New York Association of School Psychologists
Principles for Professional Ethics

I. INTRODUCTION
The formal principles that clarify the proper conduct of a professional school psychologist are known as Ethics. By virtue of joining the Association, each New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) member agrees to abide by the Ethics, acting in a manner that shows respect for human dignity and assuring a high quality of professional service. Although ethical behavior is an individual responsibility, it is in the interest of an association to adopt and enforce a code of ethics. Following the ethical code, members will be guided toward appropriate behavior, and public confidence in the profession will be enhanced. Additionally, a code of ethics should provide due process procedures to protect members from potential abuse of the code. The NYASP Principles for Professional Ethics have been written to accomplish these goals.

The principles in this manual are based on the assumptions that 1) school psychologists will act as advocates for their students/clients, and 2) at the very least, school psychologists will do no harm. These assumptions necessitate that school psychologists “speak up” for the needs and rights of their students/clients even at times when it may be difficult to do so. School psychologists also are constrained to provide only those services for which they have acquired an acknowledged level of experience, training, and competency.

The intent of these guidelines is to supply clarification which will facilitate the delivery of high quality psychological services in the school and community. In addition to these ethical standards, there is the ever present necessity to differentiate between legal mandate and ethical responsibility. The school psychologist is urged to become familiar with applicable legal requirements. There are several textbooks on the market, as well as state and federal websites that can address these issues. In addition, school districts typically employ legal staff that can be contacted for further clarification.

The guidance of the Ethical Principles is intentionally broad to make it more enduring than other documents that reflect short-term opinions about specific actions shaped by local events, popular trends, or recent developments in the field. The member must use judgment to infer the situation-specific rule from the general ethical principle. The lack of a specific reference to a particular action does not indicate permission or provide a defense against a charge of unethical practice. Therefore, one should apply Ethical Principles in all professional situations, realizing that one is not released from responsibility simply because another individual is not strictly a “student” or a “client.”

The principles in this manual are organized into several sections, and principles discussed in one section may also apply to other sections. Every school psychologist, regardless of position (e.g., practitioner, researcher, university trainer, supervisor, state or federal consultant, administrator of psychological services) or setting (e.g., public or private school, community agency, hospital, university, private practice) should reflect upon the theme represented in each ethical principle to determine its application to her or his individual situation. At times, following these ethical
principles may require a higher standard of behavior than the prevailing policies and pertinent laws. Under such conditions, members should adhere to the *Ethics* to assure the highest standards of professional behavior are followed. Ethical behavior may occasionally be forbidden by policy or law, in which case members are expected to declare their dilemma and work to bring the discrepant regulations into compliance with the *Ethics*. To obtain additional assistance in applying these principles to a particular setting, a school psychologist should consult with experienced school psychologists and seek advice from the New York Association of School Psychologists or the National Association of School Psychologists.

Throughout the *Principles for Professional Ethics*, it is assumed that, depending on the role and setting of the school psychologist, the “client” could include children and parents, or teachers and other school personnel who are recipients of consultation services, or other professionals, trainees, or supervisees.

Since the publication of the last *Principles for Professional Ethics* in 1996, Congress created the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which is an attempt to streamline the information systems that support healthcare services and to protect health insurance coverage for individuals’ pre-existing conditions when they change employers/residences. Though the latter will have no bearing on the work of the school psychologist, the former may indeed have some impact. Schools that receive funding for providing healthcare insurance programs such as Medicaid may be held to HIPPA standards. In addition, if your school uses electronic means to collect information regarding services and billing for healthcare services, HIPPA will probably be in effect. Individual school systems will need to examine the act in order to establish procedures for complying with its regulations.

Procedural guidelines for filing an ethical complaint and the adjudication of ethical complaints are available from the NYASP Professional Practices Chairperson (www.nyasp.org).

**II. PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY**

**A. General**

1. School psychologists strive to maintain high standards of competence. They recognize the strengths and limitations of their training and experience, engaging only in practices for which they are qualified. School psychologists enlist the assistance of other specialists in supervisory, consultative, or referral roles as appropriate in providing services. They must continually obtain additional training and education to provide the best possible services to children, families, schools, communities, trainees, and supervisees.

