New York
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

A publication of the New York Association of School Psychologists
Serving children, their families, and the school community
An affiliate of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

Inside this issue

• The role of the school psychologist in times of crisis
• Practicing in quarantine
• Reflections on race and privilege
• NYASP statements on tele-assessment and violence against persons of color
Dear readers,

This issue is dedicated to a topic with which we have all become intimately familiar over the last several months -- the role of the school psychologist in times of crisis. When we conceived of this topic, the crisis on everyone's mind was the COVID-19 pandemic, and as we send this issue to print, that crisis is still unfolding. However, as time went on, a second pandemic emerged, and what is unfortunate is that this pandemic has been ongoing in our society for far too long, but it seems like some of us just became aware of it within the last few weeks. We are speaking, of course, of the pandemic of systemic racism.

Therefore, this issue is full of stories of school psychologists, past and present, practitioners, trainers, and students, rising to meet various crises. These include a catastrophic flood, COVID-19 and adjusting overnight to providing services virtually and trying to stay connected to students, and becoming more and more aware of the extent that persons of color have been oppressed and marginalized in our society (and, if we are white, what our role -- however unintentional -- has been in that). School psychologists are resilient and nimble, and we promote those qualities in the systems in which we work. School psychologists are also reflective, and in times of crisis, we should pause to take stock, consider the past path forward, and commit to do better. School psychologists, also, are advocates, and we owe it to the children, families, and communities we serve to advocate for a more just society.

We hope that you find this issue, useful, and affirming, and also challenging. Neither of these pandemics will be over any time soon, so let's lean on each other and continue to press forward.

Be well,

Mike and Eliane
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Dear Friends,

This is the last column I am writing as the NYAS President, and I struggled with what to write about. Normally I write in line with the theme of this issue, but we’re in a place where the world is very different than it was three months ago. COVID-19 has tested our ability to be flexible and work quickly through chaotic times. As I reflect on this, I realize now what it is I wanted to say.

I want to tell a personal experience that happened. As of the writing of this article, we are nearing almost two months of being shut down. During that time, I participated in positive messages for kids in our school and shared in online video montages to keep spirits high. I was asked to chair many IEP meetings and had to learn how to finish my semester teaching at a college through a virtual platform. Through it all, I noticed something interesting with me... that this was hard and I was struggling. Working in a reality without defined parameters, where things were unknown week to week, where I knew my students were struggling with a new normal, and that place called school also helped to define a major part of who I am was a place that was, physically, closed. As I navigated many online meetings and did the education at home thing with my own kids, time seemed to stand still...and the days were morphing into one another (an interesting phenomenon that I learned was common to many.)

And then it happened. You see, over the course of my time as president, I did something new and ran my first half marathon (and four more after that) after having done very little running previously. Shortly after school was closed, I found it difficult to go out and run (and no, it was not just the Central New York weather.) While I got in a few three mile runs, I found myself usually staying inside. Then, I got a text from someone from my running group asking if I wanted to join in a responsible way with safe social distancing. The people with whom I was running had kept up with it better than I had, and I was no longer on par with their paces. They just smiled, told me to set the pace and joked that it was “John's day”...and I ran a good eight miles. Here’s the thing...I found the challenge of moving to a “new normal” and some friends said, “We’re going to help you where you are and get you back there.” What this did for me was amazing. I felt that I was back.

And my friends...there it was. You see, these two were doing for me what I do for students all the time. I work in some way to see what they need and then work with teachers, administration, parents, and/or the students and we help them get back to where they need to be. For years, I have helped students who have veered from their usual paths. Dealing with something this significant, in some way, helped to shake me from my own path. My point is this...when things are difficult, find someone and let them know you’re struggling. It’s amazing what people can do. Then again...it is what we do as school psychologists every day.

On another note...this is my last column as President of NYASP. I attended my first NYASP conference in the fall of 1996 at the annual conference in Rochester and words cannot describe what this organization has done for my own professional development and the skills I acquired to work effectively as a school psychologist over the past 24 years. I would like to thank you, the membership, for allowing NYASP to serve you and I would also like to thank the Executive Board of NYASP for their countless hours of work to serve school psychologists in New York State. Beth Rizzi will soon take over as President and am confident NYASP will continue to thrive under her leadership. As always, thank you, school psychologists, for being a part of the Pride of the Profession...it has been an honor. Ψ

