depressive disorders, were less

common assessment queries. Ninety-six percent of school psychologists noted assessing for mood-related disorders at least from time to time, with most doing so at least once per year. Seventy-nine percent of respondents reported that they assess for ASD at least from time-to-time, while 21% indicated that they never assess for ASD. It is important to note that qualitatively, some school psychologists clarified that as competencies of diagnoses are self-determined based on many factors, including access to training, tools, or numbers of students presenting with this need, they might assess or screen for mood-related disorders and ASD, but would not provide these diagnoses. Qualitatively, many school psychologists shared that they screen for ASD and then refer to an external agency, such as Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre (MATC), for the diagnosis. Others shared that they are currently learning assessment tools for ASD and plan to start assessing for and diagnosing ASD in the near future. Finally, one area that has demanded increased school psychology involvement following the COVID-19 pandemic is threat/risk assessment. School psychologists work across numerous domains at the tier 3 level. As one school psychologist wrote,

“

Our caseloads are enormous, however we get to see a very wide variety of cases and I am amazed every year, if not every month, with the new and unique student profiles and needs. It requires significant flexibility and personal learning outside of work hours, but the level of growth in competency in many areas is really rewarding.

”

### *Tier 2: Whole Class and School-Wide Interventions*

The most common tier 2 activities include collaboration with teachers and administrators to support the inclusion of exceptional students within the school, and consultation with teachers and administrators about learning and behaviours commonly associated with various identified learning, social-emotional, and behavioural concerns. Over 97% of school psychologists reported engaging in these types of consultation at least a few times per year. Other frequent activities at this tier include liaison with and/or serving on school-based problem-solving teams, best practices support by providing information related to current research on interventions in the area of children's and adolescents' mental health and various exceptionalities,

and providing parenting programs and staff in-service educational opportunities. Over 85% of respondents indicated that they complete these activities at least a few times per year. Eighty percent of school psychologists endorsed engaging in prevention by advising on whole class and school-wide prevention and intervention programs at least a few times per year. Group interventions and behaviour skills development are carried out by 68% of school psychologists at least a few times per year. Just under half of school psychologists (49%) indicated that they participate in planning and implementing school-wide screening and assessment programs. Finally, postvention activities following tragic events that affect the school community, such as debriefing and supporting students and staff, monitoring students and staff, and supporting outside referrals where appropriate are reportedly expected of over 90% of school psychologists at least from time-to-time, if not every year, while 15% of respondents indicated that they provide postvention support many times within a school year. Additionally, many school psychologists reported supporting specialized programs/classrooms for students with various additional needs, such as life skills programs, off-campus programs for previously disengaged high school students, and therapeutic classrooms for children with trauma.

### *Tier 1: Division/System-Wide Interventions*

According to survey results, the most frequent tier 1 activities for school psychologists are advocacy for children and adolescents with learning, developmental, socioemotional, and behavioural exceptionalities and in-service education to teachers and administrators. Eighty-eight percent of respondents indicated their involvement with these activities at least a few times per year and many endorsed advocacy activities a few times per day. Moreover, supporting best practices by reviewing and providing information on educational and psychological research on topics of relevance to educators was another common activity, endorsed by 84% of respondents at least a few times per year. Less common yet relevant activities of school psychologists include (at least a few times per year): assisting in developing, implementing, or consulting with system-wide intervention programs (48%), networking by serving on multi-agency committees and programs and collaborating with various agencies in program planning and development (25%), outreach by developing and implementing inclusive, culturally responsive parenting programs and information on a variety of topics (21%), screening by developing and carrying out early screening programs in schools (19%), and evaluation by assisting with data collection and evaluation of system-wide interventions (16%).

