



Best Careers 2011: School Psychologist

As one of the 50 Best Careers of 2011, this should have strong growth over the next decade

By BEN BADEN Posted: December 6, 2010

The rundown: The line between educational success and failure is thick: High school dropouts earn just a fraction of what students with bachelor's and advanced degrees earn. As thick as the divide is, its causes are complicated. As a school psychologist, it's your job to find the physical, psychological, social or emotional issues that prevent students' success and craft a systemic solution that generally involves the student and the student's family, caregivers, and teachers. Although you may be working with limited resources and overstretched teachers, it's your job, for example, to ensure that a student who has just lost a parent to cancer can get the support he or she needs, or that a student's drug addiction isn't ignored. Programs and solutions are monitored and reworked with the help and input of parents and teachers.

The outlook: The Labor Department projects that the number of jobs held by clinical, counseling, and school psychologists will jump 11 percent between 2008 and 2018, creating 16,800 more positions. The growth is expected to be particularly strong in schools (as well as in hospitals and mental-health centers, among others) thanks to increased efforts to provide mental-health services to students.

Money: Median earnings for school psychologists were \$66,040 in 2009. Annual earnings range widely, from less than \$40,000 to more than \$109,000. Psychologists in private practice tend to earn more.

Upward mobility: Psychologists may head into academia or into private practice. In fact, more than a third of clinical, counseling, and school psychologists are self-employed. When you hang your own shingle, pay will be higher, and you'll be able to set your own schedule.

Activity level: Average. You might be observing a class or meeting with a student, but your days won't call for much (physical) heavy lifting.

Stress level: Sometimes high. You're working with a lot of variables: the students, the teachers, the parents, the school district and its budget—and when interests clash or progress stalls, your days can get stressful.

Education and preparation: This is a career that requires intensive education. Most states require school psychologists to have earned a specialist degree in school psychology—through about three years of graduate study, including a one-year internship—or its equivalent. Some school psychologists choose to get doctorates.

Real advice from real people about landing a job as a school psychologist: Before applying to graduate school, think carefully about where you want to live in the future. "If you do know where you think you want to live, try to go to graduate school there," says Kathy Cowan, communications director at the National Association of School Psychologists. Chances are that you're going to work in the area where you choose to go to graduate school because universities generally have feeder systems that funnel you into local school districts. When interviewing for jobs, Cowan says to make sure you have a detailed portfolio of all the work that you've completed during your internship. It's also important to be able to articulate how you support the mission and purpose of the schools where you're interviewing.