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?

NASP has a long history of being a leader in the field of education. No matter the concern NASP has issued statements, provided resources, and taken the lead in coalitions. The pandemic has been no different. NASP’s COVID-19 Resource Center and the Ask The Experts Webinar series have been sources of support to school psychologists, educators and the students and families that we serve nationally. As a practitioner, I have, like you, have taken advantage of the resources.

The academic and mental health inequities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic are no different and NASP as an organization has a responsibility to continue its leadership role.

I have personal and practical experience in responding to the pandemic. In the spring of 2020, while we our schools were closed, I began reaching out to families to check in on students over the months leading up to the fall of 2020. It was obvious that the pandemic had differentially affected our students and in ways that were unanticipated.

I took the initiative to formulate a plan for my district to be proactive in supporting our students to make as safe and healthy return as possible. I worked with colleagues to present a plan to the district administration for the first ten days to start the school year consisting of trauma informed lessons taught K-12 by our staff to address coping with emotions, reacclimating to school routines, social skills, and executive function instruction. Our goal was to reorient our students back to school. I lead the cross-disciplinary group throughout the summer to research the materials, create the trainings and to train the entire staff prior to beginning school.

Like you, I have seen first-hand the results of the pandemic. I have seen students who struggled with the social isolation, fears of becoming ill or dying, having loved ones become ill or die, food insecurity, loss of housing, the lack of instruction and the lack of daily structure and routine of school for an extended period of time. These are but a few examples of the traumatic events our students dealt with. The impact was felt by students across socioeconomic status, disability status and at varying degrees of mental health. Students who were in at-risk situations and/or had multiple ACES experienced this collective trauma and the resultant mental health and educational concerns more acutely. While the pandemic maybe “over”, it is far from over.

As NASP President, one of the tools at my disposal is the ability to create a task force. I believe that, in consultation with the NASP Staff, Board of Directors, Leadership Assembly, Strategic Liaisons and Committee Chairs we can determine the most appropriate direction for a task force to start this work. The task force would serve as a catalyst to work that would stretch beyond my time as President.
Addressing the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic is hardly a one-year endeavor, however as President, I am reminded of another President, President Kennedy and his speech on the USA’s goal to land on the moon. He said, “We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.” I would alter President Kennedy’s remarks slightly. In my mind, we, (NASP and all school psychologists) choose to address social inequities in the provision of high-quality mental health and academic, not because they are easy, but because they are right and socially just. As NASP President, I plan to jump start our “moon shot.”

I ask you to join me, not solely by voting for me to be the next NASP President, but join me in shooting for the moon by sharing your wisdom, your experience, your voice, your skill and knowledge. This a collective effort and as NASP President it would be my honor to lead this charge. I firmly believe that together we can accomplish anything.