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Howard County Public School System, Maryland

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Describe the site where you work.

The Howard County Public School System is a diverse suburban district that lies between the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas. The district serves approximately 56,000 students across 76 schools. I currently work full-time at Patuxent Valley Middle School in Jessup, Maryland. It is a comprehensive middle school with a population of about 650 students.

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

At this point in my career, my areas of expertise are cultural proficiency and crisis response. I am in the process of completing the third level of cultural proficiency training offered by my district, which focuses on building facilitation skills. I am the Cultural Proficiency Liaison for my school (the only School Psychologist in the district to serve in this role) and I serve in a leadership capacity by co-chairing our Psychological Services Culture Club committee which raises awareness of provides resources for colleagues relating to the multitude of topics that impact our practice. I am also a member of the county-wide crisis response team. In addition to the rigorous training provided to the team through in-house professional development, we are also certified in NASP's PREPaRE model.

Describe something that has surprised you about your career thus far.

I think the biggest surprise in my career thus far has been the enormity of the challenges this generation of students is facing. It is important to raise awareness of the mental health difficulties that children face, from birth to age 21. I am fortunate to work in a district that recognizes the need for mental health services for students and is willing to be innovative in the provision of these services.

What challenges have you faced in your early career, and how have you handled them?

One of the biggest challenges I have faced so far is time management. Managing an assessment load while providing and logging direct services, leading and attending meetings and trainings, consulting with teachers, and responding to crises can quickly overload a schedule. Staying organized and being proactive have helped me limit getting behind on any aspect of my job. I've learned to anticipate tasks that come up routinely and I work to get them knocked out when I have a free moment so it is off my plate when the deadline rolls around. I also try to plan my direct services out for the school year so I am not tasked weekly with developing an activity and pulling resources and materials. If you work in a district where you have summer work time, use it to your advantage!

What advice do you have for other early career school psychologists?

My biggest piece of advice would be to stay connected to a group of fellow early career psychologists. I was hired at the same time as four other psychologists and we quickly developed a network to communicate and consult about challenging cases. Sometimes, it can seem daunting to approach a more experienced psychologist to ask for advice or to get an answer to a simple procedural question. It was great to know that I had a small group of peers who were there as a support system.

How has your NASP membership benefited you?

The biggest benefit from my NASP membership is access to current research and practice information through the Communique and School Psychology Review. It can be overwhelming to try to stay current on every change in the field but having it arrive in my mailbox every month removes the barrier of having to seek information on my own. I have especially appreciated NASP's social justice resources as they have helped me promote a more inclusive school environment and helped move colleagues in the same direction.