

# *The New Jersey* SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

Published by the New Jersey Association of School Psychologists (NJASP)

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## ***2020 brings unprecedented challenges for New Jersey school psychologists...***

As this newsletter goes to press, New Jersey school psychologists are ending a school year that has been like no other. Just a few months ago many of us exited our offices not knowing that we would not be back for the rest of the year. We scrambled to find our place in helping students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. And then just last month, the horrific murder of George Floyd illustrated the long standing racism pandemic - and once again, school psychologists must find our places not only in addressing the present strife but in advancing a future of fairness, equity, and justice. In this newsletter, you will find articles addressing those issues and much more.

Wishing you a safe, healthy, and happy summer.....



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## President's Message

Eli Freund

Happy Summer Fellow School Psych Colleagues!

This has been quite the spring! I don't think any of us would have thought that we were going to find ourselves in our homes for half of the year. However, as school psychologists, we work with our students to be resilient. I believe that this shows who the flexible ones are. Many students seem more flexible than their parents. How many of us adults are feeling anxious? Stressed? Write your own feelings here \_\_\_\_\_. The secret has been out; we all are feeling that way. There are plenty of funny videos, TikToks, memes, etc., that show how many of us feel. Our own counseling sessions afford insights for use in coping with the current situation.

You may wonder what NJASP has been doing during the stay-at-home order. We have been at the NJ Department of Education table, working with other organizations to develop supports for all educators. We have developed a position paper on providing remote assessment. We also have been providing webinars that are free to members. NJASP leadership and committees understand that during this time we need to provide you who are in the field with the tools that will make you feel supported.

The start of the 2020 decade has been quite a doozy, but I would like to point out that this has also put mental health professionals front and center. We have championed social-emotional functioning; we should take the bull by the horns. Advocate for yourselves in your schools and even at district levels. Write an email to your supervisor/director and principal. Tell them that as a school psychologist you can contribute expertise on mental health. As September rolls in, so will a new set of rules for students. The lives of many students will move in new directions. Some will have parents who are recently unemployed, and some will have lost loved ones due to COVID - 19. To be honest, I was already working on my theme for this coming school year prior to COVID- 19; it was social-emotional functioning (SEL).



This coming September, NJASP will place a greater focus on SEL with emphasis on Social Justice, Equality, and Restorative Practices. I do hope that by December we will be able to see each other at the Winter Conference. Enjoy your summer!

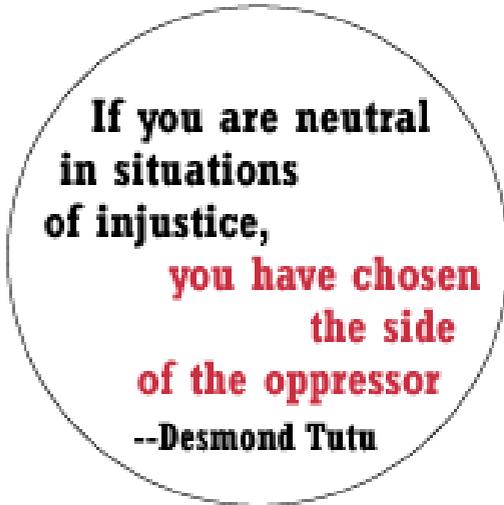
Sincerely,

*Eli Freund*

Eli Freund  
NJASP President

## **NJASP Outrage At Authorities' Indifference To Dangers For Black, Indigenous And People Of Color; Ramps Up Plans To Reform Systematic Abuse**

In a unanimous re-affirmation of its commitment to supporting the peaceful protests of ongoing systemic indifference to historic and current subjugation of people of differing color, ethnicity, religion and deprived economic status, the NJASP Executive Board has issued the statement printed below. The Committee on Diversity is planning to expand and intensify NJASP's active outreach and collaborative support for inclusion and social justice for all children and their communities.



**If you'd like to be an active  
participant, please contact  
Diversity Co-chairs:**

**Helizhabeth H. Cruz  
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Brianna Prego  
@brianna.prego@gmail.com**

## **NJASP Condemns Racism and Violence Against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color**

As an organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of all individuals, The New Jersey Association of School Psychologists (NJASP) stands committed to fighting structural and systematic racism. We express outrage and deep distress regarding the murders of George Floyd, Ahmad Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Such practices by our institutions have been an ongoing stain on our nation, and continue to impair the dignity and threaten the lives of Black Americans.

Racism is not a thing of the past nor is it a simple political issue. It is a real and present danger that must be met head on. As school psychologists, we believe the most important starting point for the national discourse that must take place is the recognition that all people are created equal and that each human life is of infinite value. We are again witnessing that too many communities around this country feel their voices are not being heard, their complaints about racist treatment are unheeded, and that we are not doing enough to point out that this brutal and unjust treatment is antithetical to basic American values.

People of good conscience must never turn a blind eye when people are being deprived of their human dignity and even of their lives. Indifference is not an option. The right of citizens outraged by these events to engage in peaceful public protest is to be protected as a fundamental right.

We plead for an end to the violence in the wake of this tragedy. We hope for comfort for grieving families and friends, and for peace across the United States while the legal process moves forward. We also join in the demand for a full investigation that results in rightful accountability and legal justice. We call on all Americans to unite in the pursuit of justice and brotherly love and respect, regardless of race, creed, color, or ethnicity.

Systemic racism has plagued our schools for far too long. BIPOC students have historically faced disproportionate discipline and separation throughout their entire academic careers. They have been and continue to be overrepresented in special education populations due to biased assessment interpretation, perceived emotional and behavioral disorders, and presumed learning disabilities. Additionally, these students face disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion and, compounded by poor distribution of funding to public school districts, can ultimately contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Upon graduation from high school, the injustice continues when, as young adults, they face discrimination and profiling when applying to colleges and jobs.

**In a racist society,  
it is not enough to be  
non-racist. We must  
be anti-racist.**

|  
Angela Davis

**None of us alone can  
save the nation or the  
world. But each of us can  
make a positive  
difference if we commit  
ourselves to do so.**

|  
Cornel West

**The beauty of anti-racism is  
that you don't have to pretend  
to be free of racism to be an  
anti-racist. Anti-racism is  
the commitment to fight racism  
wherever you find it,  
including in yourself. And it's  
the only way forward.**

7  
|

Ijeoma Oluo

...'Black Lives Matter' simply refers to the notion that there's a specific vulnerability for African Americans that needs to be addressed. It's not meant to suggest that other lives don't matter. It's to suggest that other folks aren't experiencing this particular vulnerability.

|  
Barack Obama

**Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.**

|  
James Baldwin

**Action is the only remedy to indifference: the most insidious danger of all.**

|  
Elie Wiesel

As an association, we also call on our fellow school psychologists to take action in order to support our BIPOC students and families. We acknowledge their pain and frustration; we recognize the traumatic effects that centuries' worth of injustice has caused. It is no longer enough to simply see and hear about these acts on social media without action. Our professional ethics require us to respect the dignity and rights of all persons and speak up for their rights and welfare by providing them a voice. By providing the guidelines below, we hope to assist in the fight for equality in our schools.

- Engage in reflective practice by examining our own biases; keep abreast of current issues through sources of accurate reporting. This may include seeking additional professional development opportunities.
- Incorporate evidence-based material and curriculum that demonstrates diverse representation of students and families.
- Use our professional voice to advocate for systems change within our workplaces and communities, especially during blatant acts of racism and prejudice.

- Examine and implement restorative justice policies and equitable discipline practices that take into consideration the unique needs of BIPOC students.
- Diversify our roles to include the provision of professional development in our own school communities, dissemination of resources, and practicing school-based counseling that addresses and monitors the traumatic impact of stress stemming from racial and ethnic injustice.

We understand that these are difficult times and that the current civil unrest has contributed to widespread tension across the nation. In order to facilitate growth as agents of change, we need to be the voice when there is no voice. The list of resources below is not an exhaustive list by any means, but it offers a starting point for genuine action as we bravely ignite the beginning of difficult, necessary, and productive conversations as we all work toward change.

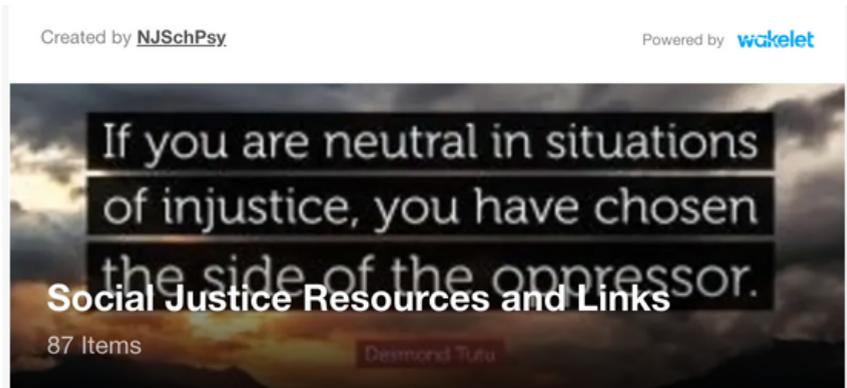


Resources:

[Link to Resources page:](#)



## For more resources, please check out the NJASP Social Justice Resources and Links



Click below to link to Social Justice Collection



New information is added frequently -  
so follow us or check in often.

Additionally, if there is anything we missed that you think other school psychologists would find helpful, email the link to Terri [@njasp.web@gmail.com](mailto:@njasp.web@gmail.com)

## Evaluation Guidance During the COVID-19 Crisis

When the initial shut down order was issued, NJASP issued strong guidance about completing evaluations during a global pandemic. Recently, we issued updated guidance as we enter the next stages of the shut-down and as we plan for school in the fall. Finally, hot off the presses, is our guidance document addressing in-person evaluations under the current conditions.

*Links to the April and the June papers are below.*

On the following page, you will find the guidance on in-person evaluations and the potential impact of the use of PPE and physical distancing on test results.



school\_psych\_memes

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## NJASP Guidance: In-person Administration, Scoring, and Interpretation Of Standardized Assessments During Covid-19

Terri A. Allen

### **First Priority: Health and Safety of Students, Families and School Staff**

- The health and safety of students, families, and school staff must be the first priority when considering the delivery of services. School districts should adhere to standards released by infection control experts (e.g., NJ Department of Health, CDC guidance). Services (including evaluations and the provision of related services) which require face-to-face interaction should not be conducted during times when there is a substantial risk of contagion, as this practice places the health of the student, family, and practitioner at risk.
- As stated in previous guidance, for many students, sufficient information for eligibility and programming decisions can be gathered using file reviews, interviews, rating scales. However, an IEP team may conclude that the data from standardized testing is necessary so that the evaluation “is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child’s special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the suspected eligibility category.”

The current pandemic underscores the importance of ongoing data collection, development and implementation of evidence-based interventions, and progress monitoring, as essential not only when school is in session but also should school be closed suddenly. In doing so, we possess a broader base of data, drawing not only from available “traditional” assessment information, but from multiple sources, providing a framework of evidence that we may use to make decisions with better fidelity and integrity.

- When “stay at home” restrictions are relaxed, school psychologists and other CST members will need clear and specific guidelines, consistent with NJDOH and CDC parameters, in order to ensure the safety of school staff and students. School districts are expected to provide clear health and safety standards, including, but not limited to, screening protocols, the wearing of PPE, physical distancing/partitioning procedures and materials, adequate ventilation in testing spaces, and sanitization. Districts should be expected to provide necessary supplies and adjustments to the evaluation setting.

### **In Person Testing Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Reliability and Validity**

- Practitioner decision-making regarding in-person testing with adaptations should be based on their professional ethical standards and in the best interest and needs of the individual student. All decisions must be student centered; not driven by convenience or “routine”. The evaluation planning process should focus on defining specific evaluation questions to guide the selection of appropriate evaluation components. Vulnerable students, such as young students, students with emotional conditions, students with language impairments, students with hearing and/or visual impairments, students with developmental disabilities, and others may be greatly impacted by the use of PPE and evaluations results may have limited validity in these cases. For many of these students, alternative “non-testing” evaluative data may be more useful.
- To meet health and safety standards, in person evaluations will require the use of PPE and other adaptations. This is obviously not the way these tests were developed and standardized and potential threats to reliability and validity need to be addressed.

