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**THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST AS A PROFESSIONALLY GUARANTEED
COMPONENT OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS
FROM THE MEDIATION OF SCHOOL CONFLICTS TO SYSTEMIC CARE
FOR STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH**

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Summary. The present article aims to analyze the school psychologist as a professionally guaranteed and institutionally stable component of primary and secondary schools, to develop the argument for systemic rather than reactive care for students' mental health, and to delineate the professional scope of school conflict mediation within the broader school counseling framework. The study employs a conceptual-analytical approach integrating three complementary sources of evidence: (1) a selective review of current Czech and international empirical literature, encompassing national monitoring data, regional surveys, meta-analyses of school-based mental health interventions, and large-scale international datasets from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022; (2) theoretical analysis grounded in the NASP practice model of school psychology and the whole-school approach; and (3) the authors' reflective applied professional experience comprising 72 school conflict mediations conducted in the Ústí nad Labem Region (Ústecký kraj). The analysis yielded four principal sets of findings. (1) Czech epidemiological data from 2023 to 2025 document that more than 50% of ninth-grade primary school students exhibit signs of impaired wellbeing (i.e., subjective psychological well-being), 40% show signs of moderate to severe depression, 30% show signs of moderate to severe anxiety, and 51.2% of Prague school students report having no trusted adult at school to whom they could confide their problems. (2) The availability of school psychological services constitutes a structural problem rooted in insufficient financing, regional inequality, limited workforce supply, and competition from health-sector and private-sector employment. (3) School conflict mediation represents a legitimate yet inherently limited instrument that is unsuitable for situations involving psychological crisis, self-harm, suicidal risk, traumatization, or suspected child maltreatment. (4) The school psychologist fulfills five interconnected functional domains: individual student support, work with classroom groups, methodological guidance for educators, collaboration with parents, and coordination of follow-up services. The findings confirm that Czech primary and secondary schools require stably funded, qualification-guaranteed, and methodologically supported access to school psychological services whose organizational model is differentiated according to school size, regional conditions, and the level of student needs. The school psychologist should be understood not as an optional supplementary resource but as a professionally guaranteed partner enabling the transition from reactive incident management to proactive, data-informed, and ethically grounded care for students' mental health. The conclusions underscore the necessity of stable systemic financing, quality assurance through supervision and continuing professional development, and evidence-based monitoring of service outcomes.

Keywords: school psychologist, school psychology, students' mental health, school counseling center, mediation, school climate, wellbeing, crisis intervention, prevention, systemic school support, educational and psychological counseling

1. Introduction

Primary and secondary schools have, in recent years, been increasingly situated in a space where students' educational outcomes cannot be separated from their mental health, relational safety, subjective

psychological well-being, capacity for stress management, and access to supportive adult figures. The school environment represents one of the most significant everyday social contexts for children and adolescents, given that it is a setting where not only knowledge and skills are acquired, but also where identity, relational patterns, self-regulatory strategies, attitudes toward authority, experiences of fairness, perceptions of one's own competencies, and the capacity to navigate socially structured environments are formed. Education therefore cannot be reduced to the transmission of content, as the learning process is always embedded within an emotional, relational, motivational, and institutional framework that may either support the student or, conversely, impose sustained burdens upon them.

The significance of school as an environment for the early identification of psychological distress does not reside in the notion that schools should substitute for health, social, or psychotherapeutic systems. A more precise scholarly framing proceeds from the recognition that school is one of the few institutional environments in which a child is daily visible, relationally accessible, and observable within a natural performance and peer context. Changes in academic performance, repeated absences, heightened irritability, social withdrawal, conflict-proneness, fatigue, disrupted sleep, self-deprecation, pronounced somatization, declining motivation, or a loss of trust in adults can all be identified within the school setting before they become the subject of specialized care. This capacity for early detection is precisely what makes the school a key site of prevention, rather than of clinical diagnosis in the narrow medical sense.

Without professional psychological support, however, manifestations of psychological distress may be interpreted in overly simplified terms. An educator may understand a change in a student's behavior such as laziness, disinterest, misconduct, provocation, or a failure of family upbringing, while a parent may perceive the school's notification as an accusation or a challenge to their own parenting competence. There is therefore a risk that the child's actual need will remain obscured by conflict between adults, a disciplinary framework, or defensive communication. The school psychologist in such an environment does not assume the responsibility of the educator, the parent, or the healthcare professional, but rather brings a differential competency that makes it possible to distinguish between ordinary developmental stress, a pedagogically addressable difficulty, a relational conflict, a risk manifestation of psychological distress, a crisis state, and a situation requiring follow-up specialized care.