Dr. John M. Garruto, D.Ed., NCSP
President
New York Association of School Psychologists
COVID-19 and Emergency Teaching: Transitioning Online
Stacy A. S. Williams

For many of us in higher education, the news of transitioning online may have come as a shock. Yes, I knew there was a medical crisis in China and Italy. However, I naively thought that the United States would be spared from the effects of COVID-19. The move to online education was swift, as higher education attempted to respond to the rapidly changing messaging in regards to the virus impact on our communities. Many university instructors were given 1 - 2 weeks to do three things: (1) learn online technology to facilitate synchronous or asynchronous classes; (2) modify and truncate syllabus; (3) deliver instruction and manage class dynamics. This expectation was met with a host of conflicting emotions ranging from excitement to full blown anxiety. At best, this process became known online as #QuarantineTeaching or #EmergencyTeaching (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020; McMurtrie, 2020; Milman, 2020). Proponents of online pedagogy were quick to point out that although our responses were valiant, newly minted online instructors should not equate emergency teaching with best practice (Hodges et al., 2020). In fact, researchers argued that it takes a considerable amount of time to develop and deliver an online class. Hence, proponents of online education, provided practical strategies for faculty to ease the transition online. The following is an account of one university instructor’s process transitioning to this new normal.

In the beginning, I was excited, nervous, and overwhelmed by the gaps in my technology knowledge. One of the first things I needed to learn was the technology available to deliver online instruction. Many school psychology leadership organizations were coordinating their efforts to provide this information to the field. The National Association of School Psychologists Early Career Group was the first to coordinate instructional resources asking faculty members to leverage their expertise by lecturing in colleagues’ classrooms. In addition, The Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs (CDSPP), along with Trainers of School Psychologists (TSP) and other leadership groups banded together to educate faculty about technology resources to deliver course work and best practice in using online teaching techniques. It is important to note that the collation of these resources happened quickly as trainers attempted to figure out the best course of action. Currently, these resources are housed on the TSP website (https://tsp.wildapricot.org/) and it is free to both members and non-members. Hence, the first couple of weeks, faculty were busy practicing online platforms to deliver content. In fact, many colleagues ended up choosing from one of the following to deliver training: Google Hangouts, Zoom, WebEx, Panopto, or Screencast-O-Matic. In the end, I settled on WebEx for virtual office hours and check-in meetings and Panopto to record and deliver lectures. The time spent learning the technology was both exhausting and anxiety provoking. I was discouraged many times and wondered if I would be able to learn the technology to deliver the quality of experience I was used to. To be honest, being a recovering perfectionist meant that I struggled initially with uncertainty and failure during the early weeks. However, extending grace to myself by repeating the mantra “you are doing your best” allowed me to appreciate where I was in my technology journey. In addition, the Marist Digital office was able to provide individual tutoring that bolstered my skills.

As the initial shock of transitioning began to wane, trainers were tasked with determining whether course work would be delivered synchronously or asynchronously. Many of us wanting to stay connected with our students pushed for synchronous learning. However, this approach was not sensitive to differences in student’s technology access and exposure to trauma. Hence, I adopted a mixed approach with hopes of creating an inclusive space. Online educators recommend recording lectures (asynchronous), holding optional check-ins, or virtual office hours. For example, I decided to hold optional virtual check-ins for an hour for each course taught per week. Depending on the class, students showed up to field questions about assignments or to check-in with each other. In addition to recording lectures, PowerPoint handouts were provided for students who
Teaching Tolerance (2020) offered guidance for infusing Trauma-Informed literature in online spaces. In essence they argued that we needed to do the following:

1. Establish a routine and maintain clear communication
2. Prioritize relationships and well-being over assignments and behavioral compliance
3. Provide students with a sense of safety
4. Foster connectedness
5. Encourage hope
6. Promote self-awareness and self-care

These recommendations became one of the foundational pillars of my online experience. In addition, Dr. Brandon Bayne (2020) from UNC Chapel Hill, identified five emergency principles to guide online teaching. In essence, he prioritized health and relationships over assignments without sacrificing the intellectual integrity of the classroom. It was helpful to review both these documents to frame how learning would happen in this space.

It became important for me to create a space to check in with students and also provide opportunities for them to check in with each other. My college uses the iLearn platform to manage online classes. Within this platform Forums can be used to mimic classroom discussion. During the first 2 – 3 weeks, Forum exercises and virtual check-ins were focused on promoting self-awareness and developing self-care routines to manage this new experience. In fact, each week Forum activities were influenced by responses shared the week before. For example, some of the Forum post titles were:

1. How have you taken care of yourself in the last week?
2. What are some of the strategies used to manage your online classes?
3. What are some of the silver linings of being home during this period?
4. What are you grateful for?

