



## **Pamela Boyle, EdS, NCSP**

*Appoquinimink School District, Middletown, DE*

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

I currently work at the Appoquinimink Preschool Center, which is part of the Appoquinimink School District, located in Middletown, DE. Our school serves a culturally and racially diverse suburban/rural community about 60 miles south of Philadelphia. We serve approximately 200 children ages 3–4 years old. Most of the students who attend our center have been identified with developmental delays, autism, or other medical conditions that impact their development or learning. We also provide itinerant services to children in local daycares and preschools. My role at Appoquinimink Preschool Center involves evaluating students as young as 2 years old who are referred through child find screenings and community referrals. I also support teachers in our center through consultation, and I serve on our building-level leadership and safety teams.

I decided to stay with the Appoquinimink School District after having a wonderful internship experience. The district has a supportive community of school psychologists who I regard as mentors and friends. At the time of my graduation, a position opened in the district's preschool center. I had previously worked in an early intervention classroom for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through the Chester County Intermediate Unit (CCIU). Our classroom was part of the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network's (PaTTAN) Autism Initiative. This program provides autism support classrooms in PA with intensive training and coaching on evidence-based practices rooted in verbal behavior (VB)

and applied behavior analysis (ABA). I loved my experience with the CCIU, and I was very excited about the opportunity to work with young children again. Working with preschoolers is so rewarding because I am able to observe first-hand the significant progress our students make with early intervention services.

### **How do you engage with staff in your buildings and effectively connect with them?**

Developing relationships with teachers is very important to me. I regularly join classrooms to help with behavior management or routine activities. Sometimes this means helping deescalate a student, taking a student on a walk around the building for a break, sitting in for circle time, or breaking a sweat dancing to a GoNoodle. I am also eager to help out by creating intervention materials or data collection tools. More than anything, I want teachers to know that I see how hard they are working and I appreciate everything they do for our students. I think this is especially important right now, while teachers in our building share the double duty of teaching in person and virtually.

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

It is very difficult for me to identify an area of expertise this early in my career. I feel like I am constantly learning new things. I have the most experience collaborating with teachers and families to support the needs of young children with ASD or behavioral challenges. Previously, I worked in the child welfare system in Delaware. Therefore, I have a good understanding of what community resources are available for families. My other interests include social skills instruction and trauma-informed practices.

I am very fortunate to have had many opportunities to observe and consult with other experienced and knowledgeable school psychologists in our district. I share our preschool center with another school psychologist, Dr. Laura Donnelly, who has many years of experience evaluating and supporting young students with ASD. I am thankful every day for her mentorship.

### **Describe a challenge that you have faced in your early career. How did you handle it? What advice do you have for other early career school psychologists with similar challenges?**

I happened to graduate from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM) just a month before our district's in-person instruction was halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers in our district were given approximately two weeks to pivot to virtual learning. We had to learn multiple new platforms and programs, many of which I had never heard of previously. In addition, virtual instruction for preschool-age students proved to be especially challenging. I supported teachers by helping them educate parents on methods to promote engagement and manage problem behaviors during virtual learning. Thankfully, our program also has a very supportive administrative team that set developmentally appropriate expectations for screen time.

My advice for other early career school psychologists is to always consider the perspectives of your students' families and how environmental stressors (not limited to a global pandemic) impact their functioning and ability to support their children academically. Never assume that you know what a family is going through. Always strive to be sensitive, flexible, and understanding and to encourage that approach for teachers and staff.

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

NASP has provided valuable resources related to the pandemic and school reopening, including the COVID-19 Resource Center and webinars. I also attended the NASP conference in Baltimore in 2020 and the virtual conference in 2021. Both conferences provided valuable professional development experiences and opportunities to attend workshops led by leading experts in our field.

I feel strongly that supporting NASP through membership is important in order to promote school psychology as a profession. I appreciate what NASP is doing to address the national shortage of school psychologists, improve our working conditions, and advocate for much-needed mental health supports in schools.