2. School psychologists offer only those services which are within their individual area of training and experience. Competence levels, education, training and experience are accurately represented to schools and clients in a professional manner.

3. School psychologists do not use affiliations with persons, associations, or institutions to imply a level of professional competence that exceeds that which has actually been achieved.
4. School psychologists recognize the need for continuing professional development. They remain current regarding developments in research, training, technology and professional practices that benefit children, families, and schools.

5. School psychologists refrain from any activity in which their personal problems or conflicts may interfere with professional effectiveness. Competent assistance is sought to alleviate conflicts in professional relationships.

6. School psychologists know the Principles for Professional Ethics and thoughtfully apply them to situations within their employment setting or practice. Ignorance or misapplication of an ethical principle is not a reasonable defense against a charge of unethical behavior.

III. PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. General

1. School psychologists are committed to the application of their professional expertise for the purpose of promoting improvement in the quality of life for children, their families, and the school community. This objective is pursued in ways that protect the dignity and rights of those involved. School psychologists accept responsibility for the appropriateness of their professional practices and consequences of their actions.

2. School psychologists respect all persons and are sensitive to individual differences, such as: physical, mental, emotional, political, economic, social, cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation.

3. School psychologists in all settings maintain professional relationships with children, parents, and the school community. Parents and children are to be fully informed about all relevant aspects of school psychological services in advance. The explanation should take into account language and cultural differences, cognitive capabilities, developmental level, and age so that it may be understood by the child, parent, or guardian.

4. School psychologists attempt to resolve situations in which there are divided or conflicting interests in a manner that is mutually beneficial and protects the rights of all parties involved.

5. When personal loyalties, objectives and competencies influence a professional relationship, school psychologists must inform all concerned persons of relevant issues in advance, including, when applicable, their direct supervisor for consideration of reassignment of responsibilities.

6. School psychologists do not take advantage of clients through professional relationships or condone these actions in their colleagues. No individuals, including children, clients, employees, colleagues, trainees, parents, supervisees, and research participants, will be exposed to deliberate comments, gestures, or physical contacts of a sexual nature. School psychologists do not harass or demean others based on personal characteristics.

7. Dual relationships with clients are avoided, as inviting personal and business relations with clients may impair one’s judgment and create conflicts of interest. School psychologists are aware of these situations and avoid them whenever possible.
8. School psychologists attempt to resolve suspected detrimental or unethical practices on an informal level by making direct contact with the individuals involved. If informal efforts are not productive, the appropriate professional organization is contacted for assistance, and procedures established for questioning ethical practice are followed:
   a. The filing of an ethical complaint is a serious matter. It is intended to improve the behavior of a colleague that is harmful to the profession and/or the public. Therefore, school psychologists make every effort to discuss the ethical principles with other professionals who may be in violation.
   b. School psychologists enter into the complaint process thoughtfully and with concern for the well-being of all parties involved. They do not file or encourage the filing of an ethics complaint that is frivolous or motivated by revenge.
   c. Some situations may be particularly difficult to analyze from an ethical perspective. School psychologists consult ethical standards from related fields and seek assistance from knowledgeable, experienced school psychologists and relevant state/national associations to ascertain an appropriate course of action.
   d. School psychologists document specific instances of suspected ethical violations (i.e., date, time, relevant details) as well as attempts to resolve these violations.

9. School psychologists respect the confidentiality of information obtained during their professional work. Information is revealed only with the informed consent of the child, or the child’s parent or legal guardian, except in those situations in which failure to release information would result in clear danger to the child or others. Obsolete confidential information will be shredded or otherwise destroyed before disposal.

10. School psychologists discuss confidential information only for professional purposes and only with persons who have a legitimate need to know.

11. School psychologists inform children and other clients of the limits of confidentiality at the outset of establishing a professional relationship.

B. Students
1. School psychologists understand the intimate nature of consultation, assessment, and direct service. They engage only in professional practices that maintain the dignity and integrity of children and other clients.

2. School psychologists explain important aspects of their professional relationships in a clear, understandable manner that is appropriate to the child’s or other client’s age and ability to understand. The explanation includes the reason why services were requested, the uses to be made of information regarding services, persons who will receive information about the services provided, and the possible outcomes or implications of results.