Hence, Forum posts were used to mimic in-person classroom discussions, promote connectedness and empathy, and overall a space where students could support each other. I was blown away by the level of professionalism and grace students showed in this space. As the weeks continued, Forum posts ranged from self-awareness and self-care activities to sharing their thoughts in regards to the week’s topic.

In order to promote overall emotional health, a wellness page was created. On this page, I modeled for students the importance of self-care. I shared my own self-care strategies. Students were also encouraged to submit their own. For example, a student shared access to her mom’s yoga channel on YouTube. Furthermore, information regarding access to counseling services on campus and a self-care survey were shared. Students were encouraged to develop a self care plan to help them through this process. I also partnered with meditation practitioners who offered students free online meditation classes and a sliding fee for yoga classes. In addition, I found being honest with students about my own self-care routines was helpful in connecting and helping students identify their own routines.

After creating a space to foster empathy and connectedness, I focused on content delivery. Syllabus was modified to reflect learning modules. Hence, six weeks of learning modules were created. Modules were released the Sunday before the start of each week. Each learning module included a checklist that identified for students what was to be covered and due that week. Links to assignments were embedded in the learning modules. Mini lectures were embedded which ranged in length from 10 – 15 minutes. Each mini lecture was paired with an activity to foster engagement. This activity ranged from responding to forum posts, creating content with classmates using google.doc/slides or taking quizzes. The level of work
required by students was staggered throughout the six weeks. This staggering was purposeful to give students the opportunity to focus energies elsewhere and reduced the feelings of being overwhelmed in class. Overall, the content quality was not scarified in this space. To foster connectedness, students worked on group assignments using google documents or slides. For example, in one of my courses, 9 students worked together to create a Bullying webinar! Again, the quality of work produced during this pandemic is a testament to creating opportunities to promote connectedness.

Lessons Learned

Although stressed in the first two weeks, I gained confidence from the quality of work students produced and the level of participation exhibited in the Forum posts. In check-ins, students remarked that the return to structure allowed them to manage their day to day activities. Students reported liking the wellness page, optional check-ins and clear guidelines to complete assignments. When students noted being overwhelmed, other students would provide suggestions as what could be done to mitigate the stress. I was blown away by the level of professionalism and empathy demonstrated by peers in forum posts and online spaces.

Emergency teaching is not sustainable. However, the student’s commitment to wanting to be engaged made the process manageable and enjoyable. We currently live in a society where tools are available to deliver content to support both professional and emotional development. Above all, developing procedures to promote connectedness and empathy was instrumental to navigating this emergency space. It was important to note that being connected will look different depending on the students in your class. Students on-the-ground academic habits tended to bleed into online spaces. For example, students who accessed office hours and asked questions prior to COVID-19, tended to access virtual office hours more so than others. In addition, students attended virtual check-ins for a host of reasons: clarification regarding assignments or a need to connect with classmates.

It is imperative as we move forward that we all take a moment to reflect on our challenges and successes during this period. First, I am amazed that at the start of the year, I thought I would be unable to learn the tools necessary to deliver an online class. Yet COVID-19 proved me wrong. While COVID-19 challenged my pedagogical skills, it also provided me with an opportunity to develop new skills/insights, and opportunities to create experiences for students in online spaces to promote connectedness and empathy. Personally, I was able to develop skills that I wouldn’t have had time for pre COVID-19. I am excited to share that I have become quite the Quarantine Chef.

To conclude, I would like to share some of my students’ insights about this period in history. When asked to reflect on the ‘silver linings’ of working from home, my students shared the following:

- Time away from the world has allowed me to breathe and recenter myself.
- The opportunity to spend time with family.
- I am saving money (no more daily Dunkin trips)
- I can work on my mental health.
- I have been going on a lot of walks and enjoying nature.
- I am able to follow a flexible schedule of where and when I complete my schoolwork.
- I can give my dog the attention he needs.
- I can get credit for classes without it affecting my GPA as long as I pass the class.

