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

I work as a school psychologist in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) in Maryland. PGCPS is a large, diverse district of over 130,000 students; it is within the top 25 largest school districts in the nation. I am currently assigned to three elementary schools. My role is diverse in that I am responsible for the following activities: conducting psychological assessments, attending meetings, providing counseling services, and consulting with school staff, parents, and community stakeholders. I also design, organize, and implement school-wide activities to support children's mental health, such as an annual children's mental health expo and fitness walks in support of children's mental health. I love the communities with whom I work, and I feel as if my work really makes a difference in the lives of others. While my day-to-day roles frequently change as I travel from school to school, the support I receive from my supervisors, the relationships I have developed with my terrific colleagues, and the frequent opportunities I am provided to collaborate and consult with other school psychologists continue to make PGCPS a great fit for me!

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

I hesitate to call myself an expert because I am always trying to learn more about topics, especially since there always is new research being conducted. With that said, I am well versed in early intervention related to children's mental health, psychological assessment, and increasing parent engagement and involvement, especially with the IEP process.

Describe your engagement in the local community and how this impacts your work.

I try to attend as many events and activities in my school communities as possible to build rapport among school staff and create more trusting relationships with students and families. I also attempt to support my students and their families through initiatives outside of the schoolhouse. Over the past several years, I have led trainings for parents and teachers and presented at district-level family conferences. I also have partnered with various community agencies to implement a mental health expo at one of my schools to help teach students different coping strategies they can use when upset. I am involved with state level initiatives through the Maryland School Psychologists' Association in an attempt to create change on a more global level as well.

In my own community, I often find myself collecting and donating for those in need. I have partnered with companies such as Lands' End, Zips Dry Cleaners, and Soles4Souls to help provide various basic needs to those in my community, such as jackets, clean clothes, and shoes. My involvement in these volunteer activities continues to remind me of the resiliency of humans. This is an important concept to remember, as school psychologists often work with individuals going through difficult periods in their lives. I also make a point to become involved in my community in ways that are totally unrelated to our line of work. I enjoy seeing theatre and taking advantage of various cultural exhibits and performances. I have been lucky enough to see Hamilton four times! These experiences help to broaden my horizons and provide me with a break from focusing on work topics.

Describe a challenge that you have faced in your early career and how you handled it. What advice do you have for others with similar challenges?

One challenge that I have experienced has been making sure to learn the culture and climate of schools before attempting to implement change. Even if I believe some changes will significantly benefit a school, I have found that it is necessary to take the time to observe and learn about a school's existing climate and culture in order for change to be effective and well received by school stakeholders. During my first year as a practicing school psychologist, I helped the crisis intervention teacher at one of my middle schools to completely redesign the school's procedure for working with students who were engaging in self-harm behaviors. We designed a promising self-harm protocol and attempted to implement it. Despite the protocol appearing to be well received by students and families, the assistant principals became frustrated with the protocol; this made things significantly more difficult. In hindsight, if I had taken more time to observe the school climate and culture to learn about the differences among the school leadership, I believe I could have worked differently with the various school leaders and stakeholders to create a self-harm protocol that could have been more successfully implemented. Since this experience and whenever I am new to a school, I do my best to spend a school year observing the climate and culture of the school and attempting to

build relationships and a sense of trust with school staff before trying to effect large, school-wide change.

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

NASP membership provides me with access to a wide array of resources, including articles, informational sheets, and opportunities for professional development, the most noteworthy of which, of course, is NASP's annual convention. I have been attending and presenting at the NASP convention since my first year of graduate school. There is something special and invigorating about NASP's convention—it is a perfect blend of professional development coupled with opportunities for collaboration and consultation with colleagues. It sometimes can be isolating being the only school psychologist in my school buildings. My NASP membership is important to me because no matter where I am, the resources provided through my NASP membership help serve as an always-available lifeline and connection to other school psychologists so that I never feel alone in my role.