3. School Psychologists recognize the obligation to the student/client and respect the student/client’s right of choice to enter, or to participate, in service, voluntarily.
4. School psychologists discuss recommendations for program changes or additional services with the child/client and other appropriate individuals. This discussion includes any alternatives that may be available.

C. Parents, Legal Guardians, and Appointed Surrogates
1. School psychologists explain all services to parents in a clear, understandable manner. They strive to propose a set of options that takes into account the values and capabilities of each parent. Service provision by interns, practicum students, or other trainees should be explained and agreed to in advance.
2. School psychologists recognize the importance of parental support and seek to obtain that support by assuring that there is direct parent contact prior to seeing the child on an ongoing basis (emergencies and “drop-in” self-referrals require parental notification as soon as possible; the age and circumstances under which children may seek services without parental consent varies greatly. Therefore, schools need to develop written policies to address this issue). School psychologists secure continuing parental involvement via frank and prompt reporting to the parent of findings and progress that conforms to the limits of previously determined confidentiality.
3. School psychologists encourage and promote parental participation in designing services provided to their children. When appropriate, this includes linking interventions between the school and the home, tailoring parental involvement to the skills of the family, and helping parents gain the skills needed to help their children.
4. School psychologists respect the wishes of parents who decline school psychological services and attempt to guide parents to alternative community resources.
5. School psychologists discuss with parents the recommendations and plans for assisting their children. The discussion includes alternatives associated with each set of plans, which show respect for the ethnic/cultural values of the family. The parents are informed of sources of help available at school and in the community.
6. School psychologists discuss the rights of parents and children regarding creation, modification, storage, and disposal of confidential materials that will result from the provision of school psychological services.

D. Community
1. School psychologists also are citizens, thereby accepting the same responsibilities and duties as any member of society. They are free to pursue individual interests, except to the degree that those interests compromise professional responsibilities and have negative impact on the profession. Awareness of such impact guides public behavior.
2. School psychologists may act as individual citizens to bring about social change in a lawful manner. Individual actions should not be presented as, or suggestive of, representing the field of school psychology or the Association.
3. As employees or employers, in public or independent practice domains, school psychologists do not engage in or condone practices that discriminate against children, other clients, or employees (if applicable) based on race, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, economic status, or native language.

4. School psychologists avoid any action that could violate or diminish the civil and legal rights of children and other clients.

5. School psychologists adhere to federal, state, and local laws and ordinances governing their practice and advocacy efforts. If regulations conflict with ethical guidelines, school psychologists seek to resolve such conflict through positive, respected, and legal channels, including advocacy efforts involving public policy.

E. Other Professionals/Related Professions

1. To best meet the needs of children and other clients, school psychologists cooperate with other professional disciplines in relationships based on mutual respect.

2. School psychologists recognize the competence of other professions/professionals. They encourage and support the use of all resources to best serve the interests of children and other clients.

3. School psychologists should strive to explain their field and their professional competencies, including roles, assignments, and working relationships to other professionals.

4. School psychologists cooperate and coordinate with other professionals and agencies with the rights and needs of children and other clients in mind. If a child or other client is receiving similar services from another professional, school psychologists promote coordination of services.

5. The child or other client is referred to another professional for services when a condition or need is identified which is outside the professional competencies or scope of the school psychologist.

6. When transferring the intervention responsibility for a child or other client to another professional, school psychologists ensure that all relevant and appropriate individuals, including the child/client when appropriate, are notified of the change and reasons for the change.

7. When school psychologists suspect the existence of detrimental or unethical practices by a member of another profession, informal contact is made with that person to express the concern. If the situation cannot be resolved in this manner, the appropriate professional organization is contacted for assistance in determining the procedures established by that profession for examining the practices in question.

8. School psychologists who employ, supervise, or train other professionals, accept the obligation to provide continuing professional development. They also provide appropriate working conditions, fair and timely evaluation, and constructive consultation.
F. School Psychologist Trainees, Interns and Supervised School Psychologists
1. School psychologists who supervise interns are responsible for all professional practices of the supervisees. They assure children and other clients and the profession that the intern is adequately supervised as designated by the practice guidelines and training standards for school psychologists.