Although moving home and online was initially stressful, students were able to identify the ‘silver linings’ that allowed them to manage the stress with moving online. Overall, providing students with an online space to reflect, reminisce and share allowed me to understand my students and create assignments that were both intellectually challenging and emotionally underwhelming. We should be proud of our ability to preserve during periods of uncertainty while maintaining our expectations. I leave you with the mantras that helped me navigate this period:

- We Got This
- We Are In This Together
- All Hands on Deck
- Slay Your Day
- Together We Thrive (Thank you NASP for this hashtag). ☺
References


Milman, N. B. (2020, March 30). This is emergency remote teaching, not just online teaching. Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/03/30/this-is-emergency-remote-teaching-not-just.html?cmp=soc-twitter-shr


Dr. Stacy A. S. Williams is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Marist College, a Licensed Psychologist and Certified School Psychologist in New York State. As a founding member of the Creating Inclusive Communities (CIC) group at Marist, Dr. Williams and her colleagues have provided inclusion training to faculty within the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences to support diversity and inclusion activities in the classroom. In addition, Dr. Williams has consulted with other departments at the college to support their race pedagogical development. Dr. Williams is also involved in social justice initiatives and training at the college, where she is currently working with the Diversity Council Training and Assessment Team in developing a social justice-training model for the college. At the national level, Dr. Williams serves on the Trainers of School Psychologists (TSP) executive board, where she co-chairs the Social Justice task force and serves as membership coordinator. In addition, Dr. Williams mentors students and early career faculty of color through the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) mentoring program. At the state level, Dr. Williams has mentored school psychology candidates, created and managed content for the state association annual conference. Dr. Williams has also consulted with Instructional Support Teams (IST) in upstate New York and Connecticut, working closely with school psychologists, general educators, administrators, and support staff integrating Response to Intervention (RTI) initiatives at the IST level. She has also consulted internationally, bringing RTI strategies to rural classrooms in Jamaica, her home country. Dr. Williams regularly provides training in social justice, creating inclusive classrooms, academic and behavioral interventions, data-based decision-making for teachers, and university/school partnerships. Dr. Williams can be reached at Stacy.Williams@nyasp.org.
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Telecounseling in Education: Building the Plane While Flying It
Arielle D. Sikora

Mid March, when I received notification from my district that we were “temporarily” closing for the three weeks leading up to spring break, my initial reaction was, “This is great! I will be able to catch up on some report writing while being able to spend time with my 13 month old son.” Less than a week later as directives from my district confirmed we had to proceed with “business as usual” and conduct CSEs virtually, as well as carry out related services virtually it hit me, this is serious and I no longer had the initial morning-of-a-snow-day feeling. I’m not usually one to panic despite the media hype, in fact the Libra in me does the opposite. When surrounded by chaos I tend to withdraw and find optimism and peace, but even I was a bit anxious. We often worry in situations we cannot control. In essence, I wasn’t worried about contracting COVID-19; I was scared for the well-being of my loved ones.

When my administrator announced we would be carrying out related services in my district remotely in order to be in compliance with state mandates, I had a lot of questions. Some questions could not yet be answered by my administration and it dawned on me that it felt like we were building the plane while flying it! I so badly wanted to say let’s all pause and think things through before we jump on the telepsychology bandwagon, but directives were happening so fast at the district and state level; it was no longer my choice.

I quickly reached out to my fellow NYASP members and members of my doctoral cohort to see where I could obtain best practice knowledge of telepsychology. Telepsychology, teletherapy, telesessions, telementalhealth, telecounseling, remote counseling, E-therapy and distance counseling quickly became new terminology in my vocabulary. Much of the information and research I came across was clear, there is little best practice research with teletherapy because it’s so novel. Much of the research had involved the adult population but not yet children and adolescents, let alone children with special needs.

Telespsychology/Remote Counseling
This is so much more than simply picking up a phone and calling a student! According to APA (2013), telepsychology is the provision of psychological services via telecommunication technologies (e.g., internet, phone, virtual meeting spaces, etc...). Prior to reaching out to your students and families, the following online trainings and/or webinars may assist with obtaining the knowledge required for engaging in proper teletherapeutic practices, as well as following the legal and ethical requirements prior to engaging in virtual counseling.

Methods to Obtaining Professional Development in Teletherapy:
Certificate Trainings
- PESI Telehealth for Mental Health Professionals: 2-day Distance Therapy Training. This is temporarily free with promo code: TELEFREE. This training will appear to be at the normal price of $439 until you reach the final registration page where you can input the promo code.