- It is important that the results of an assessment be as precise and consistent as possible. However, no test is 100% perfect and there is always a degree of *error* when we measure something. Although there will be unpredictable fluctuations that are unavoidable, by following standardized procedures we help to eliminate some of that error. The less error we have, the more reliable the test is. The more reliable the test, the greater confidence we can have that we are truly measuring what we want to measure (eg., cognitive abilities, academic achievement). However, deviating from standardized administration procedures introduces a new unknown degree of error and uncertainty into the results.
- Whenever you apply adaptations to a test, you increase the potential of “error.” School psychologists are ethically obliged to minimize error as much as is possible, in order to obtain reliable and valid results. Because a new unknown source of error is introduced to the current testing situation, school psychologists need to be especially diligent in reducing other potential threats to reliability and validity as much as possible. For example, if the test format is changed from traditional paper-pencil to an in-person digital format (eg., Q-interactive), to minimize the touching of test materials, the school psychologist must be competent and experienced in the digital administration procedures in order to reduce examiner error. Test score data should be compared to alternative sources (i.e., previous test scores, existing school records/curriculum assessments, teacher interview) in order to confirm or refute obtained test scores.
- As with all assessments, school psychologists should consider the reliability and validity evidence relevant to their assessment techniques and articulate the limits of their assessment results. Modifications to standardized administration procedures need to be explained to parents and school teams so they are adequately informed of concerns related to reliability and validity and have the opportunity to decline affected portions of the

evaluation *before* starting the evaluation procedures.

{An example of language you can use for informed consent is provided in the appendix of this document.}

In explaining to parents or school staff, try to communicate in layman's terms: Reliability is "How well are we measuring something?" [accuracy and consistency]; Validity is "Are we measuring what we want to measure?" [meaning and relevance]. You cannot have validity, i.e., test measures what it is supposed to, if the test does not measure "it" in a consistent, i.e. reliable, manner. Therefore, as our concern about potential error in measuring "X" increases, our confidence in what "X" means will decrease.

### **Scoring, Interpretation, and Reporting**

- A detailed description of all modifications/adaptations to standardized administration procedures should be included in written reports, as well as their potential impact on the reliability and validity of the assessment. Provide specific examples. For example, you observed that the student frequently asked you to repeat questions. Did he/she have difficulty understanding you because of the mask or did you observe other instances of inattention that might better explain the behavior? What other data can you examine to help determine the impact of the mask on test results? Did last year's teacher report similar behavior when masks were not necessary? Did the testing take longer than usual because of necessary safety measures? Do you think that impacted your test scores? Did there seem to be a concern related to physical distancing? For example, the student is used to "proximity", "pointing/gesturing as cues" but this was not possible due to either the distance or plexiglass divider. Address the potential impact of the adaptations but do not assume that the adaptations are the *sole* reason for the difficulties. Examine your results: Is there a pattern observed? The student performs significantly better on nonverbal items

that require little, if any, verbal directions? Could there be auditory or language processing concerns that while exacerbated by the current conditions, does not seem to be only because of the need for masks based on the totality of your information. These observations could be critical in not only in determining the reliability and validity of your results but also to inform day to day support and intervention that the student may require.

- The potential impact of increased measurement error related to deviations from standard administration should be considered when reporting actual test scores. Because there are insufficient data to suggest any systematic modifications of norms used to interpret tests administered in this manner, you will need to rely on normative and validity data obtained using the standard assessments. In other words, you will score the test in the same way that you score the test when it is typically administered but with clear documentation in any score tables that you may include. However, because you have introduced unknown error that potentially affects the reliability of the scores, the interpretation and reporting of those norm-referenced scores should be done cautiously.

Whereas, reliability refers to measurement consistency/accuracy, measurement error is represented by the confidence interval. This margin of error represents the range of true scores around the obtained score. So, for example, in reporting a full scale IQ score of 88, we might say that we can say with 95% confidence that the student's "true" score falls in the range of 83 - 94. These confidence levels ranges were determined using norm-referenced data under standardized procedures when the test was originally developed. In deviating from standardized procedures, we are introducing unknown and unpredictable *measurement error*. We do not have any data to discern how much this error impacted the test's reliability, and, hence the validity of the results. Even without a deviation from standardization, norm-referenced scores from standardized tests are never

perfectly accurate and reporting a band of uncertainty around the scores by using confidence intervals helps to account for the potential error. Due to the potential of a greater margin of error, as represented by the confidence interval band, the obtained confidence intervals per the test manual, must also be interpreted with caution. Therefore, although reporting confidence intervals at the widest range (95%) is better than reporting a single obtained score, we can not assume that under these conditions the student's "true" score falls between 83 and 94, for example, especially not with 95% confidence. Reporting of percentiles ranks is similarly problematic. During the current circumstances, school psychologists are advised to refer to the descriptor labels in reporting results (best); confidence intervals at 95% with a disclaimer (better than single obtained scores); and avoid reporting single obtained scores. If you have to report a "number", clearly and unequivocally, provide an disclaimer. Especially now, your report should not overemphasize numbers. This may be a good time to reassess your report writing style - adopting a domain focused and/or referral question guided format, integrating multiple data, rather than the traditional "test by test" template. **Remember, it is not about the "test", but *always* about the child.**

In addition to descriptions of modifications/adaptations verbiage, language should be added to your report regarding potential social and emotional factors that could impact the reliability and validity of your assessment results. The current level of distress among students and their families could impact test performance and must be considered when interpreting results. Some students have experienced varying degrees of trauma during this pandemic. Given that research suggests that stress can lead to reduced performance on measures such as working memory and processing speed, knowledge of recent experiences will serve as a critical context for interpretation. The extended time out of school may impact results of standardized cognitive and achievement assessments. What was the quantity and quality of the student's remote instruction? How might that

factor into interpretation? Consider the student's circumstances related to the pandemic when interpreting behavior rating scales. In interpreting the results of the scales, do the results seem to reflect a student's "trait" or his/her current "state"? A response to behavior will differ depending if the presentation seems more related to the current "state" of affairs as opposed to a long standing pattern. Multiple sources of data is especially critical for the evaluation process as we resume in-person services. Examine, reflect, evaluate, integrate but still take a stand (albeit, a cautious stand) with regard to the reliability and validity of your assessment.

### Three Take-Aways

- All decisions must be student centered; not driven by convenience or "tradition". Plan your evaluations around the questions that need to be addressed in order to help the child; not around the assessment tools that are available.
- Cast your evaluation net wider and deeper. Draw not only from "traditional" assessment tools, but from multiple sources, which will provide a comprehensive framework of relevant and meaningful evidence that can be used to make decisions with better fidelity and integrity.
- In order for children to thrive, they must be healthy, safe, and have a sense of belonging. Without this foundation, learning will be difficult, if not impossible. Perhaps, these unprecedented circumstances have provided an opportunity to reconceptualize our approach to assessments and evaluation. We have an opportunity to move from the traditional focus on relatively narrow bands of cognition, achievement, and classroom behavior, to a more integrated, thorough, student (not test) focused lens as we seek to observe, understand, and help our children and youth.



Click to link to references



**Appendix A:** Example: Informed Consent/Communication with parents, IEP team, teachers, and administrators

Standard test administration will be modified, and this may affect results in ways that are so far unknown. This has the potential to reduce confidence in the obtained test score(s), conclusions and recommendations. Error may be compounded when adaptations to standardization procedures are used with people who come from culturally and linguistically diverse populations, require an interpreter during the assessment, have attention or auditory processing difficulties or have limited experience/comfort with the PPE adaptations. There may be a loss of some qualitative data usually obtained during the standard in-person test administration related to the use of face coverings and physical distancing and this loss may reduce the richness of the clinical data and further limit conclusions.

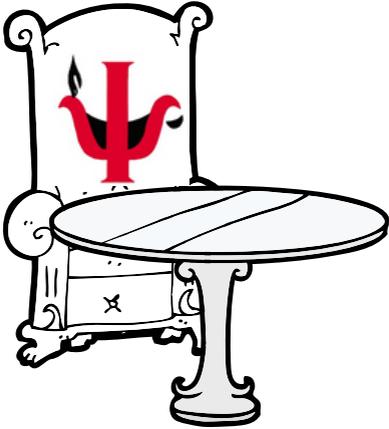
No test is 100% perfect and there is always a degree of error when we measure something. The less error we have, the more reliable the test is. The more reliable the test, the greater confidence we can have that we are truly measuring what we want to measure (eg., cognitive abilities, academic achievement). Whenever you apply adaptations to a test, you increase the potential of “error.” However, every effort will be made to mitigate the potential impact of concerns related to the necessity of administering the assessment in a manner that deviates from standardization. In addition to standardized test scores, alternative data will be gathered from multiple sources in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of your child’s assets and challenges.

If at any point during the evaluation, it appears that the assessment process is not safe for the child or the examiner or circumstances indicate that obtained results are likely to be unreliable, the assessment will be discontinued. A decision will be made with the parent/guardian as to whether rescheduling the assessment is advised. Following the completion of the evaluation, parent/guardian will be provided with a report that will include clear statements about the limitations posed by non-standard administration and the potential impact this might have on test scores, conclusions and recommendations.

[CLICK HERE](#)



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## NJASP at "the table"...

### Remote Related Services

### NJASP Joins NJDOE Conversation

Alexia Russo

NJASP Executive Board members Sol Heckelman, Terri Allen and Alexia Russo met (virtually, of course) for a roundtable discussion with members of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and representatives of social work, physical therapy and speech/language services. NJDOE representatives were Dr. Peggy McDonald, Asst Commissioner for Special Student Services, Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director, Office of Special Education (OSEP), Dr. Damian Petino, Asst Director OSEP and Dominic Rota, Esq., Director, Office of Policy Dispute and Resolution. Purposes of the meeting were to share concerns of Related Service providers during the COVID-19 crisis and to brainstorm meeting these challenges. Prior to the session, NJASP had been gathering experiences and suggestions from school psychologists throughout New Jersey with respect to telepractice during COVID-19 school closures. School psychologists' concerns, barriers, questions and improvisations were shared with NJDOE and the other disciplines. The chief concerns are presented below:

#### **Standardized Assessments and Timelines:**

The most recent NJASP position paper regarding assessments clearly states NJASP's position that assessment instruments which are standardized in the typical face-to-face setting are should not be administered remotely. Given the reliability and validity concerns, school psychologists requested guidance from NJDOE regarding the administration of standardized assessments during the

time of remote learning. School psychologists in the field have also expressed concerns about the inability to comply with timelines due to the barriers faced regarding telepractice.

### Speech/Language Specialists

SLSs noted issues about Medicaid billing: they are concerned that very brief sessions do not meet the requirements for Medicaid billing. They also noted that S/L therapy requires both visual and auditory contact with students and that this is not always feasible with teletherapy.

### Individual Education Program (IEP) Goals

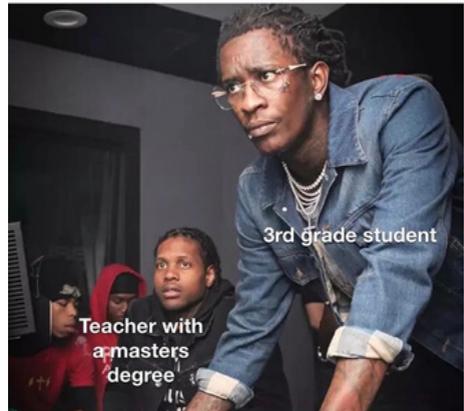
School psychologists have also expressed concerns regarding the adaptation of IEP goals and progress monitoring methods to the remote situation.

### Privacy

It was reported that privacy has become a more profound issue during the provision of teleservices. Parents and family members in and out of the room during sessions with students, causing concerns in relation to confidentiality. These privacy issues are profound in crowded households, reflecting equity issues. But they also occur in home settings where space is not a factor.

### Technology

Although technology is presently allowing schools to continue to move forward technology poses many issues as well. Many households do not have access to appropriate technology; those that do may not have enough devices for the



number of students in the household. Furthermore, districts' decisions as to which platforms to use, and the act of guiding families through the use of such platforms, reflects additional equity barriers.