2. School psychologists who conduct or administer training programs provide trainees and prospective trainees with accurate information regarding program sponsorships/endorsements/accreditation, goals/objectives, training processes and requirements, and likely outcomes and benefits.

3. School psychologists who are faculty members in colleges or universities or who supervise clinical or field placements apply these ethical principles in all work with school psychology trainees. In addition, they promote the ethical practice of trainees by providing specific and comprehensive instruction, feedback, and mentoring.

4. School psychology faculty members and clinical or field supervisors uphold recognized standards of the profession by providing training related to high quality, responsible, and research-based school psychology services. They provide accurate, objective and current information in their teaching and training activities; identify any limitations in information; and acknowledge disconfirming data, alternative hypotheses, and explanations.

5. School psychology faculty members and clinical or field supervisors develop and use evaluation practices for trainees that are objective, accurate, and fair.

6. School psychologists who employ, supervise and train other professionals accept the obligation of providing experiences to further their professional development. Appropriate working conditions, fair and timely evaluation and constructive consultation are provided.

IV. PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES—GENERAL PRINCIPLES

A. Advocacy
1. School psychologists typically serve multiple clients including children, parents, and systems. When the school psychologist is confronted with conflicts between client groups, the primary client is considered to be the child. When the child is not the primary client, the individual or group of individuals who sought the assistance of the school psychologist is the primary client.

2. School psychologists consider children and other clients to be their primary responsibility, acting as advocates for their rights and welfare. If conflicts of interest between clients are present, the school psychologist supports conclusions that are in the best interest of the child. When choosing a course of action, school psychologists take into account the rights of each individual involved and the duties of school personnel.

3. School psychologists’ concerns for protecting the rights and welfare of children are communicated to the school administration and staff as the top priority in determining services.
4. School psychologists understand the public policy process to assist them in their efforts to advocate for children, parents, and systems.

**B. Service Delivery/Employment Setting**

1. School psychologists are knowledgeable of the organization, philosophy, goals, objectives, and methodologies of the setting in which they are employed.

2. School psychologists recognize that an understanding of the goals, processes, and legal requirements of their particular workplace is essential for effective functioning within that setting. It is their responsibility to familiarize themselves with the system and community.

3. School psychologists accept the responsibility of becoming integral members of the client service systems to which they are assigned. They recognize the need to establish a vital role for themselves within that system.

4. School psychologists who provide services to several different groups may encounter situations in which loyalties are conflicted. To the extent possible, the stance of the school psychologist is made known in advance to all parties to prevent misunderstandings.

5. School psychologists promote changes in their employing agencies and community service systems that will benefit their clients; this may involve change in organizational structures or service models.

**C. Assessment and Intervention**

1. School psychologists maintain the highest standard of service for educational and psychological assessment and direct and indirect interventions.
   a. In conducting psychological, educational, or behavioral evaluations or in providing therapy, counseling, or consultation services, due consideration is given to individual integrity and individual differences.
   b. School psychologists respect differences in age, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. They select and use appropriate assessment or treatment procedures, techniques, and strategies relevant to such differences. Decision-making related to assessment and subsequent interventions is primarily data-based.

2. School psychologists are knowledgeable about the validity and reliability of their instruments and techniques, choosing those that have up-to-date standardization data and are applicable and appropriate for the benefit of the child or other client.

3. School psychologists use multiple assessment methods such as observations, background information, and information from other professionals, to reach comprehensive and valid conclusions.
4. School psychologists use assessment techniques, counseling and therapy procedures, consultation techniques, and other direct and indirect service methods that the profession considers to be responsible, research-based practice and promotes the mental health of the children served.

5. School psychologists do not condone the use of psychological or educational assessment techniques, or the misuse of the information these techniques provide, by unqualified persons in any way, including teaching, sponsorship, or supervision.

6. School psychologists develop interventions that are appropriate to the presenting problems and are consistent with data collected. They modify or terminate the treatment plan when the data indicate the plan is not achieving the desired goals. School psychologists may consult with other professionals and colleagues when appropriate.

D. Reporting Data and Conference Results
1. School psychologists ascertain that information about children and other clients reaches only authorized persons.
   a. School psychologists adequately interpret information so that the recipient can better help the child or other clients.
   b. School psychologists assist agency recipients to establish procedures to properly safeguard confidential material.