Czech data published between 2023 and 2025 indicate that the issue of students' mental health cannot be regarded as a marginal or merely media-amplified concern. NIMH-CZ, in collaboration with CSI, conducted the pilot National Monitoring of the Mental Health of Ninth-Grade Primary School Students in 2023, encompassing more than 6.000 ninth-grade students from all regions of the Czech Republic. The results indicated that more than 50% of students showed signs of impaired wellbeing, 40% showed signs of moderate to severe depression, and 30% showed signs of moderate to severe anxiety (Národní ústav duševního zdraví, 2023). These figures call for interpretive caution, since they represent screening indicators rather than clinically established diagnoses; at the same time, however, they warrant institutional seriousness, as in the school context they point to the scale of subjectively experienced distress that may affect education, relationships, attendance, self-assessment, and the willingness to seek help.

The regional survey conducted by the Centre for Social Services Prague (CSSP; Centrum sociálních služeb Praha) and the Prague Centre for Primary Prevention (PCPP; Pražské centrum primární prevence), in which data were collected in November and December 2024 and the results were published in 2025, supplements the national picture with additional significant indicators. The questionnaire survey was completed by 10.238 students in the upper grades of primary schools, grammar schools, and secondary schools in Prague, and the results documented that one third of students showed serious symptoms of anxiety, 40% showed symptoms of depression, more than half reported sleep difficulties, and 21% showed a very low level of well-being, understood as subjective life satisfaction and emotional well-being (Centrum sociálních služeb Praha a Pražské centrum primární prevence, 2025). From the perspective of school psychology, the finding that 51.2% of students reported having no adult person at school to whom they could confide their problems is particularly significant (Centrum sociálních služeb Praha a Pražské centrum primární prevence, 2025). This indicator shifts the discussion away from individual symptoms toward the question of the relational accessibility of the school as an institution, given that a student in

psychological distress does not typically seek out an abstract system, but rather a specific adult whom they perceive as safe, discreet, competent, and non-humiliating.

Contemporary debate therefore cannot rest on the oversimplified question of whether the school should address students' mental health or whether it should remain solely an educational institution. The real question is how schools can create the professional, organizational, and relational conditions necessary to recognize students' psychological distress in a timely manner, to respond to it appropriately, to remain within their own area of competence, and simultaneously to refrain from passivity in situations where a child or adolescent is manifestly at risk. This is precisely the domain in which the significance of the school psychologist as a professionally guaranteed component of the school becomes apparent, in contrast to the incidentally available external consultant or the crisis worker who is summoned only when a problem has exceeded the coping capacity of the teaching staff.

The aim of the present article is to develop the scholarly argument that the school psychologist should constitute a stable, qualification-guaranteed, and systemically anchored component of primary and secondary schools. The central thesis does not rest on the claim that the school psychologist will resolve all psychological, relational, or social difficulties of students, as such a claim would be professionally disproportionate. A more precise conclusion is that a school lacking accessible psychological expertise remains structurally weakened in the areas of prevention, early identification, crisis support, work with classroom climate, methodological guidance for educators, communication with parents, and coordination of follow-up services. School conflict mediation is understood in this study as an important yet partial instrument, whose potential is fully realized only when it is embedded within the broader counseling system of the school.

2. Theoretical Framework of School Psychology and Systemic Student Support

Contemporary school psychology cannot be limited to the individual diagnosis of students who are already failing in terms of behavior, performance, or relationships. Modern school psychology proceeds from the premise that learning, behavior, and mental health in students arise from the interaction of individual dispositions, the family environment, peer relationships, school climate, pedagogical leadership, institutional rules, and broader social conditions. Consequently, the school psychologist should not function merely as a specialist investigating an isolated problem in an individual, but as a component of a system that enables the school to understand the psychological dimensions of education and to create conditions for a safe, supportive, and developmentally appropriate school life.

The practice model of school psychology formulated by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) in 2020 defines the school psychologist as a professional operating across several interconnected domains, including data-based decision-making, consultation and collaboration, academic intervention, mental and behavioral health services, school-wide practices to promote learning and safety, family-school-community collaboration, respect for diversity, evidence-based practice, and ethical-legal professionalism (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020). The significance of this model lies in its conceptualization of school psychology as a comprehensive service that integrates individual student support, classroom-level work, methodological guidance for educators, preventive measures, crisis preparedness, and institutional school development.

