SHAWNA RADER KELLY
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?

As a practitioner, I am confronted on a daily basis with the ongoing effects of a global pandemic, which resulted in disruptions in education, academic learning loss, and a worsening mental health crisis. I also work with families experiencing discrimination, financial hardship, disruptions in housing, and a reduction in community resources. Others have lost loved ones and experienced family disruptions, and they continue to grieve these and other losses.

While students experienced the same global event, their exposure to and experience with the pandemic, the resulting school closures, and subsequent return to school have varied dramatically. The pandemic did not create the structural and systemic inequities in education, but it did serve to exacerbate them. School psychologists feel the impact when they work with students with significant academic skill deficits, address more intensive mental and behavioral health needs, respond to deficits in social skills, confront a rise in absenteeism and school avoidance, and field an increase in referrals from teachers, schools, and families. Schools often do not have systems in place to address these needs in a timely, equitable, and culturally-responsive manner, thus necessary services may not be provided to students who need them most.

NASP has a responsibility to address these issues by supporting school psychologists in identifying, disrupting, and responding to inequities in education to ensure that students receive the instruction and support they need. As the Strategic Liaison for Professional Advocacy, I have found success by prioritizing three things: Policy, Professional Development, and Professional Practice. As NASP President I would work to focus the efforts of our leadership on these areas.

Our association has the ability to address inequities by advocating for policies that ensure that all children have access to high-quality education, including access to comprehensive school psychological services. NASP advocates at the national level by promoting evidence-based practice and partnering with allied professional groups. While federal advocacy is critical, NASP must also provide resources, support, and technical assistance to school psychologists to effect change at the local level. Many federal programs rely on states and local education agencies for implementation, and decisions that affect schools, students, and school psychology practice are often left to local decision-makers. Our policy efforts must include ensuring that school psychologists are equipped and positioned to advocate for equitable policies and practices in their local communities.

The challenges facing schools today are more complex than ever. School psychologists benefit from high-quality professional development to support schools in implementing evidence-based practices, high-quality instruction and intervention, and preventative and responsive services. Offering reliable, relevant professional training, tools, and resources supports school psychologists in these efforts. Attending and adapting to the various ways that school
psychologists access professional development is also important, as many practices may themselves result in inequalities for those with limited funds for professional training or the inability to travel to a convention. Our ability to predict and respond to members’ needs is critical to ensuring that we provide meaningful services to our membership. I’d add that professional development is more than training and resources; we must also emphasize the development of the profession by ensuring that school psychologists are identified as leaders and that other school leaders recognize and respect their skills. Ensuring that school psychologists are identified for their knowledge and expertise in leadership and systems change is critical to ensure that we are included when important decisions are made.

Finally, we must focus on influencing professional practice. Our work directly impacts the lives, well-being, and educational outcomes of students. Ensuring that school psychologists have the capacity, skills, and tools they need to advocate for and to implement equitable, evidence-based best practices is a critical function of our association. Advocacy efforts and professional development are only effective if school psychologists work in systems that value and support comprehensive practice, recruit and retain an adequate workforce, and respect and honor the skills and services that school psychologists provide. Our ability to promote and support effective practice is where we have the capacity to truly impact school communities.

These priorities have been my focus as a leader, and as NASP President, I would add one more: people. I believe in school psychologists and the work we do. I believe that schools must identify and meaningfully address inequalities in educational systems that contribute to disparities, and I believe that school psychologists are critical partners in this work. I’m passionate about engaging and empowering school psychologists and collaborating with other school leaders to lead the change that is needed in our school systems.