2. School psychologists communicate findings and recommendations in language readily understood by the intended recipient. These communications describe potential consequences associated with the proposals.

3. School psychologists prepare written reports in such form and style that the recipient of the report will be able to assist the child or other clients. Reports should emphasize recommendations and interpretations; unedited computer-generated reports, pre-printed “check-off” or “fill-in-the-blank” reports, and reports that present only test scores or global statements regarding eligibility for special education without specific recommendations for intervention are seldom useful. Reports should include an appraisal of the degree of confidence that could be assigned to the information. Alterations of previously released reports should be done only by the original author.

4. School psychologists review all of their written documents for accuracy, signing them only when correct. Interns and practicum students are clearly identified as such, and their work is co-signed by the supervising school psychologist. In situations in which more than one professional participated in the data collection and reporting process, school psychologists assure that sources of data are clearly identified in the written report.

5. School psychologists comply with all laws, regulations, and policies pertaining to the adequate storage and disposal of records to maintain appropriate confidentiality of information.

6. When presenting case examples, school psychologists obtain written prior consent from the clients, or they remove identifying data from public lectures or publications.
E. Use of Materials and Technology

1. School psychologists maintain test security, preventing the release of underlying principles and specific content that would undermine the use of the device. School psychologists are responsible for the security requirements specific to each instrument used.

2. School psychologists do not promote or encourage inappropriate use of computer-generated test analyses or reports. In accordance with this principle, a school psychologist would not offer an unedited computer report as his or her own writing or use a computer-scoring system for tests in which he or she has no training. They select scoring and interpretation services on the basis of accuracy and professional alignment with the underlying decision rules.

3. School psychologists maintain full responsibility for any technological services used. All ethical and legal principles regarding confidentiality, privacy, and responsibility for decisions apply to the school psychologist and cannot be transferred to equipment, software companies, or data processing departments.

4. Technological devices should be used to improve the quality of client services. School psychologists will resist applications of technology that ultimately reduce the quality of service.

5. To ensure confidentiality, student/client records are not transmitted electronically without a guarantee of privacy. In line with this principle, a receiving FAX machine must be in a secure location and operated by employees cleared to work with confidential files, and e-mail messages must be encrypted or else stripped of all information that identifies the student/client.

6. School psychologists do not accept any form of remuneration in exchange for data from their client data base without informed consent.

F. Research, Publication, and Presentation

1. When designing and implementing research in schools, school psychologists choose topics and employ research methodology, subject selection techniques, data-gathering methods, and analysis and reporting techniques that are grounded in sound research practice. School psychologists clearly identify their level of training and graduate degree on all communications to research participants.

2. Prior to initiating research, school psychologists working in agencies without review committees should have at least one other colleague, preferably a school psychologist, review the proposed methods.

3. School psychologists follow all legal procedures when conducting research, including following procedures related to informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, protection from harm or risks, voluntary participation, and disclosure of results to participants. School psychologists demonstrate respect for the rights of and well-being of research participants.
4. In publishing reports of their research, school psychologists provide discussion of limitations of their data and acknowledge existence of disconfirming data, as well as alternate hypotheses and explanations of their findings.

5. School psychologists uphold copyright laws in their publications and presentations and obtain permission from authors and copyright holders to reproduce other publications or materials. School psychologists recognize that federal law protects the rights of copyright holders of published works and authors of non-published materials.

6. When publishing or presenting research or other work, school psychologists do not plagiarize the works or ideas of others and acknowledge sources and assign credit to those whose ideas are reflected.

7. School psychologists do not publish or present fabricated or falsified data or results in their publications and presentations.

8. School psychologists make available data or other information upon which conclusions and claims reported in publications and presentations are based, provided that the data are needed to address a legitimate concern or need and that the confidentiality and other rights of all research participants are protected.

9. If errors are discovered after the publication or presentation of research and other information, school psychologists make efforts to correct errors by publishing errata, retractions, or corrections.

10. School psychologists accurately reflect the contributions of authors and other individuals in publications and presentations. Authorship credit and the order in which authors are listed are based on the relative contributions of the individual authors. Authorship credit is given only to individuals who have made substantial professional contributions to the research, publication, or presentation.

