

# THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST IN FLORIDA

James Parker  
Pinellas County

## Problem

The purpose of this study was three-fold: (a) to assemble information about remuneration, terms of employment, and certification status of school psychologists in certain Florida counties; (b) to determine the problems school administrators encountered when attempting to locate candidates for school psychologist positions on their staffs; and (c) to compare salaries paid to Florida school psychologists with those offered to school psychologists throughout the country.

## Procedure

A questionnaire of ten items was prepared to obtain the desired information. The items fell into three general categories: (a) the number of staff engaged in providing psychological services in the public schools and their state certification; (b) specific information about remuneration for stated amounts of experience; and (c) problems encountered in finding personnel to fill vacancies.

The 1958-59 edition of the Personnel Directory of the Florida Exceptional Child Program was used to locate counties employing people with classification "I Special" which identifies those engaged in psychological evaluation and educational diagnosis. Copies of the questionnaire were sent to the superintendents of schools in sixteen of the counties believed to employ school psychologists on the basis described above. Fourteen responses were received.

To provide information about salaries currently being offered throughout the United States, thirteen issues, encompassing the period from January, 1959 through January, 1960, of the Employment Bulletin of the American Psychological Association were examined. All vacancies were listed that met these two qualifications; the salary was stated, and the statements of duties were comparable to those performed by school psychologists in Florida.

## Results

### Certification

Analysis of the returns indicated that relatively few school psychologists were employed in Florida. One county employed nine school psychologists. The other thirteen counties employed from one to three each. In all, twenty-six were employed in the fourteen counties. Only nineteen (about 73%) were certified by the state. That so few psychologists are employed might be due, partly, to the peculiarities of certification requirements: however, there is the suggestion that there are not enough fully qualified people to fill the few positions which exist. If the state legal structure is ever adjusted such that those not holding state certification are excluded from employment, then a serious curtailment of psychological services would result.

School administrators and psychologists are concerned, when setting salary schedules for school psychologists, about whether or not to honor professional experience gained outside the public school. One item in the questionnaire was designed to survey current practice on this matter. Of the fourteen county replies, five reported that they accept related experience, six reported that they do not, and three counties did not respond to the item.

### Remuneration

Six counties indicated that they have salary scales for school psychologists that differ from those for regular teachers. The most frequently reported kind of scale was simply that of adding a differential to the scale used for classroom teachers. The scale used in one county provides for a \$2,100 differential between the school psychologist and classroom teacher, both of whom hold Rank II certificates and are at the initial step on the scale. The lowest beginning salary reported for school psychologists was \$3,700 and the highest was \$6,907, with a median of \$3,900.

There is a trend in the state to recognize the greater training required of the school psychologist by establishing salary differentials, and by basing salaries on teacher pay scales to which are added stipends for specialized training.

Current certification requirements stipulate teaching experience before the school psychologist certificate can be issued. Inasmuch as some teachers, after several years of classroom duties, decide to undertake training for the psychologist certificate, this question was asked: "Assuming that you employed a person as a school psychologist, who met certification requirements and who had five years of teaching but was beginning his first year as a psychologist, what would his monthly pay be?"

The low figure was \$390 and the high was \$633, with a median of \$430. To establish the upper limit, county superintendents were asked to indicate how much they would pay a person who had five years of teaching experience and eight years experience as a psychologist in the schools. The low figure was \$412 and the high was \$724; the median, \$505. Thus, it appears that most counties will place a psychologist on the salary scale at a point commensurate with his combined experience as teacher and psychologist.

The results of the national study of salaries for school psychologists indicate that Florida salaries are not very competitive. Of the thirty-seven positions advertised in the Employment Bulletin, the range for beginning salaries was from \$4,400 to \$7,600, with a median of \$6,000; the range for maximum salaries was from \$4,800 to \$10,000, and the median was \$7,500. It thus appears from the national figures that a beginning school psychologist has a good chance of receiving a salary of \$6,000, and he could expect \$7,500 after some years of experience. In Florida, however, only one county offered a comparable salary schedule.

#### Yearly terms of employment

There is much variation in the number of months psychologists work. The ten-month year was reported most frequently. One county which employs three school psychologists retains two on a ten-month basis and the other on a twelve-month basis. Another county employs its nine psychologists on an eleven-month basis, and three counties operate on a twelve-month basis. The trend appears to be toward eleven-month appointments which provide time for evaluation, research, planning, and in-service activities.

#### Personnel problems

Administrators seeking school psychologists mentioned several problems confronting them. One indicated that it was necessary to employ people who cannot qualify for better paying jobs because of defects, such as stuttering. Another stated that it was difficult to find properly certified candidates; a third indicated that many with great clinical experience find it hard to work in a diagnostic setting. It is apparent that low pay schedules operate to curtail the number of psychologists interested in working in Florida schools. This makes it necessary to hire those who are less effective because of problems of personality or because they lack what is currently regarded as adequate training for certification. There is the implication that some psychologists have trouble accepting the role which is prescribed for school psychologists in Florida.

## Summary

A questionnaire regarding remuneration and conditions of employment for school psychologists was circulated among sixteen Florida counties and fourteen replies were received. Results indicated that about 73 per cent of the people rendering psychological services in these counties were certified. Most counties had salary schedules based on those of teachers with a small supplement for psychologists. The lowest beginning salary reported was \$3,700, the highest was \$6,970, and the median was \$3,900. The low figure for the thirteenth year of service was \$412 per month, the high was \$724, and the median was \$505 per month.

Most school psychologists are employed for eleven months a year; others are employed for ten or twelve months. Problems encountered by school administrators center around having to accept school psychologists who have some type of handicap or who lack certification. One county reports a problem arising because its school psychology staff, which is clinically oriented, is reluctant to take on a purely diagnostic role.