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Sunnyside Unified School District, Tucson, AZ

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

I work for Ocotillo Early Childhood Center in Sunnyside Unified School District, the second largest public school district in Tucson, Arizona. Approximately 92% of the student population identify as ethnically diverse, 80% qualify to receive free and reduced lunch, and 17% are English language learners. My school site has a fee-based infant and toddler program in addition to general and special education preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms. I primarily provide consultation, behavioral intervention, and assessment services to my district's preschool population. As part of the reevaluation process for our students identified with developmental delays, I use assessment data to guide the team towards eligibility decisions, kindergarten placement, and services. I am also involved with the district autism evaluation team that assesses students from preschool through high school. I fell in love with the preschool population during my internship year when I was part of the preschool child-find team. I have found that utilizing my playful personality helps engage young children during assessment and intervention at my school site.

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

Early childhood assessment, best practices when working with students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, consultation, and encouraging collaboration with a child's team are my current areas of expertise. As a former general education teacher, I understand how it feels to need assistance when you have a student struggling either behaviorally or academically. In my current position, I strive to solve problems and resolve issues before a child can "fall between the cracks." Although I am only in my fourth month at my current site, teachers feel comfortable referring me to

colleagues who need help or are approaching me for assistance regarding their students' learning and behavioral challenges.

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

I actively stay involved in volunteering for my school's fall festivals, performance events, book fairs, and other school events. Volunteering my time to give back directly to my own school has helped me build community and rapport with teachers, staff, students, and their families. For nearly a decade, I have also worked with children in the local foster system. I continued my work with them through my internship and my first year as a school psychologist. I was able to see firsthand the struggles of children who were dealing with trauma, emotional meltdowns, and cancelled visitations with family members. The lengthy court process toward reunification, severance of parental rights, or adoption can cause turmoil in a child's life. Witnessing this system firsthand has allowed me to persistently advocate for foster children's stability through social-emotional supports within the educational setting. When I worked at an elementary school with a specialized program for students identified with emotional disabilities, many of these students were also in the foster system. With the assistance of a wonderful speech-language pathologist, we were able to implement a social-emotional curriculum for these students that is still in place to this day. Many of the students' difficulties have inspired me to volunteer for Dine Out for Safety, an annual volunteer event that raises proceeds to benefit for Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault (SACASA). Giving back to my community and school is cyclical, as it helps me stay in touch with students as well as actively find solutions to address the problems they face.

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?

One of the challenges I faced early on was experiencing physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion due to job burnout. At a prior work site, I was assigned to schools facing organizational challenges with overwhelming caseloads. I often arrived to work before sunrise and stayed well after sunset; eating all three meals in my office was commonplace, and home became just a place to sleep. After speaking with district management and advocating for assistance with my caseload, I ended up resigning from my position. I applied for and accepted an offer at my present work site, where I enjoy work-life balance and closer proximity to family. My advice for other early career school psychologists experiencing job burnout is not to give up! Reach out to your colleagues for assistance and consultation. Establish healthy work boundaries. Advocate for more school psychologists at the district level or senior management level. Utilize NASP resources, including recommended ratios for comprehensive services, to assist with any conversations involving caseloads. You can also research school psychologist workloads and responsibilities at other districts or worksites within your neighboring community. Perhaps a perfect fit is closer than you think! Lastly, practice self-care and find something to regularly engage in that is not related to work. As a result of self-care activities, I am now a regular salsa dancer practicing with a local Rueda de Casino (Salsa round dance) group!

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

NASP's research statements help me easily find evidence-based solutions to challenges that my students, staff, and families experience at my work site. Recently, I was able to give research and

parent handouts to a colleague in need of resources regarding anxiety and school refusal. I enjoy waking up and reading daily e-mails from the NASP Membership Exchange forums. The questions, answers, and clarification provided by school psychology colleagues helps me stay current on topics effecting our profession. The NASP position statements and resolutions have reaffirmed my role in ensuring students' emotional well-being. My NASP membership allows me to stay connected to recent policy developments and to advocate for my students by contacting elected officials in Congress.