11. School psychologists only publish data or other information that make original contributions to the professional literature. School psychologists do not publish the same findings in two or more publications and do not duplicate significant portions of their own previous publications without permission of copyright holders.

12. School psychologists who participate in reviews of manuscripts, proposals, and other materials for consideration for publication and presentation respect the confidentiality and proprietary rights of the authors. School psychologists who review professional materials limit their use of the materials to the activities relevant to the purposes of the professional review. School psychologists who review professional materials do not communicate the identity of the author, quote from the materials, or duplicate or circulate copies of the materials without the author’s permission.

13. School psychologists take particular care when presenting information through various media sources (e.g., radio, television, public lectures, popular press articles, promotional materials).
Recipients should be advised that the information does not result from or substitute for a professional consultation. The information should be based on research and experience within the school psychologist’s recognized sphere of competence. Statements should be consistent with ethical principles, and should be perceived as individual views rather then representing the entire field of school psychology or the association.

V. PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE SETTINGS—INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

A. Relationship with Employers
1. Some school psychologists are employed in a variety of settings, organizational structures, and sectors and, as such, may create a conflict of interest. School psychologists operating in these different settings recognize the importance of ethical standards and the separation of roles and take full responsibility for protecting and completely informing the consumer of all potential concerns.

2. School psychologists dually employed in independent practice and in a school district may not accept any form of remuneration from clients who are entitled to the same service provided by the school district employing the school psychologist. This includes children who attend the non-public schools within the school psychologist’s district.

3. School psychologists in independent practice have an obligation to inform parents of any school psychological services available to them at no cost from the public or private schools prior to delivering such services for remuneration.

4. School psychologists working in both independent practice and employed by school districts conduct all independent practice outside of the hours of contracted public employment. School psychologists working independently should not accept clients from the same district in which they are employed during the school day, as this may result in conflict of interest.

5. School psychologists engaged in independent practice do not use tests, materials, equipment, facilities, secretarial assistance, or other services belonging to the public sector employer unless approved in advance by the employer.

B. Service Delivery
1. School psychologists clarify financial arrangements in advance of service delivery.
   a. School psychologists ensure to the best of their ability that the client clearly understands the agreement.
   b. School psychologists neither give nor receive any remuneration for referring children and other clients for professional services.

2. School psychologists in independent practice adhere to the conditions of a contract until the service has been performed, the contract has been terminated by mutual consent, or the contract has otherwise been legally terminated.

3. School psychologists in independent practice strive to prevent misunderstandings resulting from their recommendations, advice, or information. Most often, direct consultation between the
school psychologist in private practice and the school psychologist responsible for the student in the public sector will resolve minor differences of opinion without unnecessarily confusing the parents. Disagreement, however, is not avoided if necessary to keep the best interests of the child or client in mind.

C. Announcements/Advertising
1. Appropriate announcement of services, advertising, and public media statements may be necessary for school psychologists in independent practice to assist the public in making knowledgeable decisions regarding services. Accurate representations of training, experience, services provided, and affiliation are done in a restrained manner. Public statements must be based on sound and accepted theory, research, and practice.

2. Listings in telephone directories are limited to the following: name/names, highest relevant degree, state certification/licensure status, national certification status, address, telephone number, brief identification of major areas of practice, office hours, appropriate fee information, foreign languages spoken, policy regarding third-party payments, and license number.

3. Announcements of services by school psychologists in independent practice are made in a formal, professional manner limited to the same information included in a telephone listing. Clear statements of purposes with unequivocal descriptions of the experiences to be provided are given. Education, training, and experience of all staff members are appropriately specified.

4. School psychologists in independent practice may use brochures in the announcement of services. The brochures may be sent to other professionals, schools, business firms, governmental agencies, and other similar organizations.

5. Announcements and advertisements of the availability of publications, products, and services for sale are professional and factual.

6. School psychologists in independent practice do not directly solicit clients for individual diagnosis, therapy, and for the provision of other school psychological services.

7. School psychologists do not compensate in any manner a representative of the press, radio, or television in return for personal professional publicity in a news item.

8. School psychologists do not participate, for personal gain, in commercial announcements or advertisements recommending to the public the purchase or use of products or services.