The transfer of international models to the Czech context naturally requires respect for domestic legal, organizational, and human resource conditions. The Czech legislative framework provides a foundational basis primarily through Decree No. 72/2005 Coll. on the Provision of Counseling Services in Schools and School Counseling Facilities (Vyhláška č. 72/2005 Sb., o poskytování poradenských služeb ve školách a školských poradenských zařízeních), as subsequently amended, and through more recent methodological materials of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS; Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy), which focus on the institutionalization of supportive educational positions (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2025). From the perspective of school practice, it is important that the school psychologist is not merely an "add-on" to the school counseling center, but rather a professional whose activities encompass diagnostic and counseling differentiation, preventive work, intervention support, methodological guidance for educators, and the coordination of external services.

The concept of systemic care for students' mental health does not imply that schools should assume the responsibilities of the healthcare system or provide long-term psychotherapeutic care. Systemic care, in the school context, means primarily that attention to psychological well-being, safety, and relational culture is not left to chance, to the personal sensitivity of individual educators, or to isolated projects, but rather constitutes part of a predictably structured counseling, preventive, and crisis framework. A school operating systemically has clearly defined procedures for the early identification of risk signals, rules for the transmission of information, accessible consultation mechanisms for educators, procedures for communication with parents, a connection to school counseling facilities, and crisis protocols for acute situations. In this context, school psychologists do not function as the sole bearer of responsibility, but as the professional guarantor of the psychological dimension of these processes.

An important component of the theoretical framework is also the concept of the whole-school approach, referred to in the international literature by that term and designated in Czech as celoškolní přístup, which captures the reality that mental health, safety, and school belonging are not merely the subjects of individual prevention programs, but form part of the overall culture of the school. The whole-school approach encompasses school leadership, the teaching staff, the school counseling center, classroom teachers, students, parents, rules of communication, work with school climate, conflict resolution procedures, anti-bullying measures, crisis preparedness, and a connection to external services. A meta-analysis of whole-school interventions for adolescents published by Lekamge et al. (2025) indicates that this approach has potential particularly in the area of reducing certain forms of risk behavior; however, regarding outcomes related to anxiety, depression, and positive mental health, the conclusions remain less unequivocal. This very ambiguity is important, as it protects school psychology from unrealistic promises and supports a sober argument to the effect that the school can constitute a significant component of the support system, while not being the sole resolver of all psychological difficulties experienced by children and adolescents.

3. Students' Mental Health in Czech and International Data

A scholarly article dealing with school psychology cannot rely on general formulations about "increasing problems" or "current research". The argumentation must be grounded in specific data whose source, year, methodological character, and interpretive limitations are explicitly stated. The primary key source for Czech discourse is the National Monitoring of the Mental Health of Ninth-Grade Primary School Students, conducted in 2023 by NIMH-CZ in collaboration with CSI. The monitoring encompassed more than 6.000 ninth-grade students from all regions of the Czech Republic and was designed to capture selected mental health indicators and measures of subjective psychological well-being through screening instruments (Národní ústav duševního zdraví, 2023).

The published results of the monitoring indicated that more than 50% of ninth-grade students showed signs of impaired well-being, 30% showed signs of moderate to severe anxiety, and 40% showed signs of moderate to severe depression (Národní ústav duševního zdraví, 2023). From the perspective of educational and psychological interpretation, it is essential to emphasize that screening instruments cannot replace clinical assessment, a diagnostic interview, or a comprehensive evaluation by a qualified professional in a medical or counseling context. Nevertheless, these data possess considerable practical value, given that they indicate that a significant proportion of students approaching the end of primary education are entering the transition to secondary school with subjectively experienced psychological distress that may adversely affect their adaptation, academic performance, motivation, attendance, peer relationships, and willingness to seek help.

The Prague survey conducted by CSSP and PCPP, published in 2025, adds a further important layer of data, as it draws on a larger regional sample of upper-grade primary school students, grammar school students, and secondary school students. Data collection took place in November and December 2024 and was completed by 10,238 students at Prague schools (Centrum sociálních služeb Praha a Pražské centrum primární prevence, 2025). The results indicated that one third of students showed serious symptoms of anxiety, 40% showed symptoms of depression, more than half reported sleep difficulties, and 21% showed very low well-being (Centrum sociálních služeb Praha a Pražské centrum primární prevence, 2025). Sleep difficulties are not a peripheral accompanying phenomenon in this context, given that sleep

quality is associated with emotional regulation, attention, learning, impulsivity, mood, and the capacity to manage ordinary academic demands.

Particularly concerning is the finding that 51.2% of Prague students reported having no adult person at school to whom they could confide their problems (Centrum sociálních služeb Praha a Pražské centrum primární prevence, 2025). This finding carries fundamental significance for school psychology, as students' mental health cannot be understood merely as a set of individual symptoms. Psychological distress always occurs within a particular relational and institutional environment. A student who cannot identify any trustworthy adult at school may remain without assistance even when the school formally maintains prevention programs or general support policies. Trust is not an administrative item, but a fundamental prerequisite for effective early identification.