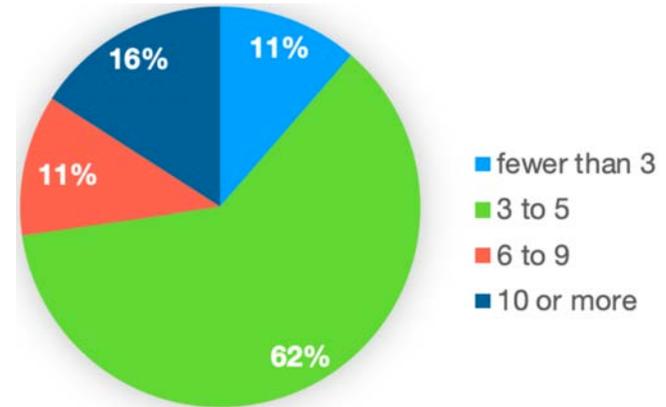
### Travelling to Schools

Most of the full-time school psychologists who completed the survey (n = 44) serve between three to five schools directly. Figure 4 displays the remaining results.

School psychologists were asked, on average, how far they need to travel from their division’s clinical office to their schools. Figure 5 displays the results.

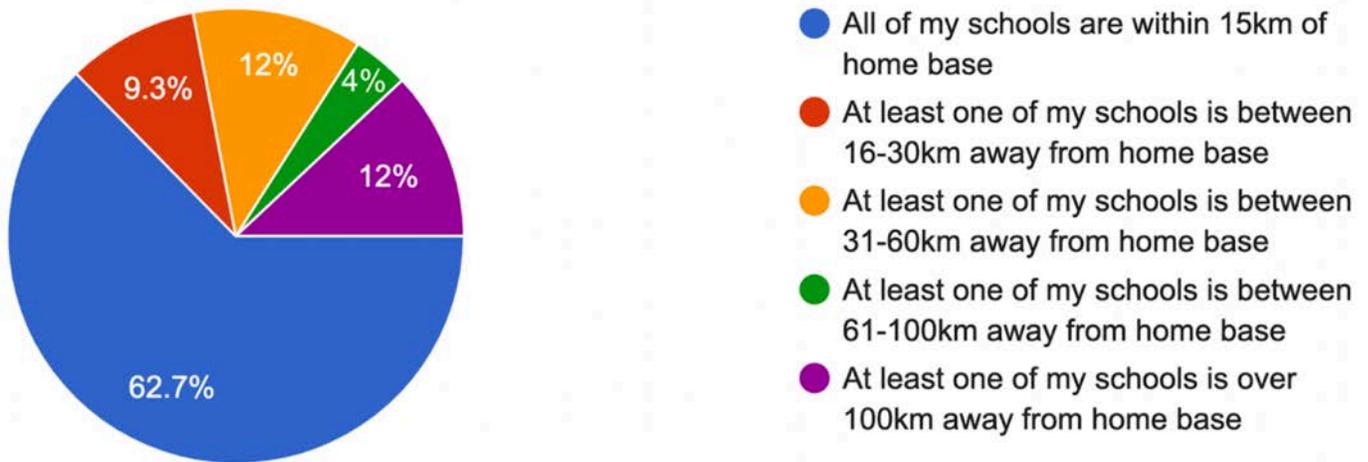
**Figure 4**

*Number of schools that full-time school psychologists (n = 44) serve directly.*



**Figure 5**

*Chart showing how far school psychologists (n = 75) travel to their schools.*



Many school psychologists who travel over 100 km to their schools shared that they try to do most of their driving before the school day to avoid it interfering with time with students and school staff. However, even with leaving early in the morning, many shared that the travel time cuts into their work hours. One MFNERC clinician indicated that they serve nine schools, five that are fly-in and four that are drive-in. The farthest school they serve requires two flights with an additional stopover to reach. This school psychologist shared that “flights are frequently delayed or cancelled, which results in disruptions of service. It also severely limits my ability to provide services to the school.” For school psychologists travelling long distances, they often require local accommodations for the days they spend in the community. Another school psychologist shared that they service

15 small schools that are between 25 to 75 km apart and often drive between two to three schools during the day. Some divisions allow for travel time as part of a clinician's work hours, while others require the clinician to spend the full school day in the school building. Additionally, it is important to note that the Franco-Manitoban school division, DSFM, spans the entire province geographically. DSFM school psychologists reported often travelling over 100 km to reach their schools.

