



Jameshia Coleman, MA, EdS

Charleston County School District, Charleston, SC

June 2021

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

I work for Charleston County School District in Charleston, SC. I serve as a preschool psychologist at two schools that have Headstart programs along with 4-year-old child development and kindergarten programs. Both of my schools have students from 6 weeks to 6 years old; I specifically serve the 3s, 4s, and kindergarten students. One of my schools has a 70% dual language learner population and one of my schools serves students who live in an area with one of the highest crime and eviction rates in the country currently.

Our district placed early learning and universal preschool as a leading working initiative. I was apprehensive when I was presented with the opportunity; early learners are their own beautiful beings that I was not sure I was qualified to handle adequately. However, after reading NASP's position statement on early childhood learning and finding the National Association for the Education of Young Children, I found the intersection of my passions: a focus on preventive services and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). I especially loved how DAP highlighted human development occurring within the context of culture; therefore, in order for instruction to be effective, it must also be culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate for each child.

How have you gotten involved with different task forces and committees as an early career professional? Describe some challenges and successes in this work.

I've attempted to soak up as much information as I can, so I've registered for a lot of different trainings and workshops offered both locally and virtually. They typically add you to a list of information that comes out, which often includes when they are looking for new team members.

The successes for me are always in meeting people doing amazing work for students. It's humbling and inspiring for me to be in the presence of so many amazing people who passionately serve students in various capacities. One of the biggest challenges for me is time management. Balancing my priority work duties with extra committee duties can be difficult.

What is your area of expertise? How have you developed skills in this area?

I would not consider myself to be experienced enough to have an area of expertise. I am building my skills and rooting myself in early childhood intervention and assessment practices along with emphasizing and prioritizing equity within all my practices.

My graduate program through Eastern Washington University taught us to be resourceful in growing our skill set so I still buy textbooks and read research to ensure I know best practices as a preschool psychologist. I also love the NASP Communities; I learn so much from the discussion boards and have found so many great resources. I have also found virtual meetups like the Bilingual Psych and Neuropsych groups to be very helpful and informative; there's a lot of expertise and passion in those groups.

How do you promote equity in your work? What advice do you have for other early career professionals who seek to infuse more of these practices in their work?

The most common way I promote equity is through building community. For me, as a Black woman, promoting equity is different. The weight feels heavier for me personally, but I also feel a pressing sense of responsibility to the students and the communities I choose to serve, so I'm intentional about building my community. I'm part of social media groups like Black School Psychologists and School Psych Sistahs, where conversations are informative and supportive to the growth of Black school psychologists. I also maintain contact with some of my peers from grad school, and I have psychologists locally who are intentional about building supportive community with one another. We also have a voluntary School Psych Social Justice Book Club in our department. We meet monthly to discuss topics from the books and commonalities we may see within our buildings and share resources and practices we are doing to disrupt inequitable practices.

I also promote equity through working with my schools to reflect on classroom practices and thought patterns first. We use tools like Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Inventory of Practices and Pyramid Equity Coaching Guide to work with teachers to evaluate how we are promoting the social emotional competence of our young learners. There are clear questions to help examine views and attitudes towards topics like challenging behaviors and intentionally designing supportive learning environments.

I also advocate for and educate the parents/guardians of my students. I take extra care and time to ensure they are aware of their rights, feel comfortable with the steps we are taking, have a voice at the table, and know what our actions and plans mean for their learners. I don't rush the process.

My advice for early career professionals is to:

- Build community. Find people who can support you (locally and virtually) because equity work is heavy work. There are people out there who care just as much as you do.
- Be inquisitive. Ask questions if you encounter practices or policies that perpetuate inequities.
- Have courageous conversations. Speaking your truth may feel uncomfortable, but I'm learning the more you sit in discomfort, the less uncomfortable it will begin to feel.
- Know yourself. Be honest with where you are on the continuum of equity work by educating yourself. If you need to take a step back, that's ok. If you need to lean in more, that's ok too. Just remember to always look within first.