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Gwinnett County Public Schools, Lawrenceville, GA

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

I work for the Early Childhood Program for Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) northeast of Atlanta, GA. Gwinnett County is one of the largest school districts in Georgia, serving over 180,000 students. I am split between two pre-K assessment teams that complete multidisciplinary psychoeducational evaluations for children ages 2–5 years old. I also complete the reevaluations for special education students prior to starting Kindergarten. Last school year, I participated in over 130 arena assessments. After relocating back home to Atlanta from Tampa, FL to be closer to family, I interviewed with GCPS for both a traditional school psychologist position and a pre-K position, and fell in love with the opportunity to work on a team and support some of our youngest students to provide early intervention!

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

At this point in my career, I feel that my area of expertise is in early childhood assessment. I've become much more efficient in administering assessments with this age population and selecting appropriate measures.

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

One thing that has surprised me about my career thus far is the amount of support that has been available. Thankfully, I've worked in counties where a strong professional network from district leadership to the school level was/is present. If I ever encountered a problem I knew exactly who to turn to for guidance or advice. Coming out of graduate school I was nervous about not always having the right answer or being viewed as an "expert." With a great professional network the appropriate

information has never been more than a phone call or e-mail away! We really do support each other in our field!

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

My first three years as a School Psychologist I was site based and worked full-time at a Title I elementary school in Tampa, FL. I wanted to provide opportunities for my students to participate in afterschool activities, so I started a Girl Scout Troop. This was a great way to connect with students, teachers and parents outside of my traditional role. I also served as a Big Sister in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. Having that mentoring background was very beneficial when my site implemented a similar program to support students with attendance and behavioral issues. Now that I'm back in Atlanta, I've been raising money for Autoimmune Awareness causes and even had my own Virtual Walk this year! I am pursuing my doctorate degree, so I have temporarily limited my involvement in additional community programs but hope to eventually serve as a mentor again.

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

Last year I was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disorder called Relapsing Polychondritis. It is a progressive disease and impacts everything from my voice to my breathing and even my joints. It has taken some time to adjust and every day is different but I try to maintain a positive attitude, especially since I'm still able to do what I love. Working full-time on two teams has been great because my teammates are very supportive and I don't have some of the responsibility that comes with serving multiple sites on my own. In our profession you definitely have to be flexible and this diagnosis, although challenging, has proven just how resilient I can be when faced with adversity.

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

Take care of yourself! Even before my diagnosis I tried my best to always practice self-care; being sick just reemphasized that for me. It's ok to take a break and have lunch, to leave that e-mail unread, to make time to spend with family and friends instead of bringing home that report to finish. The first time I was admitted into the hospital during the school year I realized, the show didn't stop. Students were still being served, meetings were still being held and my stressing about it wasn't helping them or me! Just as we advocate for our students, advocate for your own well-being too. Take the time to live your life!

How has your NASP membership benefitted your career?

My NASP membership has been very helpful in keeping me informed about the latest topics in our field and providing continuing education opportunities. I love to travel and being able to pair that with professional development while attending NASP conferences is great! Plus, I love being able to network with other school psychologists and renew my passion for this field.