- Telemental Health Training Certificate Program: This is for formal training. You don’t necessarily need this training for the school setting, but if you are looking to do teletherapy in your own private work, this would be a good venue to obtain certification.

https://www.telementalhealthtraining.com/live-training/product/telemental-health-training-certificate-htc-online-self-study

Informational Webinars-
- National Register Telepsych Video- Drs. Mary Alvord, Alex Siegel, and Eric Harris discuss the practice, regulation, and risk management of telehealth:

https://www.nationalregister.org/npc-telepsych-video/

- NASP Online- “When One Door Closes Another Opens: School Psychologists Providing Telehealth Services.”

Tips for Engaging in Legal and Ethical Teletherapy:
To narrow down the top take-aways of engaging in best practice teletherapy, below is a list of essential components to put in place prior to your first session:

1. **Ensure Counselor Competency**- Seek appropriate consultation or training to stay current with the technology you plan to use. Prior to utilizing a virtual platform make sure you have a thorough understanding of how to use it as well as all of its features.

2. **Develop emergency protocol**- Obtain an emergency contact from the parent in the event the parent is not reachable on the phone number they provide. It is also important you have the child’s address of the location they are at during the session. In the event there is an emergency (e.g., medical emergency such as seizure) and the parent is not home. You want to be able inform medical professionals of the child’s location. Better yet, only agree to telesessions, when you know the parent is home. It is important that you have these discussions with your administrators and agree on a protocol for handling suicide risk assessments and other emergency situations that could occur during a telesession. Also, make sure to provide the parents with emergency resources in the event something occurs in between telesessions.

3. **Use privacy protected virtual platforms**- It is imperative that you utilize a district approved virtual platform. This would be a platform your district has obtained a privacy agreement with and is typically encrypted. If you are doing this for private work ensure the platform is HIPAA compliant. (APA, 2013; PESI, 2020).

4. **Informed Consent**- Research is clear, consent must be obtained in order to engage in teletherapeutic practice involving children (NASP, 2017; PESI, 2020); however, if your district is not advising you to obtain written consent, protect yourself by documenting verbal consent with the parent. **You must provide full disclosure of the nature of services being offered.** The parents should be aware of all the risks and benefits of their child engaging in remote counseling. It is the parent’s right to decline this form of service. If a parent is uncomfortable with the child communicating with you on the phone or virtually, you should offer an alternate form of service. Perhaps they would be more comfortable with their child receiving weekly skills via email or through other online means (e.g., Google Classroom).

5. **Telepsych Etiquette**- Telecounseling etiquette is not only important for your students but also for you as the provider. Many of these suggestions would typically be recommended during a face-to-face session (e.g., phones off); however, there are other considerations to keep in mind when partaking in telecounseling. You can also refer to the APA (2020) telepsychological checklist for more information for practitioners.

Below are some recommended instructions to give your students/clients:

- Be on time
- Encourage use of headset/earbuds
- Quiet environment- Computer or phone should be in a location without other family members in the room, if possible.
- Phones and other electronics should be away or muted during this time
- Student recordings are prohibited
- Dress appropriately- be fully covered

Once you’ve done your research and familiarized yourself with what telepsychology is and how to implement it properly try to keep in mind, “We are all in this together.” Although that saying seems to be tossed around repeatedly in these times, it is not cliché and is truly our current reality. Whether you are technologically advanced and comfortable being the virtual school psychologists we are suddenly expected to be, or just learning how to navigate your first virtual meeting, try to remember you are doing the best you can and it IS good enough. This is new territory for us all. In moments of stress/chaos find your inner peace and engage in your own self-care. Best wishes to you all as we embark in this new journey for education and let’s hope we are able to return to our schools sooner than later! Ψ

**Resources**

https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-psychology

PESI Inc. (2020) *Telehealth for mental health professionals: 2-day distance therapy training.*
https://catalog.pesi.com/item/telehealth-mental-health-professionals-2day-distance-therapy-training-52191

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**Arielle D. Sikora** is the NYASP Marketing Chair and NYASP Store Manager. A proud supporter of school psychology, you may easily spot Arielle at our conferences decked out in the NYASP Store attire. She has served on the NYASP board for many years as Secretary, Treasurer, and originally a Student Representative. Arielle is currently in her 9th year as a practicing school psychologist in the Washingtonville CSD. She has practiced in the middle school and elementary school settings, as well as conducted the district’s preschool evaluations. She enjoys the various roles of the school psychologist, but most especially values carrying out interventions for behavior management and children with anxiety disorders. Arielle can be reached at Arielle.Sikora@nyasp.org.