## Discussion

Manitoba's ratio of one school psychologist for every 1652 students contrasts with ratios recommended for best practice ranging from 1:500 to 1:1000 (CPA, 2022; NASP, 2020). Moreover, Manitoba's overarching ratio of one school psychologist for every 1652 students has remained consistent since 2001, when Bartell (2001) estimated the ratio to be 1:1600. Considering the wide-ranging services currently provided by school psychologists, a lower school psychologist to student ratio than what existed over 20 years ago would have been expected to adequately meet the needs of students and school teams.

It was difficult to determine current ratios in other Canadian provinces for comparison, which could be due in part to the dissolution of the Canadian Association of School Psychologists in 2019, limiting national oversight and perspective of the profession (Macmillan, 2022). Some ratios were published online from previous years; for example, Saskatchewan and Ontario reported very high ratios of 1:2904 (2022-23) and 1:3448 (2017-18), respectively (Ontario Psychological Association, 2018 as cited in CPA, 2022; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2023). Lower ratios were reported in other provinces, such as British Columbia who was aiming for a ratio of 1:1800 in 2021, and Prince Edward Island having a 1:1700 ratio in 2019 if all school psychologist positions were filled, which was similar to Nova Scotia (BCTF, 2019; Campbell, 2019). It is important to note that each of these ratios was likely determined in a different way and, in most cases, the method was not reported, making it very difficult to compare our Manitoba 2022-23 ratio meaningfully to other school psychologist to student ratios across the country.

Previously published research reporting Canadian school psychologist ratios relied on self-report data from working school psychologists, who were asked to report on the "ratio of school psychologists to school-age children in your workplace" (Macmillan, 2022, p. 102). For example, the mean ratio derived by Jordan et al. (2009) came from the responses of 165 school psychologists which ranged from 10 to 40,000 clients reported per school psychologist. There were even three individuals who reported a ratio of 1:1,

which were excluded from the analysis as outliers (Jordan et al., 2009). This highlights that asking school psychologists to report on their own ratios within a workplace likely results in subjective interpretations of the question, leading to extremely discrepant answers, rather than reflecting true differences in school psychologist to student ratios. Jordan et al. highlight that “it is clear that we need a more efficient and effective way for school psychology practitioners to communicate and to be counted. From the survey, we still do not have a clear idea of the numbers of school psychology practitioners in Canada. However, there are a number of inconsistencies between the provinces that hamper the efforts to gain this knowledge” (p. 259).

Services provided by school psychologists also differ across provinces. In 2016, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Ontario were described as leaders in the provision of prevention and early intervention support by school psychologists, while this may not have been common practice in other provinces (Montreuil, 2016). Moreover, the recommended ratio differs based on services provided and populations served; when school psychologists work primarily with students who have profound additional needs or are impacted by poverty, trauma, and other societal factors, the recommended ratio is even lower than one school psychologist for 500 students (NASP, 2020). Although limited data were available in the Canadian context, NASP (2024) reported ratios by state from across the United States for the 2022–23 school year: the national ratio in the United States was 1:1119. When Manitoba’s ratio was 1:1652, only 16 out of 52 states (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) had higher ratios (NASP, 2024).

