



## **Elizabeth Williams, PsyD, NCSP**

*Darien Public Schools, Darien, CT*

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### **Describe the site where you work and how you decided on this type of placement.**

I work as a school psychologist in the Darien Public Schools in Fairfield County, Connecticut. Darien is a suburban district located approximately 50 miles from New York City. I am lucky to be one of two school psychologists in a K–5 elementary school with approximately 500 students. A school district that values the importance of the student-to-school psychologist ratio was an important factor during my job search.

Darien recently added a second school psychologist to each elementary school in order to assist in the implementation of a social–emotional learning curriculum and support a tiered approach to behavior support. My role involves traditional special education service delivery and evaluation; however, I also dedicate about half of my time to supporting general education students and families.

In addition to working as a full-time school psychologist, I am also an adjunct faculty member at Montclair State University in New Jersey. I teach Experimental Psychology and Introduction to Psychology courses.

**What are your areas of expertise at this point in your career?**

I am always seeking professional development opportunities to expand my skill set across various areas of practice. In my career thus far, I have strengths in identifying quantitative methods for tracking progress monitoring data on IEP goals, RTI behavior objectives, and treatment fidelity. This area of strength is likely connected to my passion for research methods and statistics. Additionally, I am frequently the go-to person in meetings to analyze assessment data and relay these psychometrics in a jargon-free way to parents.

I am also strongly passionate about consultation with teachers. Although my data-driven mindset easily translates to the use of a behavior consultation model, I am also proud of the consultation work that I have done through a consultee-centered approach. A key element to a successful outcome in consultee-centered consultation involves a strong working relationship with teachers. I find myself putting extra effort into developing meaningful connections with teachers and staff. Rapport is especially important in cases in which there is a lack of objectivity surrounding a student's presenting problem or a teacher's lack of confidence in their own abilities to address behavior or academic challenges.

**Describe your engagement in the local community and how this impacts your work?**

During graduate school, I served as a coordinator for the COMPASS Program at Fairleigh Dickinson University. COMPASS (Community Promoting Academic and Social Success) is a college-based support program for students with autism spectrum disorder. During this time, I made connections with local high school child study teams and families. Through these relationships, I provided insight into the college application process for students with disabilities. Importantly, this also included ensuring that parents and students were well-versed in the change in disability laws that comes with the transition from high school to college.

I am still collaborating with the COMPASS team on research projects, presentations, and publications. I also have plans in place to continue these community outreach efforts in my current district by spreading knowledge and awareness of postsecondary supports for students with disabilities.

**Describe a challenge that you have faced in your early career and how you handled it. What advice do you have for other early career school psychologists with similar challenges?**

School psychology training programs equip us with the skills necessary to complete psychoeducational evaluations and write comprehensive reports. Despite training in these key areas of the special education process, I was still very nervous during IEP meetings. When presenting my evaluation results and proposing goals, I spoke too quickly in order for my turn to be over, which compromised the quality of the information I presented and undermined the hard work I put into the evaluations.

I started to realize that I was less nervous in meetings with families I knew well. I overcame the nerves associated with presenting during IEP meetings by establishing strong relationships with parents *before* the meeting. Now, I call to introduce myself as the school psychologist completing the cognitive/social-emotional component of the evaluation and subsequently remain in frequent communication about my testing progress and answer parent questions. Additionally, I meet with parents prior to initial and triennial meetings in order to review evaluation results in depth (this also aligns with best practice).

I encourage all current and future school psychologists to prioritize relationships with families. You quickly become a familiar face to parents who may not be well-versed in the special education process. This effort goes a long way in earning parents' trust and becoming someone they turn to for a stamp of approval on their child's programming. Strong relationships with families allow IEP meetings to feel more like a conversation rather than a formal legal obligation.

**What specific aspects of NASP membership and involvement have impacted or benefited you in your career thus far? Why is membership in NASP important to you?**

I have been involved in NASP since my first year of graduate school when I served as a NASP Student Leader at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Since then I have presented at three conventions, including the 2020 convention in Baltimore. Attending NASP conventions is a revitalizing way to renew your passion for the field and bring fresh ideas back to your district.

NASP membership also allows me to access the resources available on their website. I use these materials on a weekly basis for easy access to research-based practices, parent handouts, books, webinars, and much more. It is critical

to utilize these resources, because many practicing school psychologists no longer have access to their university's online library databases. Instead of subscribing to expensive academic journals, NASP resources provide up-to-date information on all of the relevant issues in school psychology.