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A New Role for School Psychologists - Or is it?
Natalie Partyka

Week six in our new role. Or, is it a new role? Personally, for me, the answer is "yes" AND "no." We are trained to support and work through a crisis, but this particular crisis is new to everyone. When has school ever closed? When you work with a population that has high needs, that has been especially challenging. Our district spent the first week organizing lists and disseminating Chromebooks to students. I was amazed at the quick action despite the unknown, to get kids logged in and running. As school psychologists, we often feel isolated in our buildings (I am the only school psychologist for both of my buildings). It's easy to pop into a classroom and observe, help with a lesson, grab a teacher to ask a question, or pull a student to deescalate or deal with distress right then and there. With remote learning, where has that left us?

It obviously has become more challenging to reach out without being physically present, regardless of the type of population you work with. I gave the students time to get used to their new online classrooms while checking in with parents via calls and emails for the first two weeks. The contact right away is key. I also asked teachers to pass my email address on to parents if they needed support.

**Connection**, and maintaining connection, is the number one priority. Parents were super appreciative of my reaching out and welcomed the thought of continuing counseling through Google classroom. I have "popped" into classrooms throughout the day so the kids can see me and know I am here.

As we know, **routine** is also extremely important, especially during times of chaos. I have met with parents and teachers online to set up visual schedules and visual coping strategies for home. I have recorded myself reading stories on coping strategies, and expressing feelings, for elementary school teachers to post in their classrooms. I have posted visual cards of Baptiste Yoga for them to practice. My district has been distributing grab-and-go breakfasts and lunches daily from day one. I have volunteered several times to hand out food, say hello, and remind parents and students I am available. I have donated blood to feel useful. I have reached out to colleagues, as I have many who often seek advice from me throughout the school year regarding their own children or just to de-stress.

Lastly, are we taking care of ourselves? We all know taking care of ourselves enables us to help support others. So, take that mindful minute or a couple of online yoga classes. Be well! 🎁

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**Interested in writing a book review?**

Contact editor, Mike Paff at michael.paff@nyasp.org
Am I Doing Enough?
Sarah Shen

In times of crisis, school psychologists are often first on the scene. When a student elopes, school psychologists are the people who drop their work, and race (sometimes literally) to ensure the student is safe. When a reverse evacuation is called on a walkie-talkie, school psychologists go to the classroom to support students and adults. Well, what happens when the scene is virtual? This school psychologist has been struggling with feeling like her efforts aren’t enough to meet the needs of the staff, students, and the broader community.

I would like to challenge you to take a look at the outline of your day, and celebrate the continued commitment you have shown to assisting students, support staff, administration, and the systems in which you work. As I reflect on the last six weeks, at first glance, I feel as if my lack of direct, face to face, contact with students means I have left them unsupported during this time. Then, upon further inspection, as I dissect the countless hours I have spent hunched over a computer screen, I start to see the impact. While I wish I could be seeing those smiling faces in the hallway and around my office table, instead I have been working with a group of psychologists to develop and implement a plan for scheduling the hundreds of outstanding CSE and 504 committee meetings our district needed to hold. On the surface I do not think of this as a life-altering task. It is merely accepting that these meetings, that once were scheduled in person, now need to be held a different way. We worked on problem solving logistics and developing new means to communicate. This process was further complicated by new laws for technology, which have forever changed the way we use personal identifying information electronically. We did what needed to be done and accomplished our goal. As I reflected on this, I felt this contribution somewhat insignificant.

I sent out an email to the building staff around how the digital meetings would run, and provided them with logistics and the opportunity to hold mock meetings before we got started. Then I received several emails containing a shocking sentiment. People were looking forward to meetings and were expressing their excitement at participating around the virtual CSE table! I was, honestly, a bit surprised at first. But as I read the emails, I realized that holding these meetings felt very familiar to folks. People were used to meeting in the spring around a committee table and planning next year’s educational document for our students. People were holding on to that little piece of normalcy, and appeared to be excited about planning ahead, even in such an uncertain time.

It was then that I realized all of the work I and my colleagues put into planning was going to impact students’ lives for at least the next year as those educational documents were in place. We were also able to bring a small piece of normal to staff members’ days, and we provided them with the opportunity to connect with fellow educators to build programs to meet students’ needs.

Fellow school psychologists, I challenge you to be kind to yourselves as you manage your current workload. You might not be able to have the same level of engagement with students that you are used to in our changing educational landscape. But know that the work you are doing is impactful, no matter how small it seems at first glance. ※

Sarah Shen, MS, CAS, is co-chair of NYASP’s continuing professional development committee.