### **Attendance**

attendance has become an issue. Motivation, access factors, or forgetfulness and oversleeping are all possibilities. School psychologists find that attendance has become unreliable during the delivery of telepractice.

### **General issues**

Teleservice tends to exacerbate disparities among economically deprived communities. Home Rule, with each local school district having its own policies and procedures, potentially enhances impediments to consistent professional and ethical practice. Dr Buxenbaum pointed out that NJDOE cannot weigh in on ethical issues. She said this is up to professional licensure authorities. This would also appear to emphasize the value of professional associations' guidance in such respects. NJASP referred to the PA DOE's statement re distance testing, which included a caution to only use tests in settings which are validated for use in those types of settings and requested that NJDOE do likewise during the emergency closure. {Ed. Note: NJDOE did not "rule" on this one way or another, leaving it up to local authority.}

### **What is working?**

Developing and fostering relationships with our learners' families is more important now than ever. The personalized and individualized nature of special education must extend beyond the IEP document, beyond the classroom, and into the human connections school psychologists hold with the parents and children. Empathy in our personal interactions and the development of a sense of trust allows for the humanization of this virtual world we are living in. The NJDOE staff were attentive to the concerns of school psychologists and to often similar concerns of the other disciplines. As this issue of the Newsletter

was going to press, a follow-up meeting was planned.

*Follow up: Both Dr. McDonald and Dr. Buxenbaum requested all disciplines to provide guidance to NJDOE for good practices: during lockdowns and during the process of reopening schools. A specific emphasis was placed on the value of providing good Tier 1 and Tier 2 practices. Of course, this is consistent with NJASP's active support of SPs' varied roles in early intervention and general education.*



Your ongoing active participation in this conversation will be very helpful.

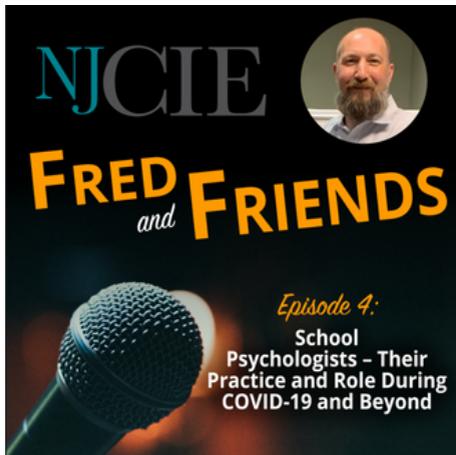
Please send any comments to Lexi arusso@njcu.edu



## School Psychologists Discuss Practice And Roles During COVID-19 And Beyond

### *NJ Coalition for Inclusive Education Podcast*

Liam Oakes



Three NJASP members were invited to speak on a May 8 podcast hosted by the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (NJCIE) to discuss the practice and roles of school psychologists during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. Sol Heckelman, John Lestino, and Barry Barbarasch were featured guests on the “Fred and Friends” podcast, hosted by NJCIE President and CEO Fred Buglione. They discussed the transition to a virtual setting, including the question of whether the role of the school psychologist has significantly changed, or should change, as a result of the pandemic and virtual learning.

“One of the things that has begun to be apparent is that when services become more difficult to provide -- or are provided in a more tenuous way -- to children with disabilities, whether they are in the special or general education classroom, then the disparities become greater,” Heckelman said. “For example, if a child benefits a great deal from closer support, whether it's a one-to-one or small group, the personal contact obviously just isn't there when the setting is remote. And that impacts a lot of children.”

*“One of the things that has begun to be apparent is that when services become more difficult to provide -- or are provided in a more tenuous way -- to children with disabilities, whether they are in the special or general education classroom, then the disparities become greater,” Heckelman said.*

“We all want close contact -- we're all social beings. But, for the children who require that and can't get it on their own, they're set back by that particular kind of situation.” For example, Heckelman said, for a child with Autism who requires routine and personal contact (like eye contact) to develop more social kinds of skills and sensitivities, “it's just not there. It's there with the family. The teachers and support staff will try to do this remotely, but it's just not the same. We're struggling with how to overcome that, if that's possible.”

Barbarasch noted that the social and emotional wellbeing of everyone, including both educators and students, is important to focus on, as well as the reintegration of students back into the physical classroom.

*"The social and emotional wellbeing of everyone, including both educators and students, is important to focus on, as well as the reintegration of students back into the physical classroom."  
Barry Barbarasch*

As for the role of the school psychologist during this time, Heckelman said the role should change in the same way as if schools were still operating regularly in person, which is that school psychologists should take advantage of their training in providing supports for all the students and teachers. "People often think of school psychologists as the 'gatekeepers to special education,' and that we do the testing," he said. "Well, that's true. We do that. But there's also a much more widespread impact we have on the children in general. "

Of course, it varies a lot from one district to another, and with the particular training of individual psychologists. But by and large, we are trained to provide the counseling supports, observe the social and emotional wellbeing of all the children, work with systems and systems change where it's needed, and manage school climate -- which now is meteorology, but personal and social.

Heckelman added that he would like to see more of the idea of preventive supports implemented, which means that the earlier one can work with a child who may display mild symptoms of difficulty whether behavioral or learning, the more efficient one can be. The effects will be much better and the children will feel much better.

Unfortunately, he said, what happens is that the legal mandates are for special education. If a child is identified as possibly needing special education, then "all kinds of timelines kick in." The pressure is from the emphasis by the state and federal governments on working with the timelines to be in compliance, he said. Barbarasch said there is also a need for school psychologists to promote the wellness of all students. "I think school psychologists are very interested in that; they want to be involved," he said. "But for the reasons that Sol mentioned, it can be very challenging to do that."

Lestino said the more extensively the school climate has school psychologists involved across domains, activities, and actions, the more they are going to be welcomed. School psychologists will then have the ability to utilize their training and skills in consultation services, not seen as just the gatekeepers. "Teachers and families are just more willing to chat with you when you're not this far-off person," Lestino said. "The more you are integrated, the more you're able to help work on those wellness issues."

*"The more extensively the school climate has school psychologists involved across domains, activities, and actions, the more they are going to be welcomed."*

*John Lestino*

## ***About the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education***

The New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (NJCIE) is a federally designated 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization serving the parents and educators in the state of New Jersey. Established in 1989 by professionals and parents, the organization supports schools in creating inclusive classroom environments for children with learning disabilities. Since its inception, NJCIE has provided services to nearly 400 school districts in New Jersey; 75 charter, private and parochial schools; and a variety of other educational organizations.

NJCIE is the only nonprofit organization in New Jersey with the sole focus on inclusion and provides needed expertise to schools and educators on how to include students with disabilities into school communities and classrooms with dignity and equality. The organization works to ensure children with disabilities and learning differences are welcomed as classmates, valued as learners, and empowered to succeed. For more information, visit [www.njcie.org](http://www.njcie.org).

*Liam is the Communications and Development Associate at NJCIE. He is an undergraduate student studying public relations at Seton Hall University.*



## Diversity Scholarship Recipients

The Diversity Committee of NJASP seeks to promote an understanding of diversity and multicultural issues within professional school psychology practice. Each year the committee awards two scholarships, the Sol. B. Heckelman Minority Undergraduate Student Scholarship and the Frank J. Epifanio Minority Graduate Student Scholarship. These scholarships are generously funded through NJASP, with awards going to an undergraduate student and a graduate student studying or considering a career in school psychology. Applicants apply for these awards in the winter each year. Awardees are officially presented with their awards and a plaque during the NJASP spring conference.

### **Sol. B. Heckelman Minority Undergraduate Student Scholarship**

**Recipient:  
Tyrah Andrews  
Kean University**

Ms. Tyrah Andrews is one of the most focused students that I have ever met. She came to Kean University with a clear vision and goal. She has achieved the first component of her goal – finish her B.A. in Psychology and is on track to achieve the second – become a school psychologist. There is no doubt in my mind that after completing her M.A. that she will continue for her doctorate in in

### **Frank J. Epifanio Minority Graduate Student Scholarship**

**Recipient:  
Crystal Molyneaux  
Rutgers University,  
Graduate School of Applied and  
Professional Psychology**

Crystal Molyneaux came to GSAPP with a background in psychology from Rutgers University. Prior to graduate school, Crystal already gained invaluable experience at Disability Rights Advocates of New York and the New Jersey Parents' Caucus. During her time with these organizations, she learned about the need for advocacy for vulnerable youth with IEPs who

*Tyrah Andrews cont.*

school psychology. She knows that education is empowering and that it is not about the degrees that one earns but what one does with those degrees that make the difference. She has and will continue to pay it forward.

---Jane O'Brien, Ph.D.  
Faculty Supervisor

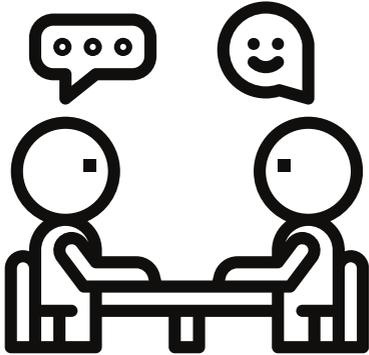


*Crystal Molyneaux cont.*

were incarcerated. Since her arrival at GSAPP, Crystal has shown a deep commitment to issues of diversity and equity. She is an active member of the GSAPP Committee on Diversity and has participated in self-exploration as a cultural being in our student process group, Focus On Our Diversity. She is beloved by her classmates as a source of support and sunshine despite difficult circumstances, and she certainly has overcome these as a rock of stability and responsibility in her extended family. Crystal has “walked the talk” by helping to bring social-emotional learning programming and restorative practices to schools in predominantly Latinx and low income schools in New Brunswick and Perth Amboy, NJ, as well as in Brooklyn, New York. As an African-American woman, she will bring tremendous strengths to the school psychology field in New Jersey and nationally as she recognizes the “ecological” and cultural factors influencing the well-being of students, their caregivers and staff.

---Anne Gregory, Nancy Boyd Franklin,  
Maurice Elias

Rutgers University, Graduate School  
of Applied and Professional Psychology



## Planning Careers in School Psychology: Interviews with Diversity Scholarship Award Winners

**Tyrah Andrews**

Interviewed by Aaron A. Gubi

**Aaron:** Hi Tyrah, what first got you interested in the profession of school psychology?

**Tyrah:** I first became interested in the field of psychology when I was a senior in high school. As I moved on to college, I continued to expand my knowledge within the field, taking many more classes in psychology. I specifically was interested in child/educational psychology, and had developed an eagerness to continue to learn more about that subject area. While I attended Ocean County College and Kean University, these were the pivotal moments in my life where I excelled in academics and became a strong leader within the educational setting. By putting the two schools of thought together, I knew that this was where I was supposed to be and who I was supposed to be. I then started to get heavily involved with community service to ensure that I could do whatever was possible in order to help students and families. I provided free services such as grocery shopping, babysitting, meal prepping, dog walking for single mothers in my community (Jackson, NJ). When I reinstated Ocean County College's Psychology Club, I put together a volunteer group to read weekly at the community college's Head Start/early intervention program. I volunteered at Kean University's Disability Services, providing mentorship and services for peers with disabilities. I worked for five years through my community's recreational camp to provide childcare services in the summer for young

children and teenagers. In my spare time, I like to keep updated on what is relevant within my community as well as world-wide. So I am constantly attending academic workshops on topics such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Supporting Anxious Youth, and the Substance Abuse Summit. within my community as well as world-wide. So I am constantly attending academic workshops on topics such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Supporting Anxious Youth, and the Substance Abuse Summit.

**Aaron:** So service has always been important to you, leading you towards your interest in school psychology?

**Tyrah:** Absolutely. Service has always played an enormous contributing role in my life, I am grateful that I have that ability to have a positive impact on individuals. I will always continue to serve my community by helping others; that is just who I am. Another component that led me towards my interest in school psychology is student success. Assisting students and their families in achieving their goals will be a part of the on-going services that I will provide. The two things that are very important to me are academic excellence and personal growth. I've definitely been a prime example of that and I want to instill in my students that no matter who you are and no matter the arduous task that may lie before you, with perseverance, motivation and positivity you can achieve anything you want to.