International comparisons provide further context for Czech discourse. The WHO and Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) report from the 2021/2022 survey analyzes the mental health and well-being of adolescents aged 11, 13, and 15 across Europe, Central Asia, and Canada, drawing attention to the significance of age, gender, and socioeconomic background in the areas of subjective well-being, psychological complaints, and life satisfaction (Cosma et al., 2023). The Czech situation is further clarified by the analysis of long-term trends published by Cosma et al. (2022), which indicated that, between 2002 and 2018, Czech HBSC data did not reveal a simple unidirectional decline in overall psychological well-being; however, psychological complaints and gender differences, particularly those disadvantaging girls, became a significant focus of long-term monitoring. The implication is that the current burden experienced by adolescents cannot be explained solely by the post-pandemic situation, given that certain trends and risk indicators possess a longer developmental trajectory.

Additional support is provided by the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, which, while not constituting a clinical measure of mental health, furnishes important information about school belonging, life satisfaction, perceived teacher support, safety, and experiences of peer victimization. The OECD country note for the Czech Republic reports that 21% of Czech fifteen-year-olds felt lonely at school in 2022, and 24% felt excluded from or on the margins of the school environment, compared to OECD averages of 16% and 17%, respectively (OECD, 2023). The same profile reports that 21% of Czech students rated their life satisfaction between 0 and 4 on a ten-point scale, and that only 49% of students indicated that their mathematics teacher showed interest in each student's learning in most lessons, compared to an OECD average of 63% (OECD, 2023). These data suggest that school well-being, the relational accessibility of educators, and the sense of belonging are relevant indicators of school functioning, rather than supplementary topics peripheral to the main educational process.

The available evidence on school-based interventions also supports a sober rather than maximalist conception of the role of schools. The meta-analysis conducted by Zhang et al. (2023), encompassing 29 studies, 32 programs, and 22,420 students, indicated that school-based interventions targeting depression and anxiety produced statistically significant, albeit relatively small effects on the reduction of these difficulties, with better outcomes associated with interventions grounded in cognitive-behavioral principles, led by clinically qualified professionals, and implemented with secondary-level students. The meta-analysis conducted by Hayes et al. (2025), which encompassed 71 unique studies with a total sample of 63,041 young people aged 8 to 18, similarly indicated small but statistically significant effects of universal school-based interventions on anxiety and depression, with the authors emphasizing the necessity of carefully evaluating the theoretical grounding of programs and of maintaining realistic expectations regarding their impact. These findings do not justify the overreaching claim that schools can independently resolve the mental health crisis but rather support the conclusion that professionally guided school support can constitute a meaningful component of a multi-level system of prevention and early intervention.

4. The Availability of School Counseling Positions as a Structural Problem

The extent of students' psychological distress must be interpreted in conjunction with the availability of school counseling positions, given that an awareness of the problem alone does not lead to systemic change if the school lacks the professional capacity to address it. A research report prepared by PAQ Research and STEM for MEYS in 2022 and 2023 indicated that the needs of schools in the area

of specialized and supportive activities are not adequately met by current staffing practices (PAQ Research a STEM, 2023). The purpose of the research was to analyze schools' needs, the existing performance of specialized and other activities, workload, organizational arrangements, international models, and options for systemic reforms in Czech regional education (PAQ Research a STEM, 2023).

Among the publicly available outputs of this research, it is reported that most schools lacking the position of school psychologist or school special educator are attempting to fill these positions, with 75% of schools without the respective position indicating their intention to recruit a special educator or psychologist (PAQ Research a STEM, 2023). Summaries from the same research framework also indicate that supportive positions, such as those of school psychologists, school special educators, or social educators, are absent from a substantial proportion of primary and secondary schools, with the problem particularly pronounced at smaller schools (PAQ Research a STEM, 2023). These findings significantly correct the assumption that the absence of a school psychologist is primarily attributable to a lack of interest on the part of schools. A more accurate interpretation reveals a systemic barrier in which financing, the availability of qualified personnel, regional inequality, the professional attractiveness of the school environment, administrative burden, and competition from the healthcare and private sectors are mutually reinforcing.

Project-based financing, which in previous years enabled some schools to secure the services of a psychologist or special educator, has a role as a supportive and transitional instrument; however, for school psychology it remains insufficient on a long-term basis. Psychological work in schools is grounded in trust, continuity, familiarity with the environment, and the gradual development of a counseling culture. Neither students, parents, nor educators seek assistance merely because the school formally maintains a psychologist's position, but because the given professional is perceived as accessible, legible, stable, competent, and respectful of confidentiality. A position financed on a short-term basis may initiate important processes, but its precariousness undermines the possibility of long-term prevention, climate work, and the relational anchoring of the school counseling center.