From an Intern’s Perspective
Jessica Jacobs

As a school psychology intern, I have been given the opportunity to grow my skills, make connections with students, and learn what it means to play a role in a school setting. When the news came out that schools were going to be closing due to COVID-19, I did not know what that meant for my role as a student intern. While I was nervous to embark as an intern during COVID-19, I was pleasantly surprised to realize that I was still able to make an impact during this situation. While I was no longer having in-person interactions with students, I was given the opportunity to supply and create resources that would assist students, parents, and teachers with effectively dealing with anxiety. Furthermore, I have been given the chance to learn from the psychologist at my internship as to what it means to be a psychologist during this time period. Although students can no longer attend in-person counseling, they continue to receive their services through Google Meets or phone calls. Additionally, the mental health faculty at my
placement site have gone out of their way to provide resources to students which explain the pandemic in a non-fearful way.

Although this is a chaotic time period, my internship placement is continuing to hold informing conferences, SST’s, and annual review meetings. I am appreciative that I can continue to take part in meetings and communicate with parents and teachers for the benefit of the students. Furthermore, the faculty continue to make the students their priority. While this situation impacts students and parents, the mental health staff at my placement also recognize the effect that it has on the faculty. In addition to helping students, the mental health staff has made it their goal to thank the teachers who are going out of their way to assist students who are struggling with their home schooling. Furthermore, I have learned about teachers who have gone the extra mile to help their students, whether it involves contacting students who need extra homework help or holding virtual classroom dance parties in order to keep a smile on the faces of their students. I have learned to appreciate the work that is put in by each faculty member in order to make sure that their students are continuing to stay positive during this pandemic. Through this experience, I have realized that I am grateful to be a part of a school setting that makes their students their priority while also tending to the mental health needs of parents and faculty. This may have not been how I planned the rest of my year to go, but I am pleasantly surprised with how my placement responded to this pandemic, and I am glad to be involved in a setting that is continuing to work hard to make sure that their students benefit from schooling during COVID-19. ¥

Jessica Jacobs, a past Ted Bernstein award winner, is currently in her internship year.

Jessica Jacobs, is a third year student in Hofstra’s School-Community Psy.D. program and currently serves as a NYASP Student Representative-Elect.

COVID-19 in Higher Education

Amy Fisk

As a School Psychologist in higher education, I have witnessed the immense impact of the sudden shift to remote learning on our campus community. Within the span of mere days, students, faculty, and staff were tasked to move the remainder of the spring semester online as a result of COVID-19. Faculty were expected to transition their entire courses online and students were expected to continue producing work amidst the chaos of moving back home.

The emotional toll on students, faculty, and staff has been tangible. Students are frustrated, confused, scared, and sad. They are separated from their friends and mentors, and for some, have lost their place of refuge. Seniors are unable to celebrate a significant life milestone with family and friends and say goodbye to a community that has been their home for the past four years. Many students are struggling with the shift from in-person to remote instruction, due to mental health issues and other disability-related barriers, lack of internet connectivity, concerns about their loved ones’ health and financial struggles, and many are losing motivation every day. Many faculty and staff are also feeling confused and frustrated, learning technology they are unfamiliar with, trying to address an array of student needs, and navigating shifting policies and expectations to deliver quality course instruction during a stressful time. And yet, our community has shown an incredible level of resilience and caring. Faculty, staff, and administration have worked around the clock to address students’ concerns, support fellow colleagues, and attempt to make the transition as smooth as possible, all while taking care of their own families and dealing with their own personal struggles.
I had just started my new role at the college a month earlier, and was just starting to gain my footing at a new campus. I had to quickly assume a leadership role in the shift of policies and procedures within our office, learn new technologies, and consult with instructors on accessible teaching methods and implementation of academic accommodations during remote learning. I’ve also been working with our campus technology team on electronic accessibility for online courses and ensuring that students with disabilities are continuing to have their needs met. This experience is allowing me to consider what all of this means from an accessibility standpoint, not just for students with disabilities, but for all the students we serve. This experience will undoubtedly force us to push the boundaries of how we approach teaching and learning in higher education as well as the K-12 system. At the end of the crisis, it will force us to evaluate practices that have been deemed impossible and will beg for a conversational shift from “can we do this” to “how and when do we get this done”. We will have the opportunity to adopt pedagogy and technologies that are accessible for all students, not just for those with disabilities.

