

Carving Pathways to Leadership: An Introduction to the NASP Leadership Development Committee

By Celeste Malone, Chase McCullum & Hiral Bhatt

Leadership is an essential competency for school psychologists. Whether formally (i.e., by virtue of appointment or title) or informally, school psychologists serve as leaders in school communities by advocating for the needs of students and their families. Although there are opportunities for professional advocacy through NASP and state and local associations, members may be unaware of how to access these leadership opportunities or may feel like they lack the skills and experience to make a meaningful contribution. Too often, it can feel like these opportunities are based on who you know as opposed to who is capable, with opportunities to build leadership capacity being few and far between. Whether real or not, these perceptions are a deterrent to potential leaders and weaken the leadership pipeline. This, in turn, affects the capacity of NASP and our state and local associations to effectively advocate for the profession. Our associations are only as strong as their memberships. Furthermore, the future success of our professional associations is dependent on both their future members and the cultivation of leaders to sustain the associations.

Leadership Development Committee

One of NASP's key initiatives is to “develop leadership skills and qualities of school psychologists.” This is a major task of the NASP Leadership Development Committee (LDC), which has the responsibility of providing ongoing training in leadership skills for NASP leaders, orienting new and returning NASP leadership to their duties and responsibilities, identifying and establishing mentors for emerging leaders, and coordinating the nomination of the Rookie of the Year award with the Awards Workgroup. The LDC has existed for many years and in the past primarily saw as its purpose the orienting and mentoring of new leaders. However, NASP leadership has been on a two-year journey to improve governance policies and practices through the Government Enhancement Initiative (GEI). The GEI recommended major revisions to the LDC that included expanding its ranks as well as its responsibilities and focus. The newly rejuvenated LDC now has a membership composed of a more diverse group of leaders including early career and seasoned practitioners, graduate educators, and members with experience serving as state presidents. On the LDC are Tracy Hobbs (chair, Michigan), Hiral Bhatt (cochair, Michigan), Ashley Enz (Kansas), Celeste Malone (Maryland), Chase McCullum (Mississippi), Leah Nellis (Indiana), and Karen Apgar (Oregon).

Additionally, the LDC has a new charge to build a reservoir of potential leaders that could be accessed by both NASP and state leadership looking to fill committee vacancies, recruit leaders for support of particular projects or initiatives, or identify potential nominees for elected positions. This reservoir will be maintained by

a database of experienced state and national leaders, as well as by association members who are interested and skilled in leadership development opportunities.

Since July 2015, when the committee officially started its work, the group has held a working retreat, conducted a two-part new leader training for newly elected and appointed state delegates and committee chairs, created a mentorship toolkit, and started planning for a special leadership training session, NASP 101, to be held at the convention in New Orleans (see the article in the 2016 Convention News section in this edition of *Communiqué* that talks about this leadership training opportunity.) Successful completion of these activities and the others scheduled as part of the future work of the committee are dependent upon the broad skills and experiences of school psychology leaders. The members of the LDC hail from across the country and represent multiple facets of diversity in the profession. They are linked by a shared passion for leadership, but have traveled individual pathways to the LDC that are quite different. In an effort to show how the pathway to leadership often organically evolves, this article will highlight the journeys of three LDC members, Hiral Bhatt, Celeste Malone, and Charcelor (Chase) McCullum.

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Spotlight on Leaders

Hiral Bhatt, NCSP. When I pull into the administration building parking lot, I tell myself, “Think big picture, think nationwide, think strategic.” My morning is filled with multitiered system of supports meetings with district directors, consultants, and other core team members. My afternoon includes a reevaluation for a student with a learning disability. I have the same thought, “Think big picture, think long-term impact, think strategic.” My daily practice as a school psychologist continues to evolve as I continue my leadership journey with NASP. My journey began when I attended the Multicultural Affairs Committee (MAC) breakfast during the San Francisco convention; my internship supervisor had arranged a meeting with a MAC leader, and this opportunity led to becoming a member of the MAC subcommittee for Asian Americans. I stayed in touch with the leaders I met during the convention and continued to seek their guidance as I started my first job. Staying in touch led to conversations about leadership, and I was encouraged to get involved in different aspects of NASP. In the fall of 2012, I was invited to become a member of the GEI. As an early career member of the task force, I spent the beginning stages by listening to and watching NASP leaders solve problems and make tough decisions that would impact our association. As I continued to participate in and contribute to GEI discussions, I gained firsthand knowledge about strategic priorities and the mission and vision of NASP. As the cochair of the LDC, I am involved in activities related to identifying, sustaining, and supporting new leaders. Reflecting on my short journey with these unique experiences, I am reminded of how each discussion has led me to become a better thinker. My experiences with NASP have had a profound impact on the way I view the students, families, and staff members I work with.

