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 in a high school, I have witnessed the initial and ongoing effects of the global pandemic on my students, which resulted in disruptions in education, academic learning loss, and a worsening mental health crisis. I work directly with students and families experiencing discrimination, financial hardship, disruptions in housing, and depleted community resources. Others have lost loved ones and experienced significant family disruptions, and they continue to grieve these and other losses.

While students experienced the same global event, their exposure to the pandemic and their experiences during school closures and the subsequent return to school, have varied dramatically. While the pandemic did not create structural and systemic inequities in education, it served to exacerbate them. School psychologists see this impact when they work with students with significant academic needs, are called upon to address more intensive mental and behavioral health challenges, respond to crises, confront chronic absenteeism and school avoidance, and field an increase in referrals for special education services. Many schools do not have adequate systems in place to respond to student needs in a timely, equitable, and culturally responsive manner, and necessary services may not be provided to those 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 and advocating for best practices to ensure that students receive appropriate instruction and support. As the Strategic Liaison for Professional Advocacy, my work involves responding to challenges and opportunities in our profession by focusing on policy, professional development, and professional practice. As NASP President I will work with the leadership to concentrate on these priorities.

Advocacy for policies that ensure that all children have access to high-quality education, including access to comprehensive school psychological services, is a critical function of our association. As President, I will work with leaders and the NASP staff to leverage collaborative partnerships with allied professional groups and to advocate for policies that promote evidence-based practices, highlight the importance of our work in schools, and address barriers that contribute to workforce shortages. While federal advocacy is critical, providing resources, support, and assistance to school psychologists to effect change at the local level is equally important. Many federal programs rely on states and local education agencies for implementation, and decisions that affect students, schools, and school psychology practice are often left to local decision-makers. Policy efforts must ensure that school psychologists have a seat at the table when decisions are made and that they are equipped and positioned to utilize their expertise to advocate for equitable policies and effective practices in their local communities.
School psychologists benefit from high-quality professional development to support districts in implementing evidence-based practices, providing high-quality instruction and intervention, and engaging in preventative and responsive services. Offering reliable, relevant professional training and resources can bolster skills and empower school psychologists to partner with other leaders to confront educational inequities and create more effective school systems. Professional development must be readily available and responsive to members’ needs. I collaborated with NASP staff and other leaders to develop the COVID-19 Resource Center and chaired the task force charged with evaluating our web-based resources. I will use these experiences to ensure that we engage in ongoing evaluation of the depth, breadth, quality, and accessibility of professional resources and work with others to ensure that offerings are responsive to the needs of a diverse membership employed in a variety of settings.

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 provided by school psychologists. Promoting and supporting effective practice is where we can truly impact our members and the school communities they serve. I’ve spent twelve years in leadership, working with school psychologists and for school psychologists, and as NASP President I will continue to partner with others to develop and elevate our profession.

These priorities have been my focus as a leader, and as President, I will emphasize the importance of the people in our profession. I believe in school psychologists and the value of our services. I believe that schools must identify and meaningfully address inequities 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.