MEYS methodological materials on the institutionalization of supportive educational positions, published in connection with the introduction of school psychologists and school special educators in primary schools, confirm the aspiration to transition from project-based logic toward a more predictable systemic arrangement (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2025). The goal of institutionalization is to establish a system whereby the services of a school psychologist and a school special educator can be accessed by the broadest possible spectrum of students fulfilling compulsory school attendance, and so that the long-term professional stability of these positions is ensured (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2025). From the perspective of this article's subject matter, this shift is significant, as it confirms that the school psychologist is no longer conceived merely as an optional premium service for schools with a strong founding authority or an exceptionally active leadership, but rather as part of a support system whose accessibility is to be a matter of public policy.

However, the availability of a school psychologist cannot be measured solely by the existence of a position. The scope of the appointment, qualifications held, the scope of duties, methodological supervision, professional consultation, ethical grounding, actual accessibility for students and educators, and integration with other services are equally decisive. A psychologist present in the school for only a few hours each month cannot fulfill the same role as a psychologist stably integrated into the school counseling center. Similarly, a psychologist overwhelmed by individual consultations and administrative tasks may lack the capacity for preventive work, methodological support for educators, and work with classroom climate, although these very activities are central to the systemic impact of school psychology.

For this reason, it is more appropriate to formulate the goal as guaranteed access to school psychological services, rather than to define it mechanically as the identical presence of a psychologist in all school buildings. Larger primary and secondary schools, schools with a higher level of social disadvantage, schools with a higher prevalence of risk behavior, or schools with extensive heterogeneity in the student population may require a full-time appointment or a multi-appointment solution. Smaller schools may utilize shared specialists or a regional support model, provided that the service is regular,

predictable, professionally supervised, and genuinely integrated into school life. A shared service must not constitute merely an administrative referral to a distant expert, since preventive school psychology requires knowledge of specific classrooms, the teaching staff, the relational culture, and the institutional history of the school.

5. School Conflict Mediation as a Professionally Applicable yet Limited Instrument

School conflict mediation represents a significant instrument in situations where the core of the problem is a communicative barrier, eroded trust, an escalation of mutual accusation, a sense of injustice, or differing interpretations of a school situation. Conflicts between families and schools often arise not solely from the objective severity of the event itself, but also from the meaning-making frameworks through which the respective parties construe the situation. Parents may perceive the school's approach as a failure to understand their child, as disproportionate strictness, or as an attack on their parenting competence. Educators may perceive the parents' response as a challenge to their professionalism or as a refusal to cooperate. The school leadership may find itself in the position of a formal authority that makes decisions but may be unable to restore relational trust between the parties. Mediation in these situations enables a structured dialogue in which it is possible to separate the substantive issue from the relational tension and to seek a solution oriented towards the interest of the child.

The authors' applied experience with school conflict mediation in the Ústí nad Labem Region (Ústecký kraj) indicates that, with appropriate methodological guidance, preparation of mediators, and supervisory support, mediation can contribute to the resolution of disputes between schools and families. Within the scope of this professional experience, 72 mediations of conflicts between families and schools were conducted, of which 58 were concluded with a written agreement of the parties involved. This figure is significant as a reflective applied experience of the authors, rather than as a representative research study or an evaluation with a control group. This very methodological delimitation is crucial, as personal professional experience may fulfill a legitimate function in an academic text if it is not presented as statistically generalizable evidence. In the present article, the mediation experience serves as a practical illustration of the fact that a portion of school conflicts can be resolved through structured dialogue, while simultaneously indicating that mediation has inherent boundaries.

The boundaries of mediation are particularly important in the school environment. Mediation presupposes at least a basic level of voluntariness, safety, communicative capacity, and relative balance between the parties. Situations involving domestic violence, serious bullying, self-harm, suicidal risk, traumatization, suspected abuse or maltreatment of a child, pronounced psychological decompensation, a criminal law dimension, or a fundamental power imbalance cannot safely be addressed as an ordinary dispute between two parties. In such situations, mediation could inadvertently lead to secondary victimization, a minimization of risk, or a false neutrality in cases where it is essential to protect the child and to activate the appropriate professional or legal procedures.

This is precisely where the significance of the school psychologist becomes apparent. The school psychologist is not in competition with mediation, but rather is a professional who assists in determining whether mediation is an appropriate instrument, whether it is first necessary to stabilize a crisis situation, whether it is necessary to involve the Social and Legal Child Protection Authority (OSPOD; *Orgán sociálně-právní ochrany dětí*), an educational and psychological counseling center (*pedagogicko-psychologická poradna*), an educational care facility (*středisko výchovné péče*), a healthcare service, or another specialized institution. The procedural transition from the mediation of school conflicts to systemic care for students' mental health therefore does not constitute a rejection of mediation, but rather its precise integration within the broader counseling system of the school. Mediation remains suitable for conflicts in which communication can safely be restored, while the school psychologist helps to identify situations that call for a different type of professional intervention.

