

PATRICIA L. LANDERS SANTIAGO

State Delegate Candidate: Puerto Rico

Statement 1

What are your qualifications that make you a strong candidate for delegate?

A responsible and passionate school psychologist is a perfect candidate for Puerto Rico delegate in NASP

I am a Puerto Rican school and clinical psychologist who has been fully trained in undergraduate and graduate programs in my island. While I attended graduate school for my master's degree in school psychology, I worked as an English as a Second Language Teacher for the PR Department of Education (PRDE). This 15-year experience in public school settings made me see first hand the need for school psychologists. I am a very responsible, organized and loyal person who is passionate for just causes. I strongly believe that prevention is key, mainly when dealing with children, adolescents and mental health well-being in general. Other than being a public-school teacher, I am an associate professor for one of the strongest school psychology graduate programs in the Southern part of the island and I also run a part-time private practice. My experience working with the PR School Psychology Association, as secretary (2017-18), presidents (2018-2019), past president (2019-2020) and direct collaborator (2020-present) has helped solidify my leadership skills as well as my interpersonal & professional relationships with colleagues, the PRDE and other organizations and/or associations.

What is the most pressing issue in your state? As NASP Delegate, how do you see your role in working with your state association to address this issue?

I believe Puerto Rico's most pressing issue is the recognition of school psychologists as important professionals, who need to be included as part of the public-school system. As to 2017, public schools in Puerto Rico did not have a school psychologist on hand. The aftermath faced from hurricane Maria brought to the attention of government leaders the need of addressing the emotional well-being of students. Federal funds for rebuilding included a budget assigned to work on identifying trauma signs in children and adolescents in public schools. This created positions for mental health specialists, but not specifically for school psychologists. Other situations faced by Puerto Ricans later on (earthquakes, pandemics) also helped alert political and government leaders regarding the toll on mental health. In 2019, the PR Department of Education announced that they were opening positions for school psychologists in every public school. This was a great step in creating awareness of the need to address mental health in schools. So, why is this still a pressing issue in Puerto Rico? I believe it still is, because not enough awareness has been achieved. School psychologists working in the public-school system continue to struggle with being heard and recognized and also having formal responsibilities, standardized protocols and job security. This is why I believe a lot of work is still needed to be done. It is my understanding that school psychologists in Puerto Rico need to be recognized and deserve full respect from school administrators and leaders. They also need the tools and support to excel in what they need to do.