

Why REMEMBER?

In last season's article announcing the *History of NYASP* project undertaken by Ruth Steegmann and myself, I cautioned "Those who do not remember history are bound to repeat it." During the intervening months as I've pored over the archived newsletters, board minutes and conference proceedings, I've been struck by the recurring nature of the issues faced by our professional organization.

For instance, the leadership of NYASP (and by extension all practicing school psychologists) have dealt with mandate relief before. To be precise, since this is a history project, in 1991 when as a result of the governor's reduction in the state budget of 240 million dollars in aid to education, school districts sought relief by reducing the duties of school psychologists.

1. It was proposed that the psychologist would be a sitting member of the CSE by invitation only (similar to the way physicians are presently utilized).
2. It was proposed that the determination of need for a psychological evaluation be made by the CSE (minus a full-time school psychologist).
3. It was proposed that two-member CSE building subcommittees be established, making CSE level decisions throughout New York State. (These committees would consist of the child's teacher and a supervisor of special education).
4. It was proposed that the mandate relief efforts outlined would save approximately \$36,000,000.00. The reality was that the only way these saving could occur would be through the elimination of about 900 school psychology positions, statewide.

As a result of NYASP's actions (and more specifically, the Gang of Four: Jack Kamins, Dirk Hightower, Arlene Crandall and Debra Handel) a more palatable resolution occurred.

1. The school psychologist remained a permanent member of the CSE.

2. The school psychologist determined the need for and extent of psychological assessments.
3. Two-member building level subcommittees were limited to the “Big Five” cities in New York State. In addition, the involvement of the school psychologist was mandated anytime there were new psychological data and whenever there was a consideration of a change to a more restrictive program option.
4. School psychology positions would not be disproportionately impacted in light of current budgetary reductions.

So how could it be that the issue of mandate relief is once more stalking the field of school psychology?

In these dire economic times, school districts are looking at any and all positions they might manipulate in order to cut costs. As Ruth Steegmann pointed out in her article in this same volume, the difference between the federal law regulating the delivery of special education services and New York State’s more rigorous regulations is the culprit. Or is it that School Psychologists have hitched their cart too closely to the horse of special education?

Our connection to special education has been a conundrum for the field since the passage of PL94-142. Do we want to be seen as the indispensable “gate-keepers” of special education or do we emphasize the varied nature of training which enables us to make data-based decisions, consult and collaborate, advise on instructional supports to develop academic skills, provide mental health services to develop social and life skills, develop prevention services, initiate home-school collaborations,

celebrate diversity in development and learning, and conduct research and program evaluation? All in a legal, ethical and professional manner!

The aforementioned skill set is the message NYASP's leadership, especially the Legislative Committee, emphasizes when they meet with Albany powerbrokers each Lobby Day and on other occasions when budget woes threaten our positions in schools. That aspect of our professional organization's functioning may make us appear to be a "guild". In the words of one of our earliest leaders, Marcia Shaffer, "There's nothing wrong in acting like a guild if no one else is looking out for us." But guild issues are not our sole reason for existence. In articles to follow, Ruth and I hope to inform you regarding events and people in the history of NYASP that have shaped us into a dynamic, focused and effective state association of school psychology. We invite responses in the form of letters to the editor or your own impression of a pivotal moment in the history of NYASP.