As for my academia background, I attended Jackson Memorial High School in Jackson, NJ. I then moved on to Ocean County College where I was on the Dean's List and awarded President's Honors every semester. I've been grateful to have been afforded many awards and scholarships throughout my time there. After graduating Ocean County College with a 4.0 (Summa Cum Laude), I transferred to Kean University with a scholarship, where I have also just recently graduated with a 4.0 (Summa Cum Laude). While studying at Kean University, I got involved with research. I conducted a successful pilot study; The Impact of Recess on Stress Levels of Type A and Type B College Students.

These ongoing involvements with workshops and training, along with taking additional classes and my research involvement, led to my interest in school psychology. I was recently accepted into Georgian Court University's Master's Program in School Psychology. My future goals are to earn a Ph.D. and work as a school psychologist, as well as have my own private practice.

**Aaron:** What would you like to do as a school psychologist?

**Tyrah:** As a future school psychologist, I have the passion and drive to identify and press the prominent issues within the educational system. I would like to address challenges that students, as well as the school community, continue to face. I would work with students, families and other educators to resolve them so that I can give my students the best opportunity to reach their fullest potential in academic excellence and personal growth.

**Aaron:** Thank you, Tyrah!

## **Planning Careers in School Psychology: Interviews with Diversity Scholarship Award Winners Crystal Molyneaux**

**Aaron:** Crystal, what first got you interested in the profession of school psychology?

**Crystal:** My introduction to the mental health needs of youth took place in an undergraduate class called Sociology of Education. Through this course, I learned about the school-to-prison pipeline and various systems in America which perpetuate institutionalized racism, one of which is education. I realized that even in my own experiences, while growing up in my extremely diverse school district, racial disparities in academic achievement and discipline abounded. In the Sociology of Education course, the instructor played a video

about the differences between saying you want change and actually going out to make a change. That video led to my involvement with a nonprofit organization working with families of children who had mental health special needs and/or juvenile justice involvement.

**Aaron:** Wow. So your involvement with this non-profit led you to apply to the graduate program in school psychology at Rutgers?

**Crystal:** Yes, my involvement with youth in prisons exposed me to the potential outcomes of youth who are left without the skills and support needed to overcome barriers in their lives. Working with incarcerated youth led to my interest in social-emotional learning (SEL) and restorative justice (RJ) as preventative approaches for at-risk youth with similar circumstances to those who are presently incarcerated. My desire to pursue a doctoral degree in school psychology came from my desire to increase mental health service accessibility to youth of minority backgrounds. I want to work within a natural setting, to fight to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and improve the well-being and outcomes of minority youth.

**Aaron:** How do you want to be known by the youth you are working with?

**Crystal:** It is my hope to be a representative and trusted ally for students and families within the school, while also reducing stigma. Overall, keeping students from minority backgrounds in school is of the utmost importance to me. It would not only build their sense of belonging, but also decrease the likelihood of school drop-out and potential involvement with the criminal justice system that is associated with out-of-school suspensions. I endeavor to continue creating opportunities for diverse groups of children to receive positive reinforcement and consistency while breaking down negative beliefs of others about themselves, and to create a healthier environment for future generations.

**Aaron:** Why do you think you can help students succeed?

**Crystal:** As I work in schools with at-risk students now, I am unaware of what exactly occurs in their homes, in their neighborhoods and pressures they face. But what I am aware of, is how I can provide a space for growth, sense of safety, and most importantly, an opportunity to feel heard. Through the work I have done with youth in the juvenile justice system, and my research and training in SEL and RJ, I have affirmed my desire to continue my work in high-risk urban settings as a school psychologist. I wish to utilize the skills I have gained in SEL as a tool to work with students who have been labeled by their peers, teachers, and/or families as outcasts, defiant, or a “problem,” and to disrupt the perpetuation of African-American and Latino students in the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Aaron:** Thank you, Crystal!





## *Exec Board Spotlight!*

Sol Heckelman

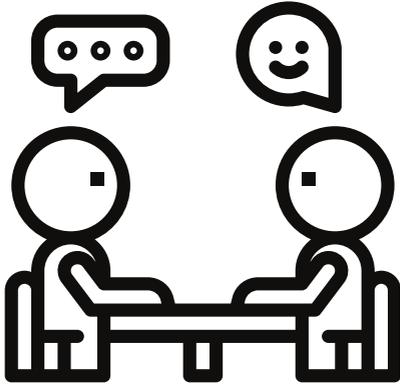
*Ed Note: The Newsletter is initiating a column which will feature interviews of newer Executive Board members, so that the entire membership will become familiar with all Board members and roles.*



Brianna Fonte



Krystal Norman



## School Psychology in Delaware & New Jersey; "Technological Personality"

Interview with Brianna Fonte

Sol: So let's start by telling us who you are.

Brianna: My name is Brianna Fonte. I'm a school psychologist working right now in Egg Harbor Township.

S: How long have you been working there?

B: I actually just started there last Aug I was working in Delaware for the past 4 years. Right after I graduated, I got a job there in the Delaware Autism Program. I worked there for a full year as a contractor. So I was looking to work in a district. So after the Delaware Autism Program, I was hired at a local Consolidated School District, one of the biggest districts in Delaware. It was a good time to be looking for a job in a district because it was right at that time that the Delaware Autism program made a big push to send a lot of their students back to their home schools. At that time, a lot of the schools in the area had just started opening their own programs. So I was at the Learning Center for just about a year. I worked at the Delaware Autism Program for a year after that; for the two years following, I had to do my internship for my Doctoral program. Because that required me to change my role by at least 60%, I started working for the Early Learning Center. It was like the transition from Part B to Preschool I did a lot of the Preschool evaluations and so forth for two years. I just moved back to New Jersey this past July, and got the job in Egg Harbor Township.

S: So this is quite a year to come back to New Jersey?

B: Yup, it is quite a year to have a first year somewhere. It is different. I did have some years of experience under my belt but working in an Autism program is very different. It's not a traditional school psychologist's job, and so is working in the preschool setting, with a lot of early childhood stuff. It's a different world than looking at RTI, and assessing for learning disabilities. So I think this year there was a big learning curve. And now we have an interesting situation we're in.

S: So in Delaware you didn't really work in a regular school setting.

B: Yeah. It was a public school setting but they were specialized programs. The Autism program was very stressful. I found a lot of students with very significant behavioral and medical needs. I really liked working with them. And I really liked preschool as well. But I'm happy to be where I am too. It keeps me on my toes. Always learning something new.

S: So even though you didn't work in a regular school in Delaware, do you have any sense of a difference between Delaware and New Jersey in what school psychologists do?

B: There's a huge difference. One of the things I really love being back in New Jersey, because that's where I'm from. I did my internship for my Ed.S here in New Jersey. It's where I learned a lot of my skills to begin with --

S: Where are you originally from in New Jersey?

B: I'm from Hammonton

S: Sorry for interrupting you.

B: That's ok. So I do enjoy being back but I do find that I'm missing a lot of the skills that I was able to use as a school psychologist in Delaware. In Delaware you were considered to be an IEP specialist. They had us at all the evaluation planning meetings. And that's a requirement. In Delaware; school psychologists do FBAs. That's what I did in my first two years as a school psychologist: Behavior Plans and Functional Behavior Assessments. In New Jersey, unless you're a BCBA, you can't touch Behavior Plans and Functional Behavior Assessments. And again, looking at the Autism classification, we [i.e., SPs] did all our testing for that. I was trained in a lot of different Autism assessments. It was really a process, I learned a lot about development and social skills,

having to do those. And here, you just wait for the diagnosis from the neurologist, the medical doctor.

S: And in Delaware?

B: Nope. What you do find there is that the medical diagnosis and the educational classification are two different things. A child can have a medical diagnosis of Autism but he may not show educational impact. I think that would be rare but there have been situations where that is the case. And I think, first we give the educational classification but the child may not have the medical diagnosis yet.

S: That's interesting. Even in New Jersey, when they require a psychiatrist or a neurologist, it still is supposed to be that the educational team makes the educational diagnosis.

B: Mm-hmm. Yeah. But I think a lot of what ends up happening is that you have a diagnosis and you do a Behavior Rating Scale and observation. It's not as in-depth as you would do when you do an FBA, like looking at the play skills or the interactions or the social conversations, and really breaking it down. So, yes, we are still assessing but really not to the super-extent. We could still give a cognitive. or they would still do the educational, but you're really not diving into it the way I had before. And that's the other thing, too. I did all my own educational assessments, as well as doing social history. You don't have to, of course. In Delaware, I feel like I really put my evaluation tools to the max there and I got a lot of evaluation experience. And it's not that way here. But then I guess you learn the other Case Management skills. Which you did not do in Delaware.

S: Who did that in Delaware?

B: The teacher was considered the Case Manager. But the teacher did not play the role of the Case Manager the way the role of the Case Manager is in New Jersey. In Delaware, we had the Educational Diagnostician, which I think once upon a time they were traditionally like Learning Consultants. But now, in my opinion, they do take sort of a Case Management role. Because they do all the meeting scheduling, they run the meeting, they do the paperwork. The teacher as the Case Manager is sort of seen as the

point person of contact; they talk with the parent. In Delaware, it's very different. I think they both have their pros and cons.

S: You had to learn to be a Case Manager here in New Jersey.

B: I sure am learning [laughs]

S: So what do you like about what you're doing now?

B: I think that...I really like right now working on a Child Study Team -- that feels very nice. Because while it was really good to flex my evaluation muscles, and do all of that in Delaware, I did really feel like everyone looked to the psychologist: "Well, ok, just tell us..." I felt a lot of pressure. Here, working on a team, in just a short period of time, I feel that I have become really close with our LDT-C and our social worker. Both of them are fabulous. I feel like I've learned so much from them; it's really nice to be able to work in a team environment. I do like that aspect.

S: So it's sort of a trade-off.

B: Yup, yup. Mm-hmm.

S: Did you ever find that you drift into doing more things than a typical New Jersey school psychologist would do? And you're ok with that?

B: We're kind of in a tough spot. I know that it has been for a while now our caseloads are very large. Egg Harbor Township is a big district; our numbers are very high compared to a lot of the other schools in the district. Being my first year, I haven't really gotten my hands into a whole lot. The school that I work at is the Davenport Complex. Actually, when I was in graduate school, i was a paraprofessional there. And they do have an Autism program there. So that's kind of how I started out with that experience. They do have children with intensive needs there. There is a lot of support, various aspects of the job, responding to crises. There was a lot of that this year that I definitely helped out with, and I still do. because it's a big part of my background. I would help out with reinforcement, assessment. But other than that, I don't feel I'm really finding myself getting into anything really that untraditional. I'm hoping that as I get more

experience in the role at the school that I will be able to do that. But right now it's kind of what you would expect to see in any other system.

S: So the coordination between you and the LDT-C and the social worker, that works pretty well, apparently.

B: I think we get along pretty well. Yeah, yeah, I think we work pretty well together. I think it's a good team. I'm really lucky to be working with them.

S: So, anything else that you're doing now that you enjoy, that you can be productive in?

B: In my position there?

S: Yeah. Do you do any counseling, for example?

B: So like I said, this year was a lot. It's something that we've talked about with our supervisors. They've looked at numbers and it is very disproportionate so we did not really have the time for a lot of that. But they are recognizing the need, so I think -- our district is actually just starting to open up a full day kindergarten program next year, and with that transition there will be two additional team members added to our team. And at this point in time -- I'm sure you know how things change when these types of things are in the works -- but at this point in time they're looking to have those team members do our testing, with the hope of freeing up the social worker and the school psychologist on the team to do counseling next year and be able to do social skills. That is something I am looking forward to. I know when I was in graduate school, I had a part-time job as an outpatient counselor, I did that for about a year or two. Even before that I worked in a partial care program and did social skills there. So I think I do have something to offer. With that kind of background, I'd be excited to get my hands into that and get that started, but again we've gotta see how things roll out this year.

S: Well, it sounds like your supervisor is open to that -- if you have the time.

