



## **Laura Bitzer, MA, EdS, NCSP**

*Red Clay Consolidated School District, Wilmington,  
Delaware*

**March/April 2020**

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### **Describe the site where you work and how you decided on this type of placement.**

I work in a public school serving students in kindergarten through eighth grade. I work primarily with the students in kindergarten through fourth grade, while a second school psychologist within the building works primarily with students in grades five through eight. I chose my current district, Red Clay Consolidated School District, based on the commitment the district made to improve access to mental health supports and services within our schools. For example, a few years ago the district made it a priority to hire at least one school psychologist in each school to lower the student to school psychologist ratio, and to allow school psychologists to provide a wider range of psychological and educational supports and services. I chose my school, Brandywine Springs School, in part based off of the unique student population and wide variety of age ranges. Additionally, the administration at Brandywine Springs School is deeply committed to continuing to improve our school climate with students, staff, and families, and they see school psychologists as valuable members of the team who can affect positive change in all aspects of the educational environment.

## **What are your areas of expertise at this point in your career?**

Prior to graduating from the University of Delaware in 2018, I worked as a graduate assistant for the Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project (DE-PBS). During my time with the DE-PBS Project, I assisted in providing professional development for schools and districts related to expanding their Tier 1, 2, and 3 supports. I have also been able to use what I learned from the DE-PBS Project to enhance the positive behavior support program at my own school. I am currently the Tier 1 team leader for the building, which supports a total of 1,000 students and their families. I also work to support the school's problem solving team, or PST, which services students at the Tier 2 level.

## **Describe your engagement in the local community and how this affects your work?**

It is clear that there is a national shortage of school psychologists. I strongly believe that this shortage is due in part to a lack of visibility of school psychologists within our schools and communities. Many students and families do not know what a school psychologist is, and it is our job to educate them. Given my strong feelings on this matter, I have made engaging with my school and my community a priority. I have served on the board of the Delaware Association of School Psychologists (DASP) as the Communications Chair since the Spring of 2016, and as such, I have been involved in organizing statewide events, such as membership dinners, participation in a race for charity, and the annual DASP conference. Additionally, I have grown the size of the DASP social media page substantially by sharing resources and information from state and national organizations related to mental, emotional, and educational health. Within my school, I run an Instagram page (@bss\_psychs) with the other school psychologist in the building, on which we post pictures of events in the school, information on our Tier 1 programming, and more. We have utilized our page to connect with other school psychologists and school counselors to share resources; and we have utilized it to connect with families in our school and increase our visibility within our community. I also remain actively engaged in the school by contributing to various school teams, by being an assistant coach for the middle school soccer team, and by guest coaching for Girls on the Run. Due to the visibility gained through contributing to Girls on the Run, the Girls on the Run program at my school chose to make sensory kits for various classrooms within the school using my guidance and input. Thus, my engagement in my local community and in my school has resulted in my own personal and professional growth and has contributed to the growth of our community programs.

**Describe a challenge that you have faced in your early career, and how did you handle it? What advice do you have for other early career school psychologists with similar challenges?**

Many of the challenges that I faced in my early career were and are self-inflicted. Entering a profession that is so important with so many people counting on you is incredibly daunting. Walking into your building those first few months feels akin to walking blindfolded into a complicated maze, just hoping that your training and your colleagues will assist you in being able to come out the other side. My advice to other early career psychologists with similar worries is to try your best to trust yourself. Your training and your dedication are likely more than enough to help you become a great school psychologist. Additionally, try to be as present as possible in the school and in the community to show students, staff, and families that you are there to support everyone, not just the students that you see for testing or counseling. Finally, as awkward and uncomfortable as it may feel, learn how to say no to people. It is easy to want to do everything for everyone when you are in your early career, but if you do not set boundaries for yourself, you may be setting yourself on a path to burnout.

**What specific aspects of NASP membership and involvement have benefited you in your career thus far? Why is membership in NASP important to you?**

Membership in NASP is important to me because NASP puts forth so much time and energy into advocating for school psychologists to be involved in decision making about education and mental health on the national level. Our society is at a point where mental health is something that people are talking more openly about, and this is our opportunity to make sure that we are represented in those conversations. The only way that we will progress toward lowering the ratios of psychologists to students and increasing the overall number of individuals entering into our field of work is by being visible both nationally and locally. The work that NASP does with advocating for visibility at the national level is vital, which is why contributing to NASP through maintaining membership is so important. On a more day-to-day level, NASP membership has benefitted me by providing me with countless resources online or through in-person trainings that have allowed me to grow as a professional.