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President-Elect Candidate

Statement 3

The pandemic has increased inequities in academic progress and mental health services for our students. What is NASP's responsibility in addressing these inequities and what will you do as NASP President to address these needs?

Someone recently asked me in discussion of our public school system, "Is it easier to look away?"

The pandemic has increased inequities in academic progress and mental health services for the students in our care. School Psychologists were on the front lines of children's mental health as schools pivoted to provide services during pandemic closures. A tsunami of referrals now accompanies the re-entry to school, and so it will be necessary to become stronger voices for equity. We cannot accept "back to normal" as our endgame.

NASP has a responsibility in addressing these inequities. If elected to be NASP President, I will have a responsibility in addressing these inequities. More importantly as human beings, we all have a responsibility to address these inequities. Individuals and groups in a position of power, influence and privilege have a responsibility to help others.

Is it easier to look away or should we choose to have difficult conversations?

Our words are only as good as our actions. We must work to ensure that our beliefs align with our vision and goals. If we want to achieve something great as a team, it starts with believing it is possible. When we believe then we can work hard to achieve it.

The structure of NASP allows for collective work on anything that we set our hearts and minds to accomplish. Committees, state delegates, strategic liaisons, and staff are part of the effort to tackle serious issues in our school communities and will be there to address the inequities we now face in the aftermath of school closures. Fortunately, NASP is not just these great volunteers. NASP is also each and every member summed up in the phrase, "We are NASP!"

It will be critically important to amplify authentic voices who can elucidate the issues affecting children as well as ways our profession plays a role. We must also recognize that many of these problems in education are not new nor created solely by the pandemic. There have been real problems in public education for a century.

Is it easier to look away or do we acknowledge our past and the factors that have contributed to this moment.

In the most basic terms, we can tackle this issue by providing resources to members, fostering research to inform our decisions, demanding greater equitable tools in our daily work, strong advocacy and leadership. Ensuring that members utilize NASP resources, harnessing expertise in and around our profession, and building greater capacity

within our state associations can create the potential for meaningful change. In addition, with strong partnerships there is so much more that can be done to intervene and build equitable programs across the country.

However, in the most aspirational terms, we must strive to create communities of inclusion and belonging. Belonging is the only sustainable solution to the profound problem of inequity. The right to be included equates to having greater decision-making. Belonging begins with dispelling negative stereotypes and actively working to bring marginalized groups into the center of our concern.

Advocacy will be a prerequisite for this work. It will require the use of data and becoming consumers of research. Stories from our field can bring the numbers to life and are illuminating in these conversations. However, we must guard against implicit bias contributing to inaction or even worse misinformation.

Is it easier to look away or should we work together and do big things?

As a lesson from the pandemic, I found it even more critical to connect with others. First with close colleagues for comfort, then with my state association for guidance and ultimately to NASP for direction, resources and professional development. NASP has been responsive during so many crises in my career (i.e. school shootings, suicide, 9/11) that I appreciate its presence during difficult times.

Is it easier to look away or do we change the status quo?

In my work as a practitioner and as a volunteer leader, I always believed that you get the best effort from others not by lighting a fire beneath them, but by building a fire within. Coming together means we will face challenges that affect all of us. As NASP President, I will ensure that we have plenty of room at the table to have conversations, work together and do big things.

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.” – Helen Keller