B: Yes, yes. Like I said, we were very busy this year with crisis support and there is a huge need right now -- everywhere, not just in our school -- but I think it's a goal of our team that we have to provide the social-emotional support that they need. It's the ideal

solution so I'm really crossin' my fingers. I hope it works out that way; I think it would be really great.

S: So tell me about that crisis team that you're on -- situations that come up, and how you handle them.

B: The crisis team?

S: Yeah.

B: So, we do have two behavior specialists in our building. The people who are assigned usually are whoever's available. In Egg Harbor Township -- it's really funny, it's something that we sort of figured out. They have a housing development that was sort of -- I think previously it was a hotel -- and there's a lot of students there who are living right there now with their families who have, I would say, pretty significant trauma backgrounds. These students had a really hard time this year. We've been really helping out: filling in, in the classroom, trying to use de-escalation; we've spent a lot of time with about four or five kids this year. I really hope everything does work out next year to be able to do more of the social-emotional learning stuff with those students because -- there's such a huge need for it

S: So what actually happens -- how does it work if somebody needs some attention, comes to the attention of the crisis team?

B: It depends on the student, and what the student's plan is individually. Some students we just know for sure, we know from past experience that they escalate very quickly and it becomes unsafe very quickly. So sometimes when we get there, their teachers have already initiated a physical safety intervention. There are different types of restraint; we're there to help de-escalate from that point. Some students -- we know that it is helpful for them to get right out of the classroom. So that might be someone stepping in and being able to go for a walk with the student while the teacher continues to teach. But it really just does depend on who the student is, and what their plan is. If they don't have a plan yet, we start a figuring-out process. But that doesn't happen too often. It's different from student to student.

S: These are not just children who are in your regular caseload? These are children who are anywhere in the school?

B: A lot of the students I worked with this year were on my caseload. There was also a good handful of students who were in the kindergarten, brand new, they had never been in preschool. They're in school for the first time and they're considered general education students but they have a lot of difficulty. I think that our behavior specialists work supporting a lot of those students so I didn't really have a lot of one-on-one experience. But every once in a while there is a child who is not identified who has some difficulty during the school day. But all the students I've supported this year were on my caseload.

S: And then do you follow up with those students after the first incident, after the first contact you have with them?

B: After the first crisis incident?

S: Yeah.

B: Yeah, usually the Case Manager would do that. So if that was my student, they were de-escalated, they were doing ok, you would usually check in to see how they're doing, at the end of the day. Of course, after any crisis, whether the student had to leave the classroom or if there were any safety interventions, you contact the parents. So a lot of the times, I did check in with the student and be able to contact the parent at the end of the day to let them know that this happened but some of the other positive things that did happen after that. I think that's always helpful -- to be able to also offer how students are able to use their coping skills that we've been trying to teach to turn the ship around. towards the end of the day. And I think even working with the students on different days, you could always say, "Oh, remember how you had a hard day on Wednesday but then you did this -- do you think you can try that again?" So, I do check in after that and some of the students do have plans where they do have a point person to check in for a couple of times throughout the day. So I guess again, it just depends on the child and what the plan is.

S: So it's just the immediate de-escalation that you're involved with.

B: Yeah.

S: Are there any kids you see on an ongoing basis? Are there any families that you're in touch with?

B: Yeah, there are about three or four students this year who we're working through these things, if not on a daily basis then at least every other day. Still try to stay in touch with their families right now. Keep in touch, talk with them, but for the most part I think it's a little different. It's not like I was providing counseling for them. It's sort of like a check-in: how's it going. The parents are usually like "good," things like that. So it's not like I would have any face-to-face, or sort of like a relationship when we were in school. Which is one of the drawbacks for our situation here.

S: So tell me about your contact with parents, when you were still in a regular school setting. What was it like? Were there parents you were able to -- wanted to -- meet with regularly?

B: In general, or with each student who --

S: Well both, actually.

B: I definitely did have frequent contact with some of the parents. I did work with my principal for some students who had a significant issue, then we would have the parent in for a meeting to sign permission to start an FBA or something like that. We would do the daily check-ins over the phone to talk about progress. It's funny -- I think that a lot of the students I did work closely with this year in regards to behavior, already had outside services, and those that didn't knew really to start that conversation with a parent or encourage that. I found it a little difficult because I think the ones that didn't already have it were hesitant to want to do that. Something that I think was helpful in talking to parents not only this year but in general whenever we had discussed looking at outside services aside from what we offer in school was -- parents are always very big on academics: "I want them to catch up," "I don't want them to fall behind." Just explaining to parents that their child's emotional health and their social skills are just as important as those academics because they can know everything there is to know in a book but when it goes to getting a job and being successful in life, these are skills that

they need to have also. These are skills, just like academic skills, if you're not caught up and if you're not taking care of them, that could be just as much of a challenge as falling behind on academics. Presenting things in that way. But other than that, it's -- you're just doing a lot of listening. Those are the kind of conversations I've had with parents.

S: Are there any things that you'd like to do, that you haven't had a chance to do yet? As a school psychologist?

B: Yes, there's lots of things. I think it being my first year here, I haven't really had the chance to get involved in as many things as I would like to: being on the building leadership team. I think I really have to be around for a while so I can start to just become familiar with all the programs and teams the school has. I would really like to be more involved. But it's so challenging. It's a shame when we have maxed out our Case Management and trying to keep up with our deadlines. But the first step -- I would really like to have gotten more involved in the extracurricular type things and building supports and building teams. But there's next year -- we'll see.

S: So, what are some of the big differences you found between earlier in the year, when we were still in the schools, and now with all the distance learning that's going on?

B: What are some of the big differences?

S: Yeah, the differences in general, but then particularly for you as a psychologist.

B: I think it's a little hard because it's sort of like the same grind but I don't get with the students, and see them, and talk with them, But I haven't had direct contact with any students, and I think that's really hard.

S: So what have you been doing? [smiles]

B: I've been holding Annual Review meetings and Eligibility meetings. Our caseloads are very, very large. And it also just so happens that our district is actually moving from calendar-year IEPs to school-year IEPs this year. So any students that we had already met on before March 1, we had to meet again this Spring. So we're squeezin' 'em in. [laughs] It's day after day after day. So we're kept very busy. I think that's different. I

have less contact with students; it's not fun.

S: That would've been the same if you were in school or not. If you were in the school building, you'd still be doing all those Annual Reviews.

B: Yeah, but then you would still have the opportunity to go outside while buses are loading, or be in the hallway. Or, if you need a break, sometimes you pop in a classroom and say, "Hi." But here, you take a break and you're at home; you don't really have those other opportunities. But I think one good thing is that a lot of the teachers and Related Service providers that I work with -- I think they're all really excellent collaborators, so you still have had the chance to get together as teams and talk about things before IEP meetings and keep each other updated. So that's been good. The communication with other team members has been positive; again, you still don't have the opportunity to see people and talk to them. That's the biggest difference. But we're just having lots of meetings [laughs]. So we're just meeting like we would, only virtually.

S: Have you come across any situations earlier in the year, and now you're in a virtual setting -- where there was something you wanted to do -- some sort of challenge came up, and there was a roadblock.

B: Oh, yeah.

S: How did you manage to get around that?

B: It is really difficult, because we're all thrown in a situation -- you just have to roll with that. I know at first it was hard. So we were starting off by calling parents to let them know this is what we're doing, this is how the meeting is going to occur. It's funny, when you do call -- the number comes up as a New York number, or in Massachusetts. It looks very much like a telemarketer. So a lot of the parents -- even though we would call them before. Then you call them at the time of the meeting, and they don't answer. They don't know. And then what? You call 'em again five minutes later but you're not really able to get in touch with them. The meeting emails have been going out electronically but some parents don't check their emails regularly. So I think it's hard because you really have to try to make sure that we're keeping up and keeping in touch with parents so we know what their technological personality is. This is a parent who's going to be

vexed by text messaging.. We've now established our own Google voice account so we can text. So maybe we know this parent is going to meet only by phone. So first we call and then say, "Ok, I'm gonna hang up and then call back at this number. It's a lot of trouble-shooting, and it has taken a lot of extra time just to try to navigate those extra steps. trouble-shooting, and it has taken a lot of extra time just to try to navigate those extra steps.

S: So you've been at this for almost a year now. So for next year, assuming that everybody's back in the classroom, in the building -- how do you see yourself functioning? What do you see yourself doing then? If you had your choice?

B: I am really excited about getting more involved in counseling, or doing social skills groups. Because I think that's the part of the job that I love -- being able to work directly with the kids. That's something that as I started out, mostly was the biggest part of what I did. Whether you're working directly in the classroom with a teacher on a behavior plan, or observing. I was doing a lot of assessment when I worked in preschool -- you're with the kids, you're working things out, really getting information for the team to help build a good plan. I do miss that a lot, so I think if I had my way, I'd be doing a lot of that. I really hope that that does work out this year.

S: Have you found at any point that your supervisor either asked you to do something that you felt was not professionally appropriate, or wasn't open to your suggestion about doing something in a more efficient way, providing a better service?

B: I think I really lucked out in this situation. I have seen really fabulous supervisors that I really do look up to in professional practice. I feel really lucky to be working under them and working with them. I've learned a lot this year, and I'm looking forward to learning more from them next year. I think they're good examples, and they lead by a good example. It was an interesting position this year because I was brand new but our building in particular also had a new principal, had a new asst principal -- it was her first year in an asst principal's role. Our supervisor of special education who I think had been there for roughly 30-some years had just retired, and another administrator who had been working directly with the special education program had just retired. So, again, I think our building -- I took the position because this type of program -- having worked there before, really has my heart and I really love all the people that work there, and I

think that's my favorite part of the job. But there's been a high turnover rate within the Child Study team. I think that's something our supervisors are aware of, and started off the year with. So they said, let's go work through it this year and see what we can do differently. So I think I'm really lucky that they have been hearing feedback and really do work with us. I think it's just a huge position to be in because I think the work is on the cusp of change. Not only with staff but a lot of change is coming up this way, in our programs in particular, so I think it's worth -- have to be open to doing things differently.

S: That's nice to hear. Do you have an idea about what they're doing differently?

B: Yeah. I think, like I talked about before, with the full day kindergarten program, how that's coming off. And I think by adding some additional Team members -- they're doing a testing team; that frees Case Managers up, so the social worker and the psychologist are able to do more of that counseling, and working with families. So I think that's hopeful for what we're looking at for next year. Let's see how that works out.

S: So now let's talk a little bit about the Association. When did you actually become involved with NJASP?

B: When I was Dr Terry Molony's intern; I worked with her in Cherry Hill. I just seemed to get involved. It's a great thing to do professionally. School psychology is my job but I feel like, for me, it's also a hobby, it's a passion. I would say it occupies a good 75% of my life. I do really enjoy it; I do love it. So my reading in my free time is usually school psychology related. And as involved as possible with NASP. After going with Dr Molony to a couple of the meetings, and being given opportunities to be able to work with the GUSTO group, I loved it. It's fun for me. And I really like to be able to talk to other school psychologists about school psychology things, and really just do work for the profession. It's something I enjoy.

S: So how many years is that now, that you've been involved with NJASP?

B: I think I was more disconnected when I was in Delaware, as a Delaware employee. That was just for about a year, in 2015, that I was involved. And then when I was in Delaware -- I didn't know if I was gonna stay in Delaware, or if I was gonna come back

to New Jersey. But once it got back on my radar, I'm very excited to jump back in.

S: You came back this year to NJ? B: Yup, I moved back to NJ last Aug. 2019.

S: So this is your reincarnation.

B: Yup [laughs]

S: So, how do you feel about the Association? Where it's going, how it's going, about the things that are going on in the Association? How it's functioning?