The authors' mediation experience therefore supports the central argument of this article. Schools require instruments for the cultivated resolution of conflicts but equally require a professional capable of distinguishing conflict from psychological crisis, a behavioral difficulty from a traumatic reaction, relational tension from bullying, and communicative breakdown from a situation requiring a protective

response. Without this differential competency, a school may possess individual instruments yet lack the capacity to determine when their application is professionally appropriate and when it is, on the contrary, potentially harmful.

6. The Institutionalized Role of the School Psychologist in Primary and Secondary Schools

The school psychologist should be understood in primary and secondary schools as a stable professional member of the school counseling center whose activities are interconnected with the school leadership, classroom teachers, the educational counselor (výchovný poradce), the school prevention coordinator (školní metodik prevence), the school special educator (školní speciální pedagog), the social educator (sociální pedagog), the educational and psychological counseling center (pedagogicko-psychologická poradna), the educational care facility (středisko výchovné péče), OSPOD, healthcare services, and other relevant stakeholders. Institutionalization in this context does not mean merely the creation of a job position, but the establishment of a professionally managed mechanism in which it is clear what activities the school psychologist performs, what activities they do not perform, how the rights of students and parents are protected, how confidentiality is ensured, how collaboration with educators' proceeds, and how the effectiveness of the support provided is evaluated.

Individual student support constitutes one of the most visible areas of school psychological work, and encompasses the counseling interview, an orientational psychological assessment of school-relevant difficulties, crisis support, work with motivation, consultation with parents, collaboration with the classroom teacher, referral for follow-up care, and support in the establishment of educational support measures (podpůrná opatření). Individual work by the school psychologist must not, however, be equated with long-term psychotherapy or clinical diagnosis in the medical sense. The purpose of school psychological work is primarily to identify the nature of the difficulties, to provide appropriate support within the school setting, and to recommend further care in a timely manner when the difficulties exceed the school's capacity.

Work with the classroom group constitutes the second fundamental area. Classroom climate, relational hierarchies, group norms, bullying, ostracism, social isolation, the sense of safety, mutual trust, and the relationship with the classroom teacher significantly affect students' psychological well-being and their educational engagement. The school psychologist may employ sociometric methods, group interviews, observation, relational interventions within the classroom, and methodological collaboration with classroom teachers. The significance of this work lies in the fact that a proportion of students' difficulties cannot effectively be addressed solely through individual intervention, given that these difficulties arise and are maintained within the specific relational field of the classroom.

Methodological support for educators constitutes the third level of activity. Educators are often the first people to register a change in a student's behavior, performance, or social engagement; however, without professional support, these signals may be interpreted in an overly pedagogical, moralizing fashion, or conversely, with excessive uncertainty. The school psychologist can assist educators in distinguishing when the issue is one of rules and instruction, when it is a relational conflict, when it may be a signal of psychological distress, and when it is a situation requiring an immediate crisis or protective response. This methodological support protects students from misinterpretation of their difficulties and simultaneously protects educators from professional isolation in situations that exceed ordinary pedagogical competencies.

Collaboration with parents constitutes the fourth level. Communication between the school and the family in cases of a child's psychological distress is frequently burdened by defensiveness, shame, anxiety, anger, or distrust. Parents may perceive the school's notification as a criticism of their parenting, while educators may interpret parents' defensive reactions as a lack of concern for the child. The school psychologist can help to shift the conversation from a register of blame to one of shared responsibility for the support of the child. Psychological consultation with parents here does not substitute for parental responsibility but rather provides a professional framework that enables the difficulties to be named, their school-related manifestations to be explained, supportive steps to be agreed upon, and a decision to be made regarding possible follow-up care.

Coordination of follow-up services constitutes the fifth level. Educational and psychological counseling centers, special educational centers (*speciálně pedagogická centra*), educational care facilities, OSPOD, crisis centers, general practitioners, child and adolescent psychiatry services, clinical psychologists, psychotherapists, and non-profit organizations together constitute a network within which schools often find orientation difficult and delayed. The school psychologist can help to compile relevant information, to establish communication with the family, to distinguish the competencies of individual services, and to coordinate the procedure so that the student is not left between institutions without access to genuinely available assistance.