The same concerns with limited school psychology access in remote regions and Indigenous communities identified in the current project were previously discussed by Bartell (2001) in a Manitoba school psychology update written for the Canadian Journal of School Psychology. Psychologists working in Canada have a responsibility to align with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada’s recommendations regarding services for Indigenous communities (CPA Task Force, 2018). The CPA Task Force (2018) on Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Report underscores the necessity for psychologists to acknowledge the harms the profession has enacted on Indigenous peoples and carry out recommended accountable practices, such as appreciating the worth of Indigenous ways of knowing, general advocacy and cultural allyship, and increasing Indigenous representation in the profession. Numerous specific guiding principles are proposed and readers are encouraged to reference the report for details (CPA Task Force, 2018). The same disparity of service availability found in this project for children living in remote communities compared to urban centres is discussed in the CPA Task Force’s report. Specifically, the report states that psychologists have a responsibility to advocate for remote Indigenous communities to have increased access to relevant psychological services. Prioritizing

access to school psychology services in rural and remote areas would be a step toward reconciliation within our province.

In addition to the responsibility to Indigenous communities specifically, school psychologists are tasked with supporting best practices and appropriate education across school systems. For example, in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC, 2022) public inquiry into issues affecting children with reading disabilities, the role of the psychologist is emphasized in supporting the development of evidence-based universal screening and intervention. The OHRC report recognizes the constraints imposed on school psychologists given the limited resources, such as only a fraction of the students who would benefit from a psychological assessment being able to receive one, and the limits placed on school psychologists for becoming involved in other prevention and intervention activities when there are so many students who require specialized assessments. Similarly, People for Education (2024) recently released a report regarding access to special education in Ontario. This report cites low numbers of school psychologists as a major barrier for students being able to access special education services. As both of these Ontario reports highlight, school psychologists bring an expertise to the implementation of best practices in schools but are limited in the extent to which they can provide system-wide services given high individual caseloads (OHRC, 2022; People for Education, 2024). This can be seen in the Manitoba data from the current report, where only 48% of school psychologists are involved in developing, implementing, or consulting with system-wide intervention programs and even fewer participate in early screening programs (19%) and evaluation of system-wide interventions (16%). As one school psychologist wrote, "we are limited to an assessment-focused service delivery model which does not allow for participation in the follow-through of recommendations." Another school psychologist commented,

“

We are, and have been, short-staffed for a long time and so our roles have become very limited to assessment. There is \*interest\* from both us and our school teams in (re-)expanding our roles to other areas (small groups, screenings, actually following and supporting interventions), but the reality is we're just trying to get through long assessment waitlists and our roles have become increasingly limited.

”

In Manitoba, school psychologists have recently been tasked with supporting school teams across each grade level in determining whether students are eligible for modified or individualized programming (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023b). When a student is struggling substantially to meet grade-level expectations, teachers are required to continue teaching and assessing the student based on all grade-level curricular outcomes unless it has been determined that the child meets eligibility and suitability criteria to have their programming modified or individualized (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023b). Across all grade levels, it is only students who meet Criterion A of an Intellectual Developmental Disorder as per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition, Text Revised; APA, 2022) who are eligible to be considered for curricular modifications or individualized programming (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023b). The only school-based employees able to answer this question of eligibility are school psychologists through the process of in-depth, specialized assessments. Some school psychologists are already noticing a shift in their practices, with one respondent sharing that

“ For the past two years, my school division has mandated that psychologists almost exclusively limit their work to assessments, primarily to address the learning needs of students (e.g., Specific Learning Disabilities and Intellectual Developmental Disorders)... [The] rationale provided for this change in service delivery has been due to Manitoba Education changes in the eligibility criteria for modifications and individualized programming. ”

It is anticipated that as more schools across the province align their practices with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2023b) expectations for modifications and individualized programming, there will be a significant increase in assessment demands placed on school psychologists, further limiting their capacity to provide comprehensive services if the ratio of school psychologists to students is not decreased.