B: About the things that are going on? [long pause] I haven't really had enough opportunity, quite honestly, to get a full grasp of everything that you guys do. I really try to read through all the emails as much as possible. But I think that a lot of the things that you and Terri Allen are doing are absolutely phenomenal. The type of things that she gets the ball rolling for. And, with support, has been able to put out there. I think it's really something to look up to. I have been working with Stephanie and Debbie on the Committee for Membership. Some things that I've noticed, more from talking with them. Maybe it's a different perspective than being involved in a committee versus just having gone to the Executive Board meetings. But I really liked at the last meeting Eli's graph with the data. A lot of the discussions seem to be a lot more about practice -- what the school psychologists do in applying that. I think that's great. It's not only professional opinions and ideas of the members getting together, but it's also us extending and applying school psychology ideas. Looking at the data: seeing what the needs are, what the next steps are. I think that's really cool. Again, it might just be my perspective -- I feel like I'm more involved. When I see something I hadn't seen before -- I think that's really cool. I like being a part of that.

S: What would you like to see the Association doing? Either continuing what it's doing now or something it hasn't been doing, and you feel it should get into that?

B: I think that's a tough question again, since I'm a little new to the scene.

S: So let me rephrase it: What do you think the Association should be doing, whether they've been doing it or not? If you had a lot to say -- which you should -- about the

Association's direction? What would you see as very important?

B: I think some of the most important responsibilities that fall on the Association is giving guidance and direction to members, especially when it comes to the pandemic situation, to be able to disseminate information and keep your members updated with the most important issues of their profession. I've seen a lot of effort put forth. I think that is very important. I think being able to support members. I do understand that that's something that our Ethics Board is able to, and have people reach out and discuss concerns and have information. A lot of advocacy. Efforts that are going on now for students. Making sure that evaluation practices are being followed. I think those are the most important things to have from an Association. Those are all great things that I see happening. As a new person to the scene, I think I have a lot more to take in at this point.

S: Yes and no. because, as a new person, you have a certain perspective, a way of looking at things, that may have been forgotten [by veteran members] or gotten into certain habits. So a fresh breeze is important to have. Don't play that down.

B: [laughs] Ok.

S: Anything else that we haven't talked about that you'd like to discuss?

B: Not really. I feel like I did a lot of talking.

S: Well, you did. That's the point. It's not for me to talk -- it's for you to talk.

B: Well, thank you. Thanks for listening, and thanks for your time. I'm really excited to be in New Jersey again and participate in NJASP. Yeah, thank you so much. I appreciate everything.

S: You're very welcome. What I've heard is very useful to me. Because it gives me that new perspective. You're very welcome to the Board -- you've got a lot to offer, and you've got a lot of thoughts as to how to go about doing that.

B: Well, thanks. [laughs] It doesn't feel that way. I've still got a lotta learning to do.

S: Do you ever feel that when there's an involved conversation going on -- and a lot of folks like to speak up a lot. Do you feel a little self-conscious about jumping in, because "Oh, I'm new -- how could I know what those folks know?" Do you ever hold back because of that?

B: Of course. I think that's the natural feeling when you're in a large group, especially some of the members that are on the Executive Board are very well-established; they're people that I have a lot of respect for, and I'm sure have a wealth of knowledge. So I think anyone who is there would feel a little hesitant. But I think it's in my personality -- if I have something very new that I really wanna share -- I generally do. But I think that as I am around more often, and become more comfortable, I will have more interaction with people there. I'll feel more comfortable doing that more often. But I think that's what anyone would experience.

S: I think you're right -- that's why I asked the question. A lot of folks -- and I've been the same way -- when you're new to a situation, you feel like you don't know the right thing to say, or what you say isn't as well-founded as somebody else because of all the experience they've had. I think you ought to try to minimize that. Consider that you're with a bunch of friends who are all on a similar level. It doesn't mean you have to be right about everything. It doesn't have to be something new, necessarily. A lot of us speak up and really aren't adding something new.

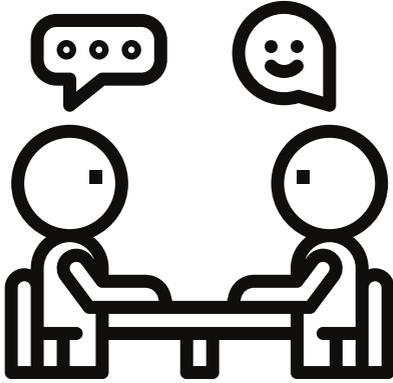
B: Well, thank you.

S: Anything else you feel we haven't gotten to?

B: Not that I can think of. It's a good conversation.

S: Yeah. I learned a lot from you.





## A School Psychologist Makes Her Way (partly) in Gen Ed

Interview with Krystal J. Norman

Sol: So, Krystal, let's start off by your telling us who you are.

Krystal: Hi Sol. I am Krystal Norman and I am starting my second year as NJASP's secretary. I am a fourth year school psychologist working in the Asbury Park School District case managing, but also implementing a lot of school wide supports. Previously, I completed my hours in Lakewood and Long Branch before starting my first position as a school psychologist in Manchester. Most of my day involves supporting my students through behavior plans, individual counseling, and planning school wide events with the Wellness Team. I also complete psychological evaluations, social skills and self-regulation groups. I also chair the Crisis Response Team and the Suicide Assessment Team for my building.

S: So you do some Child Study stuff.

K: Yes. I case manage out-of-district as well as in the building currently at the middle school level. The district is planning to consolidate buildings so I will most likely be with a different age group next year. We have various special education placements currently at the middle school, and for next year, just based on the needs and the consolidation, we have a lot of changes. When I started three years ago, the middle school had a special class for cognitive impairments but my students appeared to need more of a functional, life skills piece. With my colleagues and administration, we were able to create a life skills program that I hope will continue to develop. As the district is changing, I am looking forward to providing more supports like this.

S: So just to reprise a bit. At the beginning you mentioned a few things that you did -- not Child Study, some of the other: consultation. You mentioned a social skills program?

K: Yes. So far as Related Services, I do individualized counseling, group counseling, mostly focusing on self-regulation and social skills. Based on the groups that we had, I've been able to do girls' groups as well. My colleague and I have been working together to create these groups and have been trying to introduce the zones of regulation school-wide. I've also been able to implement school-wide preventative supports. For example, we did a suicide prevention push-in to every classroom in the building, stressing to students how much they matter and where they can go if they need support. We also do school-wide things for kindness, anti-bullying and different activities for everyone, so that students and staff know what a school psychologist is; that it isn't just testing and writing IEPs. I've had students -- they're all my students -- come to me and say, "I wanna be what you are when I grow up." It's wonderful because some are in completely mainstreamed settings that would generally not have any contact with me if it were not for the school-wide activities.

S: You're gonna be like the Pied Piper -- they'll all be following you along.

K: [Laughs] When I was a kid, I had no idea what a school psychologist was. I didn't know they existed. So I'm trying to put us out there for everyone to know we are here for support. The good thing about being a part of NASP and NJASP is being able to follow changes going on in our state and country, to see how others have better supported their students, classified or not. One specifically is the bill requiring school psychologists to be involved when a student is suspended. So I brought that to my administration's attention to let them know I am here to help and want to be involved. I have let them know I'm here for Conflict Resolution, for Restorative Circles, and things like that, so we all can work together. It is a lot about collaborating, asking for help when you need it and providing support when others need it. I am lucky enough to work with another school psychologist in my building and a social worker that is not a part of the Child Study Team. I actually co-chair a grant with her and I've created a Wellness team in our middle school to create a common language for all of the support personnel. We have completed needs assessments and created plans to improve staff and students' wellbeing. So with that I've been able to even make better connections with staff, and now they're willing to come to me when they have issues and concerns,

and they actually trust what I have to say and what I have to offer, and we can work together that way.

S: How do you think that developed? That you were able to develop that kind of stuff by the teachers there?

K: It definitely took time. With some of the school-wide activities and staff supports, I think it started with follow through. With more individualized cases, it took trial-and-error. Like with any type of intervention, I would present different options, for them to see what would work best in their classroom. But I think the most important thing is that they'd see me in the classroom. That I would go in, I would observe, I would meet with them afterward; I was following through on all of those things. If they needed something, or even if they just needed to talk or to vent, I would drop everything so that I would be there for them. Because in that moment, to some, if a student is misbehaving, or if a student is not understanding, and they're trying different strategies, it is the end of the world to them in that moment. So just to be an ear to listen can go a long way. I don't have the answers right away, and it is a lot of trial-and-error, but they see I am trying and not giving up.

S: They knew you were there for them. -- it's the personal contact. Apparently you have a way of letting people feel that you're interested in them, and that you're there to support them. Regardless of the particular program.

K: Yeah.

S: You mentioned before, something that sounded like impulse control. SEL kind of stuff. That's big in Asbury, isn't it?

K: It is, yes. We have a company, Koncious Youth Development Services (KYDS) that contracts in our district and comes in to the schools to provide Social Emotional Learning activities for students. They have a Mindfulness Room, where kids can go in for yoga, and different things like that to decompress in the moment. It makes a big difference. They also have it set up so that they push-in to each classroom so that even those students that are not outwardly struggling can benefit from their services. I work a lot with them to ensure a common language when assisting our students; I try to

utilize many of the activities such as specific breathing exercises into my practice so the kids can become familiar with these practices. Some of the kids have a better connection with KYDS and some have a better connection with CST. Either way, we work together to try to provide a unified approach. If something comes up, they'll reach out to us for support and vice-versa. It's wonderful to have these outside resources so that we can all work together. But it is also so important for people to have an understanding of all that school psychologists are capable of doing, including school-wide SEL programs.

S: One of the things I was gonna ask you was, "What do you like about what you're doing?" [smiles and chuckles] But you've been telling me that.

K: I love it. I love the kids, for sure. They make it all worthwhile [chuckles]

S: How did you come to NJASP?

K: I went to Rutgers as an undergraduate, and I actually did not know what a school psychologist was. I was a part of Dr Elias's CESEP program -- his Civic Engagement and Service Education Program, and through that I was introduced to ABA. I worked a little bit in HeadStart, and then he connected me with Dr Barbarasch, a school psychologist in Hamilton, who I began shadowing. While in Hamilton I also spent some time in HEP shadowing Mr Tenaglia. Dr. Barbarasch actually brought me to a few of the NJASP meetings. So that's how I became involved. And at that point, Dr Colford was the president of NJASP. I learned more about a career in school psychology, then I applied to Georgian Court University, where I completed my graduate school. So everyone that helped me along the way was very involved in NJASP and always put that in my mind. You always have to try to give back, and try to help, and know that you're never done learning, that there's always new things out there and you have to...

S: They sucked you in, huh? [laughs]

K: They did. And looking back --

S: It's nice to hear.

K: Yeah. And looking back, I've always been a member and I always knew I wanted to get more involved. When I saw the Secretary position open I said, "You know what? This may be that time to get more involved. I'll apply and see what happens." Which I did. And now, my eyes have been open to so many other wonderful things the Association does through its many committees. I wish I would have gotten involved in that way sooner.

S: At this point you're the Secretary. Are there any other committees, or projects, that you're involved with in NJASP?

K: I'm slowly getting involved with GPR but so far I've only been to three of the meetings.

S: You know that GPR, the Association, the Board as a whole, has been involved in a number of projects recently, with regard to the teleservices that school psychologists are doing. Have you been involved in any of that in the Association?

K: Just in brief conversation and through email threads.

S: So what's your experience in Asbury, with all the teleservices?

K: In Asbury Park a lot of our students don't have devices or access to the internet. The district actually just started distributing devices with hotspots for students to access google classrooms.

S: So what's been happening until now with you as a psychologist?

K: I've been meeting with my students that have devices, we've been doing check-ins recently, where we offer fun, different activities for our students once a week. I have been making phone calls and posting other "assignments" on google classroom focusing on self-regulation, social skills and transition planning. Slowly, I have been having more and more students engage with that. Students that I am counseling, we're doing activities and talking through things and problem-solving through sessions. Parents are appreciative that I am checking in and calling and meeting with their kids but it does not feel as effective as in person. It is very difficult, as there is often no privacy and no in-

the-moment conflicts to work through. It is a lot of reflecting on past experiences and referring to hypothetical scenarios.

S: So looking back now -- it's not a very long time but you've had some experience now with that -- what were the things that kinda worked better? What would you say to somebody if you yourself were starting over now? A good way to approach, to provide teleservices, as a psychologist?

K: Provide a very structured schedule. Students and parents seem to appreciate that.