7. Professional Guarantee, Ethics, and the Boundaries of School Psychological Work

The strengthening of school psychology must be accompanied by an emphasis on professional guarantee, as the mere extension of psychological language within the school does not in itself signify an increase in professional competence. School psychological work must be grounded in qualification standards, ethical principles, the protection of confidentiality, informed consent, appropriate documentation, respect for the rights of the child and legal guardians, the capacity to work within the limits of one's own competence, and a willingness to utilize supervision. It is precisely this ethical and legal grounding that distinguishes professional psychological work from lay support, intuitive counseling, or informal conversation.

The significance of the school psychologist must also not lead to the psychologization of all school difficulties. Not every decline in performance, conflict, disciplinary incident, or parental disagreement with the school is a manifestation of a psychological disorder. A competent school psychologist should rather prevent lay psychologization by helping to distinguish precisely between the pedagogical, relational, social, developmental, counseling, and clinical dimensions of difficulties. The absence of psychological expertise frequently does not lead to less psychologization, but rather to lay labeling, moralization, simplified diagnoses, and imprecise interpretations of students' behavior. The professional presence of a psychologist is therefore not intended to transform the school into a therapeutic institution, but rather to improve the quality of decision-making regarding which type of support is appropriate in a given situation.

The NASP practice model explicitly includes ethical, legal, and professional practice among the core domains of school psychology and simultaneously emphasizes that school psychologists should function as professionals capable of evaluating and applying research in practice (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020). The Czech system requires an equally robust integration of qualification standards, methodological support, and supervision, given that the school psychologist works in an environment characterized by many competing expectations. The student expects safety and confidentiality, the parent expects respect for their responsibility, the educator expects practical support, the school leadership expects organizationally applicable recommendations, and external institutions expect relevant information. Without an ethical framework, the school psychologist may easily adopt the role of a crisis administrator, informal therapist, control officer, or universal problem solver, which would be professionally and systemically erroneous.

Professional guarantee equally presupposes that the school psychologist will not work in isolation. Supervision, peer consultation, continuing professional education, methodological support, and a professional network are indispensable for maintaining the quality of work, preventing professional burn-out, and resolving ethically challenging situations. The school psychologist frequently navigates between the interests of the child, the expectations of parents, the needs of educators, the organizational demands of the school leadership, and the limitations of external services. Without professional support, this position may be characterized by excessive pressure and unclear boundaries, which diminishes the quality of the support provided.

8. Reactive and Systemic Approaches in School Psychology

The reactive approach to school psychosocial difficulties is characterized by the fact that professional intervention is activated only after a problem has significantly escalated. The school then addresses acute bullying, self-harm, a panic response, an aggressive incident, a breakdown of communication

with the family, a marked decline in a student's functioning, or a crisis event affecting a classroom or the teaching staff. The reactive model is indispensable in crisis situations, as the school must be capable of responding to acute risk. However, as a predominant mode of operation it is insufficient, as it arrives too late, increases pressure on educators, and frequently results in the school acting only at the point when the problem has become visible to all stakeholders and the options for non-intensive intervention have become limited.

The systemic approach proceeds from opposite logic. Its goal is not to wait for a crisis manifestation, but to create conditions in which the school continuously monitors climate, promotes trust, strengthens the competencies of educators, identifies risk signals in a timely manner, offers accessible consultations, methodologically guides work with classroom groups, develops crisis protocols, and maintains collaboration with follow-up services. The school psychologist in this context does not function as a person waiting for a referred student, but as a professional who assists the school in developing mechanisms of prevention, differentiation, and intervention.

A multi-tiered conception of school support makes it possible to integrate universal, selective, and indicated interventions. The universal level pertains to all students and encompasses a safe school climate, support for social-emotional competencies, anti-bullying measures, the cultivation of communication, and access to information about support resources. The selective level targets students or classrooms with elevated risk, for example during transitions between educational levels, following a crisis event, in situations involving relational difficulties, or under conditions of elevated stress for a particular group. The indicated level pertains to students with specific manifestations of psychological distress, risk behavior, or academic failure, who require individual counseling, crisis, or follow-up professional care. The school psychologist can connect all these levels, thereby preventing the school from responding exclusively to the most conspicuous manifestations of difficulties.

Research evidence on school-based interventions supports realistic expectations. Zhang et al. (2023) found statistically significant but relatively small effects of school-based programs targeting anxiety and depression, with better outcomes associated with a cognitive-behavioral orientation, professional leadership, and the secondary level of education. Hayes et al. (2025) arrived at a similarly sober conclusion regarding universal school-based interventions, indicating that these programs may have a significant population-level impact, but that their effectiveness depends on theoretical quality, implementation, and appropriate targeting. Such evidence supports school psychology not as a rhetorical demand, but as a professional mechanism that increases the probability of the correct selection, implementation, and evaluation of supportive procedures.