School psychologists recognize that the vehicle for change is relationships. The more schools and students that each school psychologist supports, the fewer opportunities the psychologist will have to form meaningful connections with their families, students, teachers, and school teams. Placing this limit on the effectiveness of school psychologists has an impact not only on individual students and families, but the school

community and society as a whole. Early intervention is imperative for academic difficulties and perhaps even more acute for mental health concerns (CPA 2022; OHRC, 2022). As the CPA (2022) explains, “school psychologists are positioned to provide whole school, classroom, and individual mental health assessments and supports, as well as system-level initiatives to build staff capacity and support mental health and well-being” (p.5), yet the psychologist shortages mean “heavy workloads and roles which do not permit psychologists to practice to their full scope” (p. 14). Ensuring greater access to school psychologists where they can continue to operate effectively at all three tiers of service will go a long way in supporting the mental health, academic, and behavioural needs of Manitoba’s children and youth.

## Limitations

One limitation of the survey data is that despite being loosely representative of the proportions of psychologists working within Manitoba’s school division regions, there is always a possibility of bias in the sample. Individuals who were motivated to complete the survey may not accurately represent all school psychologists practicing in the province. An additional source of bias can be introduced anytime data are gathered via self-report, as participants were asked to estimate time spent on numerous activities in recent years. It is possible the data could be skewed toward over- or under-reporting involvement in various activities. Considering the 75 respondents represent approximately half of all school psychologists working in Manitoba, it can be inferred that the information gathered in this project is reasonably representative of general trends across the province.

School psychology FTE data are typically not published separate from overall teaching or clinician positions. For this reason, the data were gathered via emails or phone calls with supervisors for school psychologists across Manitoba’s school divisions for the 2022–23 school year. This introduces the potential for human error in ensuring the data pertain to the correct school year. In addition, for three of the school divisions, the school psychology FTEs were provided by school psychologists employed by the divisions, rather than the directors. It is possible that the school psychologists were not aware of the exact contract FTEs for their divisions. Finally, specific ratios for First Nations schools could not be calculated, given the enrolment numbers are not published. It is reasonable to suspect that the number of students per school psychologist would be significantly higher for First Nations schools, as it is in other Northern and remote areas of Manitoba.

## Future Directions

Given the difficulty with finding current ratio data for school psychologists and students across Canadian provinces, increasing access to such data would be an important

avenue to prioritize. A recommended future direction in this project echoes the statements by Jordan et al. (2009) that Canada would do well to establish more efficient and effective systems for determining the number of school psychologists practicing across each province. Either through the Educational and School Psychology Section of the CPA or a revitalization of a school psychology specific national association, it would be beneficial for Canadian provinces to systematically calculate and publish ratio data so that we can better learn from the provinces with lower ratios. Tracking ratios across provinces on a regular basis would allow us to recognize when ratios are very poor and make changes to ensure that students across Canada are receiving equitable, timely, and appropriate services.

As part of this project, it was found that some Manitoba school divisions receive contract psychological services or supplement their existing school psychology FTE with contracted services. Given that the profession of school psychology is certified through the Manitoba Education Professional Certification Unit, rather than a regulatory college, it is not clear how the contract-based services are regulated. This could be an avenue to explore in future projects.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic had far reaching global impacts. It would be beneficial for future projects to capture the long-term effects the pandemic has had on school psychology practices in Manitoba.

## Conclusion

The profession of school psychology has much to be proud of in Manitoba. Despite high student to clinician ratios, school psychologists continue to provide service at each of the three tiers of intervention and valuable specialized assessments. A role that was once heavily focused on assessing students for eligibility and special education programming has evolved to include complex diagnostic assessments, crisis response, individual and group interventions, and school staff professional development, among many other responsibilities (CPA, 2007). To sustain and enhance the quality and scope of these critical services, it is essential for Manitoba to prioritize the expansion of its school psychology workforce. This need is especially urgent in the Northern and remote regions, where access to school psychology services is significantly limited. The cornerstone of a school psychologist's effectiveness lies in fostering genuine relationships with students, families, and school communities. Therefore, achieving lower student to psychologist ratios is not just beneficial but imperative for the continued success and impact of school psychology in Manitoba.

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