S: So the structure is very important.

K: Yeah, and I would definitely tell myself too -- not to be so hard on myself, that this is new for everyone, it's a trial-and-error process, and it's not gonna be perfect. You just have to try.

S: You feel like you know what you wanna do, and you're not able to do that.

K: Yes. There are so many ideas I have but some are just not realistic in the current times. Especially when families have more important things going on like their physical and mental health and that of their loved ones.

S: Yes, it is difficult times. So NJASP is almost in your blood, because, like you were saying, you were connected early, and then you happened to run into people who were active in NJASP.

K: Yeah, and I feel like I kinda jumped right in, headfirst, for sure. And now, I'm trying to play catch up in different ways, like trying to see where I can be more involved. And I know, here and there, trying to offer support where I can.

S: So how do you like being Secretary?

K: I like it a lot. It took me some time to understand a few different things, like some of the language. And then also, because of all the different bills that's going on in the legislature -- I did not understand that process. It's been a learning experience for me.

S: You have sort of a handle on that now?

K: Yes, I think so. From you and from other Board members. It took some time, I'm sure you noticed, to take it all in.

S: So, when you came to Asbury, was the position set up the way you're describing it now? That most of the time you work in general ed? And you just do some Child Study stuff?

K: How it was set up -- I was hired as a school psychologist to case manage and evaluate. But I kind of took it upon myself to do more. I brought ideas to administration and they were supportive of my plans, and we worked together. When building and district administration changed, I would bring those ideas to the table again and explain this is what we were doing, this is what we were trying to do and see if they would support me continuing with the plans. But as far as my job role, it is Child Study Team, it's testing, case managing.

S: So you said that you took it upon yourself to do these other things. What I hear people say a lot is that they would like to do that but they have their caseloads. It's too much, it's too big for them to be able to find the time to do it. So tell me about that -- how did you find the time, how did you make the time to do it? Or you just did it?

K: When I first started, I had about 70 students on my caseload. So that's low for New Jersey. I saw where the need was: you're spending so much time doing Individualized Behavior Plans, so there comes a point when you say, "I can't have eight students in this class having separate plans, when their overall issue is very similar. So then you work on those, and then an administrator asks you what's going on, or you invite them to sit in the meetings with you about this student and what's going on. And you see that there's a greater need. I would bring it to their attention. I would point that out to them, and say, "This is what I'm seeing, do you agree with me, what can we do?" I would show them the data! And then we would brainstorm, and then I would do it.

S: It sounds like from what you're saying, it's a natural way to do it -- why wouldn't anybody else do that? You see the issue and you do it. So it seems to me that you saw the need, and you used your initiative. You did find some receptive administrators but

you're the one who got the ball rolling. Using a broader perspective -- not just individual kids with special needs.

K: Mm-hmm. And one of the big things that I did was because we have KYDS and we have our PBSIS program -- we have all these people trying to have the same common goal, to have a better school climate, to support the students so that they can ultimately function independently with all of these skills. We're all working toward the but we weren't working together. Everyone was doing something different, everyone was using a different language. For example, I would have a thermometer for my students. They're having a rough time in class, they come down, I'm -- "Ok, check in, what's your number, and give me a word to describe it." So I had a student that went to the Southside program, and was like -- I'm at a 10. And I'm like -- "Oh, 10, that's wonderful." "No, in our zone, zero to one is like you're fine, and 10 is like you're fuming." It's a funny story. I'm saying, "Oh 10, that's wonderful, that's wonderful." And it wasn't -- it was the complete opposite. So we were like we really have to do something so we're all on the same page.

S: I wanna be in on how you actually got this to develop. You said "we" -- you had a team. But how did you begin to work together? How did somebody get that started?

K: I brought that to the administration and said, "This is what's going on," and I want to create a team to address it. So once we decided on our key players,. I made sure they were on board and we met monthly to talk about what we're doing to support our kids, so that we're not stepping on anyone's toes, and we can help each other. So that's what it started out as: team meetings. These meetings, we'd come together, and say, "Ok, this is what our plan is for this month, this what our plan is for this month." And then it turned into -- well, ok, instead of us having separate plans, let's work together on one greater -- that's what it turned into. And the big thing was, whenever we'd have our meetings, we'd get to have an administrator there -- someone who knew the processes and procedures.

S: Working together was very helpful.

K: Yeah, it makes a huge difference; everyone brings something new to the table. I always let administration know what my plans are and get approval. For instance, when

my principal changed, I told him in the past I sent out a Motivational Monday email to all staff. Would it be okay to continue that? Once I was given the okay, I started working, pre-writing emails to send out. This was something simple I could do when I had a spare moment or saw something inspirational catch my eye that I would like to share. Even something as simple as sending out a weekly email got my name out to my colleagues, so they became more aware of who I was and what my role was in the school. So doing things like that for staff. And also showing up to others' meetings and asking to be involved. Whenever I would go to a PD I found helpful, I would bring it back to my coworkers and present in our common planning time. So I would go in and do Brain Break activities with the staff. Or, I would talk with them about how trauma affects the brain, and in turn, what that looks like in your classroom. So I put myself out there to make sure they know that I'm here as a support, I'm not just here just to sit in my office.

S: Now, tell me a little bit about yourself more personally. You're married, you have two kids.

K: Yes. So I'm married to my high school sweetheart, even though we went to different high schools. He is actually a high school special education teacher. We have two children -- my son Nathaniel, who's three years old and my daughter, Janelle who just turned one. We moved to Brick almost three years ago. We love going outside, gardening, travelling, and making crafts together. My son was recently diagnosed with Autism so that opened my eyes completely to a different way with this career. I am now able to understand better what the parents are feeling on the other side of the table. It helps me in my practice, for sure. I come from a large extended family and I am one of four -- I have three older brothers so we are constantly doing things to bring the whole family together.

S: You were the baby girl in the family.

K: Yes, I'm the baby girl. I actually semi-started my own business years ago but having children and everything, it's gone to the wayside. But I still do it as a hobby. I enjoy making soaps and self-care products. Some of the things I actually have made with some of my kids in counseling.

S: What was the business like?

K: I made and sold soaps, natural deodorants, creams, bath teas and baby products like diaper rash cream, baby powder, and teething cream.

S: You made all of that?

K: Yeah, it was fun. And I still make it when I can -- like now I'm starting it up a little bit more, now that we're home. Just doing it for myself, for fun. I enjoy that.

S: You have a very active life.

K: Yeah. I love it, though. I need to keep moving!

S: It sounds like it. Anything else you want to add, about what you've been doing, or how you see things are going as a school psychologist?

K: I am a firm believer that our education never stops. For this reason, I have stayed connecting teaching as an adjunct at Georgian Court University. I am also going to be starting with my doctorate in the fall. I think I need to learn more. I need to learn more from all of you.

S: I think you have a lot to contribute. I'm guessing that you're gonna be pretty active, and in time get more active in the Association. Have you been to any of the NASP Conventions?

K: Yes, I actually had a poster presentation in New Orleans, on a university and school partnership study I assisted on while at Georgian Court University.

S: A final question. Where do you see NJASP going? What would you like to see it do? How would you like to see it develop over the years?

K: For the last few months many members of the Associative have shared ideas of networking opportunities to better connect school psychologists by Regional Delegates. I am looking forward to those activities and workshops. I haven't missed a

[NJASP] conference yet but those only give an opportunity to connect with others two times a year. I am looking forward to all of the upcoming things planned, meeting more people, and learning from them.

S: I learned a lot about you. Wonderful stuff to put in the Newsletter.

K: Thank you so much.

S: Thank you, Krystal.



Don't be shy...we are all friends here!  
We would love to feature YOU and hear  
about your role and experiences.

Contact Sol @sandyhecno1@aol.com to learn more.

## Learning Disabilities and Mental Health: Practices in Schools

John Lestino

By the time you read this, we will still be in the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic impacting life throughout our daily personal and work. Let's hope that, as you read this, there are improvements in the health of our nation's citizenry, together with some degree of normality.. Even though NJASP's Executive Board voted unanimously to cancel our Spring conference, planning considerations remain for future conferences and professional development opportunities. To that end, here are a few ideas and a request.

First, a hearty thank you to the NJASP Conference Committee and the professional development interactions that would have made for what was to be another laudatory NJASP state-wide conference. There were many themes up for discussion through the program, e.g., improving assessment and communication of evaluation recommendations, Autism classification and interventions, SLD and PSW, and professional and ethical practices to guide us in our work. Along with several Awards for individuals who have provided remarkable services for children and for school psychology, and for future school psychologists.

Here are two factors, one explicit and one implicit, which come to mind, prompted by Conference and Board discussion. I'm going to explore them, then ask for your feedback.

Explicit factor #1: SLD and the nature of classification and support. While we work in schools that are required to have rules/guidelines governing assessment and qualification for SLD classification, it appears that, in New Jersey discrepancy formulas still take almost exclusive predominance. This seems to occur even though federal regulations under IDEA note: "(a) General.

A State must adopt, consistent with § 300.309, criteria for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in § 300.8(c)(10). In addition, the criteria adopted by the State; 34 CFR 300.307 Specific learning disabilities... (1) *Must not require* [italics added] the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, as defined in § 300.8(c)(10)..."

So, as we practice with colleagues, parents and extended teams, what has been your experience using the three-pronged approach?

1. Eligibility/classification...
2. Need for SPED and/or related services...
3. Benefits and placement for student(s)

**34 CFR 300.8 Child with a disability.**

\*\*\* (c) *Definitions of disability terms.* The terms used in this definition of a child with a disability are defined as follows:

\*\*\* (10) *Specific learning disability--*

(i) General. Specific learning disability means a *disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes* [italics added] involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an *imperfect ability* [italics added] to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia..."

Here are the federal regulations extended from above:

"Additional Procedures for Identifying Children with Specific Learning Disabilities:"

**34 CFR 300.307 Specific learning disabilities.**

(a) *General.* A State must adopt, consistent with § 300.309, criteria for

determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in § 300.8(c)(10). In addition, the criteria adopted by the State--

(1) Must *not* require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, as defined in § 300.8(c)(10);

(2) Must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and

(3) May permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a learning disability, as defined in § 300.8(c)(10).

(b) *Consistency with State criteria.* A public agency must use the State criteria adopted pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section in determining whether a child has a specific learning disability.

#### **NJ: 6A-14**

12. "Specific learning disability" corresponds to "perceptually impaired" and means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

i. A specific learning disability can be determined when a severe discrepancy is found between the student's current achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas:

(1) Basic reading skills;

(2) Reading comprehension;

(3) Oral expression;

(4) Listening comprehension;

(5) Mathematical calculation;

(6) Mathematical problem solving;

(7) Written expression; and

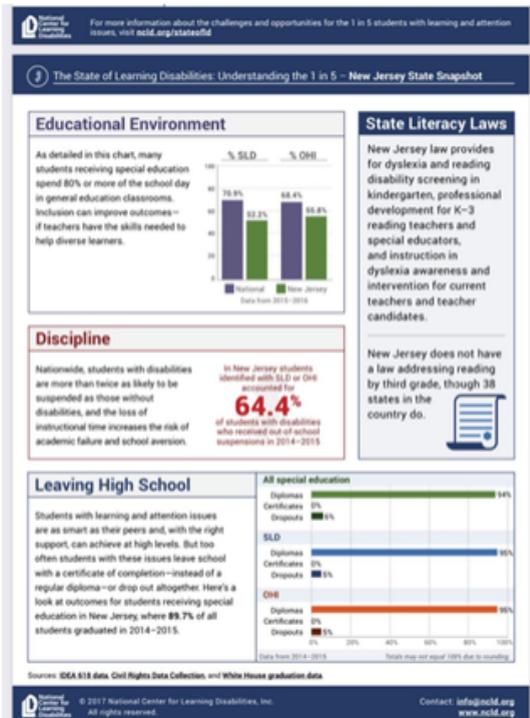
(8) Reading fluency.

ii. A specific learning disability may also be determined by utilizing a response to scientifically based interventions methodology as described in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(h)6...”.