Celeste Malone, PhD. I have always believed that service to the profession is important. As a graduate student, I made a conscious effort to not only be a member, but to seek leadership positions in the organizations representing my profession. I was president of my program's school psychology association, served as my program's NASP student leader, and was active in my state association (Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania; ASPP). ASPP sponsored my attendance at NASP's Public Policy Institute, and my leadership at the local and state level led to my appointment as a graduate student member of the Local Arrangements Committee for the NASP convention in Philadelphia. These experiences were instrumental in my education and training as a school psychologist and indoctrinated me into the profession. I saw firsthand how school psychologists engage in legislative advocacy on behalf of the profession and the

populations we serve, and I connected with leaders in the profession who would later become mentors. Now, as graduate faculty, I consider it a privilege to work with students who represent the future of school psychology. I actively attempt to create a culture of leadership by sharing my past and current leadership experiences, inviting my students to attend conferences and leadership meetings with me, and connecting them with people and opportunities specifically related to their own interests. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the LDC to create similar opportunities for all school psychologists so that they can continue to be strong leaders in their schools and communities, their state associations, and in NASP.

Charcelor McCullum, NCSP. My path to leadership within NASP began by developing relationships and finding a mentor within my state association. As an early career professional in a state with very few individuals working in the field, I was in serious need of a community. Sensing this need, my supervisor encouraged me to attend our state association's annual convention. When I arrived, I saw no familiar faces, but I soon realized that I was among a group of people who shared similar ideals and goals and were experiencing similar difficulties. It was amazing! Over the next few days, I developed strong relationships with people who would provide me with support and encouragement over the next several years. One of these individuals became my mentor, and she eventually asked if I would be interested in serving as the state association's membership chair. This position opened my eyes to the importance of committing both my time and energy to service toward the growth and development of school psychology on a local, state, and national level. Within the next few years, I had the opportunity to serve as the president-elect and president of the Mississippi Association for Psychology in the Schools. One of the duties associated with these positions was to represent my state at various events sponsored by NASP. Attending these events and collaborating with leaders from all over the country who were passionate about the field of school psychology helped me to realize that my experiences, opinions, and efforts were valued. As a member of the LDC, my goal is to help other school psychologists realize that they have a voice and that their commitment to serving as a leader within our field can have a far-reaching effect on the lives of children and their families.

Discovering a Path to Leadership at the NASP Convention

The paths taken to leadership positions are as diverse as the professionals who fill them. Hiral, Celeste, and Chase's stories demonstrate how experiences and relationships often converge to create leadership opportunity. At the 2016 NASP convention, the LDC will be sponsoring a special session called *NASP 101: Understanding Governance and Leadership Opportunities in NASP* (MT035D). The LDC is excited about this session because it will be a great opportunity for those interested in or new to leadership to learn more about NASP's organizational structure and existing leadership opportunities within the organization. The session will also feature a panel of national and local, early career, and seasoned-career school psychology leaders who will share their stories of leadership. This will be followed by breakout roundtable discussions where attendees can engage in more focused discussions about leadership and receive guidance on pursuing leadership opportunities on national, state, and local levels. The LDC hopes to use these sessions as a way to meet and learn from interested attendees and perhaps discover new potential leaders interested and willing to serve NASP or their state association.

The Leadership Development Committee looks forward to working closely with NASP leadership, state associations, and most importantly, NASP members to provide resources and tools to assist school psychologists in becoming leaders in their schools and the profession.

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