



Sarah Flora, EdS

Santa Clara Elementary, San Xavier Mission School, San Miguel Catholic High School, Sunnyside Unified School District, Tucson, AZ

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Describe the site where you work.

Currently, I am split 4/5 time at Santa Clara Elementary School and 1/5 time split between two private catholic schools. Santa Clara proudly serves a diverse population of students. Our school is the feeder school for students from the San Xavier District and the rich culture of the Tohono O'odham nation is evident. The San Xavier Mission School is located next to the San Xavier Mission. The school primarily serves Tohono O'odham students from the San Xavier District. Other students include children from the Pascua Yaqui Tribe and children from the surrounding areas. The San Miguel High School is a private Catholic school that integrates rigorous academics with practical experience, preparing students for college and career readiness.

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

I would say that I feel confident in the areas of mindfulness, consultation, and supervision. My continued collaboration with the University of Arizona has allowed me to bring much needed resources such as Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness interventions into my schools to help my students. There is so much research in support of mindfulness and the positive effect that it has on social emotional learning. I feel that collaborating with graduate students is mutually beneficial because they bring a positive energy to the school that is refreshing for both the students and teachers that they work with but also provides support and supervision for them within their program as they develop their skills.

I try to implement mindfulness as much as I can at our school. We collaborate with El Rio Community Health Center to bring a mindfulness class to students in Third grade. I also run an afterschool program that I call "Crafting with Kindness." I try to integrate lessons on gratitude, mindfulness, and random acts of kindness with arts and crafts. Given the challenges that our students face, I feel that it is important to help them with these resources.

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

I think the most surprising thing about my career is realizing that no one day is the same. I love that each day offers new challenges and rewards! Sometimes I feel more like a detective than a school psychologist; trying to figure out what has happened along a student's academic path to the point that they have been referred to our team. More importantly, how can we help them to be successful at our school?

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

I think one of the biggest challenges that I have faced is trying not to over-extend myself. As a profession, we inherently care so much for our students and the challenges that they face. When I first started, I spent much of my time trying to find resources for my students and connecting them. I turned to the experienced school psychologists in my district to help develop my own list of resources and I continue to build on it. I also became involved in committees, working on matters that I cared about (Health and Wellness, School Events Planning, Southern Arizona Psychological Association (SAPA) School Psychology, SAPA Continuing Education, and Mobilization for Positive Futures). Although I feel that it is incredibly important to be involved with current issues, I also know that self-care is imperative. I balance these commitments with mindfulness, meditation, yoga and Zumba.

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

I feel very lucky that I work in a district with a strong group of school psychologists who value mentorship and continuing education. I can call any one of them when I need advice. I highly recommend that early career school psychologists continue to network within their district and community. Sometimes being a school psychologist can be isolating, but reaching out for help is so important! Join local, state and national organizations to benefit from the resources that they have available. I am a strong advocate of being a lifelong learner. We don't have all of the answers, but we should be able to know where to find them; whether it is through your own research or a collaborative professional relationship.

Additionally, self-care is vital to avoid burn-out. Self-care is not selfish. There is a reason the airlines tell you to secure your own mask before helping others: if you are not taking care of yourself, you cannot help others. Get enough sleep, get some level of exercise, practice mindfulness and gratitude (even for the little things, like a hug from a student), eat well and be well!

How has your NASP membership benefited you?

My NASP membership has granted me access to multiple resources that have helped me as an early career school psychologist. I love the information provided in the *Communiqué*. The updates on legislative issues, upcoming webinars, trainings and workshops help me to stay informed. The discounts that are provided to Early Career School Psychologists are also very much appreciated. I love the different topics that are presented during School Psychology Awareness Week. It is so helpful to have the tools and resources available to share with our schools.