So, when looking at our NJ population of students requiring SPED services, how do these three issues/requirements intertwine in your professional experiences and judgments: i.e.,

1. Principal use of severe discrepancy
2. Application of utilizing a response to scientifically based intervention methodology
3. Placement decision(s) on the LRE continuum

*Here's more to consider from background information provided by our colleagues at NJDOE: [Link provided in references]*



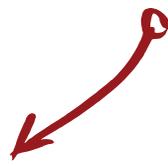
Data Display: New Jersey

PERCENT OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (IDEA) BY DISABILITY CATEGORY, AGES 6 THROUGH 21

Disability Category	Percent of Overall Student Enrollment State (%)	Percent of Overall Student Enrollment Nation (%)
Autism	1.07	0.90
Deaf-blindness	0.05	0.00
Emotional disturbance	0.68	0.82
Hearing impairment	0.12	0.15
Intellectual disability	0.41	0.96
Multiple disabilities	1.50	0.28
Orthopedic impairment	0.05	0.12
Other health impairment	2.82	1.63
Specific learning disabilities	6.32	5.23
Speech or language impairment	3.40	2.38
Traumatic brain injury	0.06	0.06
Visual impairment	0.03	0.06

Explanatory Note: The percentage of enrollees who are children with disabilities (IDEA), by disability category, in the state and nation for the age range of 6 through 21 (excluding children with developmental delays). For this calculation, the numerator is the number of children with disabilities (IDEA) in a specific disability category as of the state-designated special education child count date (between October 1 and December 1, 2011) for ages 6 through 21 (excluding children with developmental delays) and the denominator is the total number of students enrolled in public schools as of October 1, 2010 (or the closest school day to October 1) for all grade levels from grade 1 through grade 12, as well as ungraded. National data represent the US and Outlying Areas. Data reported for IDEA 2011 Child Count and 2010-11 CCD. (Data Sources: <http://www.idealdata.org> and <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/>)

Please review how New Jersey aligns with national trends, so as to impact the subsequent conversation to follow.



PERCENT OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (IDEA) BY DISABILITY CATEGORY, AGES 3 THROUGH 21

Disability Category	CWDs (IDEA), Ages 3-5		CWDs (IDEA), Ages 6-21	
	State (%)	Nation (%)	State (%)	Nation (%)
All disabilities	100	100	100	100
Autism	5.8	6.9	6.5	7.2
Deaf-blindness	x	0.0	0.0	0.0
Developmental delay*	67.8	37.2		
Emotional disturbance	0.4	0.4	4.1	6.5
Hearing impairment	0.4	1.3	0.7	1.2
Intellectual disability	0.9	1.6	2.5	7.6
Multiple disabilities	2.4	1.1	9.1	2.2
Orthopedic impairment	0.2	1.0	0.3	1.0
Other health impairment	4.4	2.8	17.1	12.9
Specific learning disabilities	4.7	3.2	38.4	41.5
Speech or language impairment	12.7	45.9	20.6	18.9
Traumatic brain injury	x	0.1	0.4	0.4
Visual impairment	x	0.5	0.2	0.5

\*Developmental delay is only allowable through age 5, so a 6-21 percentage cannot be calculated.

Explanatory Note: The percentage represents a distribution of children with disabilities (IDEA) by disability category for age ranges 3 through 5 and 6 through 21 (excluding children with developmental delays). For this calculation, the denominator is all children with disabilities (IDEA) for the specified age range, excluding developmental delays for ages 6 through 21. National data represent the US and Outlying Areas. Data reported for IDEA 2011 Child Count. (Data Source: <http://www.idealdata.org>)

What do these measures look like when compared with your workplace?



EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS, AGES 6 THROUGH 21  
Percent of Time Spent Inside the Regular Classroom

Disability Category	≥ 80% of Day State (%)	≥ 80% of Day Nation (%)	40 to 79% of Day State (%)	40 to 79% of Day Nation (%)	< 40% of Day State (%)	< 40% of Day Nation (%)	Separate School or Residential Facility State (%)	Separate School or Residential Facility Nation (%)
All disabilities	46.6	61.1	26.7	19.8	16.1	14.0	7.2	3.3
Autism	23.7	39.0	14.6	18.2	33.3	33.7	27.6	8.2
Deaf-blindness	90.4	27.0	x	10.5	x	32.6	x	26.4
Emotional disturbance	32.2	43.1	20.7	18.0	22.0	20.6	21.8	15.1
Hearing impairment	48.7	56.7	18.2	16.8	14.5	13.0	x	12.0
Intellectual disability	5.2	17.0	22.0	26.6	55.3	48.8	16.5	6.5
Multiple disabilities	15.1	13.0	21.6	16.4	30.4	46.2	31.3	20.9
Orthopedic impairment	56.6	54.0	28.7	16.3	x	22.2	4.7	4.8
Other health impairment	52.2	63.5	29.1	22.7	12.1	10.0	x	1.8
Specific learning disabilities	49.2	66.2	34.5	25.1	11.3	6.8	0.8	0.6
Speech or language impairment	66.2	86.9	18.3	5.5	11.0	4.5	0.5	0.3
Traumatic brain injury	29.8	48.5	27.9	22.8	24.2	20.4	x	5.7
Visual impairment	57.9	64.3	x	13.1	11.1	11.3	x	9.6

The percentage of children with disabilities (IDEA) in the state and nation by disability category (excluding children with developmental delays) attending regular classrooms, or separate schools and residential facility. Note that this table does not include all reported educational environment categories. The denominator is all children with disabilities (IDEA), ages 6 through 21 (excluding children with developmental delays), in a specified disability category. National data represent the US and Outlying Areas. Data reported for IDEA 2011 Educational Environment. (Data source: <http://www.idealdata.org>)

So, to what end are classification rates, e.g., SLD criteria, being used for eligibility and/or related services delivery, and its impact on performance as part of your experience with our SLD population of students and children? Your NJASP Professional Development (PD) and Conference Committees are very interested in hearing from you. From a categorical standpoint, SLD is the area of largest need for services; it has some interesting comparisons with national trends. What does that mean for us in New Jersey as SPs, as educators and psychologists, for the most part working within schools and on CST Teams?

Now for the second part of this article...or making the *implicit explicit*. This is just as important as the background information, and experiential and statistical data, provided so far.

What have you found that supports or positively impacts on the well-being of your students, that ranges from the broad categories of social-emotional learning to the educational impacts on your students and on your schools/communities...the concept of positive mental-health functioning?

So, 30 years ago, I recall SLD often being labeled as the Mild Disability. What did and what does that mean in terms of our collective practices for our students in 2020? Are there practices that blend the well-being of your students with the broader mental health of your school/community on a continuum, and affect school-climate? Just think about it for a moment. Children aware that they can't keep up with their peers around them in a classroom, with, most likely, tension, if not terror, they must feel. And pressure to do something that does not easily come to them.

Can we de-link mental health from learning challenges, or is there a need for re-vamping the labeling system of/for specific learning disabilities or classification schema? I don't know what you would say, but the drive for us to work together with other educators so as to help for greater overall functioning of

our students, is stronger than ever. Whether we call these needs, values or goals, e.g., social skills, positive behaviors (supports), character skills and/or mental health abilities, they cannot be denied; they will impact student learning and services. Students and schools cannot move away and try to escape these processes. Would it not be better if we moved in a more unified manner toward more pro-social values, working together, so that we help improve skilled learning (academics) and bring forth healthier, socially skilled human beings?

When we return to school, with whatever greets us in post-Covid-19 educational settings, I hope we are able to provide even a stronger educational impact for our students, teachers and communities. Not a bad goal to have for an individual, a community and our organization.

*Please contact me at: [jlestino1811@gmail.com](mailto:jlestino1811@gmail.com) for ideas re: professional development suggestions and/or discussing programs of interests*

*Or, contact Kristine Raymer, [kristineraymer1129@gmail.com](mailto:kristineraymer1129@gmail.com)  
NJASP Conference Committee Chair-person as well for future conference suggestions, or contact info for any of the EXBRD members at [www.njasp.org](http://www.njasp.org)*

Link to resources - click below



*John C. Lestino*

NJASP President-Elect and PD Chair



## Publicize Your Extracurricular Activity



We've been offered an opportunity to share the value of extracurricular programs, now that the plans of so many kids and families have been thrown into turmoil by the pandemic. Are there any districts doing something unique and innovative during the shutdown? Do you know of a school giving online school music performances? Has anyone started a sports league online? Anyone publishing an online school newspaper? Is there a superintendent or a therapist who is doing something extraordinary or unusual who might inspire others? Provide a brief summary/abstract. If usable, we'll be in touch for a full description.

**Respond ASAP to: Editor @sandyhecn01@aol.com**



## Prestigious Recognition

### Second Commendation for NJASP Executive Board Member

On the occasion of its May 2020 (ZOOM) meeting, NJASP's Executive Board bestowed a unique commendation on one of its members, Terri A. Allen. Created especially in Dr. Allen's honor, for her initiative (described below) in serving school psychologists throughout New Jersey, this is the second successive Newsletter issue to announce a major award to her.

So, once again, we share her accomplishments with our readers. What else is up your sleeve, Terri?



**Special Resolution in Recognition of  
Terri A. Allen, Ph.D. for Her Provision of Information to School Psychologists**

**Whereas**, the coronavirus has drastically affected the wellbeing and education of New Jersey's school children, drastically disrupting traditional education policies, programs and practices; and

**Whereas**, this has resulted in profound uncertainties especially as to appropriate delivery of services for both classified and unclassified children with special needs; and

**Whereas**, school psychologists are responsible for and eager to provide such services; and

**Whereas**, guidance from official government sources such as USDOE and NJDOE have been limited and general with respect to such services; and

**Whereas**, the Executive Board of the New Jersey Association of School Psychologists (NJASP) had, early on, recognized such concerns in informal discussions; and

**Whereas**, such discussion had included the possibility of NJASP providing such guidance to school psychologists; and

**Whereas**, Terri A. Allen, a member of the NJASP Executive Board, took it upon herself to initiate such guidance by NJASP; and

**Whereas**, with the assistance of some other Executive Board members, Terri A. Allen has been the driving force in NJASP's gathering, coordinating and distributing such information and guidance via NJASP's website and other means; and

**Whereas**, Terri A. Allen's implementation of the availability of such information and guidance to the school psychologists of New Jersey has been notably reassuring and helpful to many New Jersey school psychologists and, consequently, to the children and their families;

Be it resolved that the Executive Board of NJASP formally and officially, and with unanimous consent,

Hereby commends Terri A. Allen for her devotion to the appropriate professional practice of school psychologists, and therefore to the wellbeing of children and their families in these times of crisis, and

Hereby confers on **Terri A. Allen** a **Special Resolution of Recognition** for her initiation and ongoing maintenance of such resources.

Attested to this day of May 14, 2020

*Eli Freund*

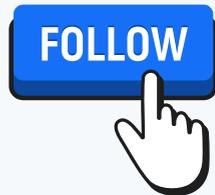
NJASP President

*Krystal Norman*

NJASP Secretary

## Check out the NJASP Wakelet collections!

Follow our Home Page by clicking link below to access all of our collections.




**NJASP (@NJSchPsy)**  
Public Collections from NJASP. We are a non-profit professional association...  
wakelet.com

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**Re-entry resources**  
26 Items

This will be an ever expanding collection of resources related to planning our re-entry to traditional school model, whatever that may be in our future. Keep checking back!

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**COVID-19 Resources**  
110 Items

As we come across resources/info that we feel may be helpful to you, we will add to this collection so please check back frequently! Also, we have many previously added resources on our website [www.njasp.org](http://www.njasp.org) so please take a look there as well. There is a separate

Powered by [wakelet](#)



**KEEP CALM**  
**The Virtual School Psychologist**  
90 Items

This is a collection of "official" information (NJDOE, USDOE, NASP, NJASP, etc) and practical resources to support you in your virtual school psychology practice. We strongly encourage you to review the NASP legal and ethical considerations for remote school psychological services

# Stay tuned

It may be summer but your NJASP Executive Board continues to advocate for children, families and our profession of school psychology!

Go to [www.njasp.org](http://www.njasp.org) to keep up to date with the latest news and information or to check on your membership status.