9. Recommendations for Educational Practice and Educational Policy

Educational practice needs to conceptualize the school psychologist as part of the routine functioning of the school, rather than as a specialist reserved exclusively for crisis cases. In practical terms, this means that the school psychologist should be involved in the regular assessment of risk signals, the methodological support of classroom teachers, work with classroom climates, consultation with parents, the development of crisis protocols, and collaboration with external institutions. When the psychological service is reduced to individual consultations with referred students, a significant portion of its preventive and systemic potential remains untapped.

Educational policy should move toward guaranteed access to school psychological services for students in primary and secondary schools. The organizational model may be differentiated according to school size, student enrollment, social disadvantage, regional availability of qualified professionals, and type of school; however, the principle of accessibility must be common to all arrangements. Larger schools require their own stable full-time or multi-appointment solution, while smaller schools may utilize a shared psychologist on the condition that their presence is regular, predictable, and functionally integrated into the school counseling center. The shared model must not signify merely a formal referral to a distant service, as preventive school psychology requires familiarity with the specific environment, relationships, classroom groups, and pedagogical culture.

Stable financing is an indispensable condition. Project-based funding may support pilot programs, innovations, or transitional measures, but cannot serve as a permanent basis for a position that requires trust, continuity, and long-term planning. A school psychologist whose position is precarious from year to year cannot fully develop the school's prevention system, as professional work with school climate, the trust of students, and the support of educators extends beyond the horizon of a short-term project. Funding from systemic sources is therefore not merely an economic question, but a professional precondition for functional school psychology.

At the same time, it is necessary to protect quality. The expansion of school psychological services must not be associated with a lowering of qualification requirements, an unclear definition of the role, or an overburden of psychologists with tasks that do not require psychological expertise. The school psychologist requires supervision, methodological guidance, continuing professional education, and a professional network, given that their work occurs within a space of high emotional demands, ethical dilemmas, and institutional pressures. The support of the professional who is tasked with supporting the school must be a systemic component of the model.

Educational policy should simultaneously promote the collection and evaluation of data on the functioning of school psychological services. It is insufficient to monitor the number of appointments or the formal presence of a position. Analysis is required of the accessibility of the service for students, the types of cases addressed, response times, involvement in prevention, collaboration with educators, work with classroom groups, connections to external services, parental experiences, and students' perception of the trustworthiness of the school. Such evaluation must not deteriorate into the mechanical reporting of performance metrics but should serve the purpose of ensuring that school psychology is not merely declared but genuinely developed as a high-quality and effective service.

Conclusion

The mental health of students, school climate, and the availability of professional support constitute a problem in Czech education in the years 2020 to 2026 that can no longer be addressed solely through reactive, project-based approaches or through the personal commitment of individual educators. The National Monitoring of the Mental Health of Ninth-Grade Students from 2023 documented a high proportion of students with impaired well-being, signs of moderate to severe depression, and signs of moderate to severe anxiety (Národní ústav duševního zdraví, 2023). The Prague survey from 2024, published in 2025, revealed a widespread prevalence of symptoms of anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, and the particularly serious problem of trust, given that 51.2% of students reported having no adult person at school to whom they could confide their problems (Centrum sociálních služeb Praha a Pražské centrum primární prevence, 2025). The PAQ Research and STEM study simultaneously indicates that schools are actively seeking to fill supportive professional positions, but that their recruitment encounters systemic barriers (PAQ Research a STEM, 2023).

School conflict mediation has a legitimate and professionally applicable role in the school, as it is capable, in certain situations, of restoring communication between the school, the family, and other educational stakeholders. However, its possibilities are limited in cases where conflict overlies a psychological crisis, trauma, serious bullying, self-harm, suicidal risk, endangerment of the child, a criminal law dimension, or the need for follow-up specialized care. The school psychologist therefore neither replaces nor negates mediation but rather situates it professionally within a broader support system and assists the school in distinguishing when a mediation approach is appropriate and when a different form of intervention is required.

The school psychologist should be understood as a professionally guaranteed and institutionally stable component of primary and secondary schools, which enables the transition from the reactive management of acute incidents toward proactive, data-informed, and ethically grounded care for students' mental health. From the perspective of educational policy, it is necessary to move toward stably funded, qualification-guaranteed, and methodologically supported access to school psychological services, whose specific organizational form may be differentiated according to school size, regional conditions, and the level of students' needs. Czech schools do not need a school psychologist as a symbol

of modernization, but rather as a professional partner who connects pedagogical work, prevention, crisis support, work with school climate, communication with families, and connections to specialized services.

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