No matter where we work and who we serve, our job as school psychologists is to use our skills in collaboration and communication to build positive relationships, promote kindness and empathy, and create a culture of hope and innovation for the future of education.

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**Tom's Tech Talk**

**Sociocentric IEPs**

Tom Kulaga

As an adjective the term “sociocentric” typically describes being oriented toward or focused on one's own social group. Additionally, if you are sociocentric it’s likely that you would consider your own group as superior to others. So how is this technically relevant? When one is invested in a particular operating system (MacOS, Windows, Chrome, Linux, iOS, Android) or a particular device (MacBook, Phone, PC, iPad, Tablet, Watch) one might forget that others may not be using the same system.

Each system or device has its particular strengths and weaknesses, which may be examined to develop an Individualized Equipment Plan (IEP). It is important for us to recognize that not all IEPs are alike. Additionally, IEPs are not static. For example, newer versions of operating systems or devices may come along that better serve the end user (EU).

While both operating systems and devices form a basic structure that may limit IEP choices, there are other factors to consider. Enter applications and cloud based activities. How might your IEP deal with messaging? Do you sync messages with a laptop? Do you use Facebook? Do you use one of dozens of messaging apps? What about privacy and security?

Enter COVID-19. Now that we are all involved in distance learning, how should our IEPs be amended? How will we all work remotely? Two of the popular video conferencing tools, Zoom and Google Meet, have been used to keep staff and students connected. Many schools, businesses and organizations with G Suite services already have Google Meet included in their suite. To compete with Zoom, Meet has been recently added a “Tiled” view and, as of this writing, Google announced that “Meet” will be rolling out a free version for individual use in the near future. At this point, it looks like Meet may be the more popular service for school meetings.

While our IEPs may not be perfect, we should try to develop appropriate plans that avoid sociocentric behavior. If your IEP is bloated with notions of superiority, is overly proprietary and promotes disdain for others’ plans, maybe you should add some counseling goals.
Nominations for the New York Association of School Psychologists Psychologist of the Year and Gil Trachtman Leadership in School Psychology Awards are Now Being Accepted

Chapter School Psychologist of the Year

These awards recognize excellence in the provision of school psychological services. They are presented by local chapters to individuals who spend the majority of their time (75%) providing direct services to children and their families. Contact your local chapter representative to nominate a school psychologist in your chapter for this award. Each local winner becomes the chapter nominee for the NYASP Frank Plumeau School Psychologist of the Year Award.

Chapter representative information available at http://www.nyasp.org/contact_us/

Gil Trachtman Leadership in School Psychology Award

This award recognizes a school psychologist who has made a significant contribution to the field of School Psychology by virtue of teaching, research or supervision. Nominees may not spend the majority of their time providing direct services to children and their families but have made a significant impact to the field of school psychology in other ways.

Nomination forms are available at:
http://www.nyasp.org/awards/leadership_packet.doc

Deadline is August 15, 2020.

For information, questions, or to submit completed nomination forms, please contact Dr. Jeanne B. Gold: Jeanne.gold@nyasp.org
The NYASP Research Committee invites you to apply for a research grant.

Applicants must be members in good standing of NYASP.

Grants will be awarded in amounts up to $1,000.00.

Half of the amount of the grant will be given upon selection. The second half of the grant will be distributed upon presentation of the resulting study at a future NYASP conference.

The closing date for applications is July 15 for the initial NYASP research grants. Winners will be notified by September 1.

Please submit 1 copy of the application (below) and 1 copy of the proposal (up to 1000 words) to:

Elizabeth Power
The College of Saint Rose
School Psychology Department
432 Western Avenue
Albany, NY 12203

Also, submit your proposal by e-mail to: research@nyasp.org

Outline of Guidelines for Research Proposal

I. Introduction
A. Briefly summarize your hypothesis
B. Provide a brief review of the literature to support your hypothesis

II. Method
A. Briefly describe the subjects
B. Briefly describe the setting
C. Variables
   1. Briefly describe the dependent and independent variables
   2. Briefly describe the methods for demonstrating the reliability and validity of the variables
D. Experimental Design—briefly describe and explain
E. Procedure—concretely summarize

III. Results—describe plan for your analysis of your data.

IV. Discussion—briefly state the potential significance of the study.

Funds from the grant are to be used only for successful execution of the research. Proposed budgets where more than 5% of the money is used for food/drink and where any of the money is allocated for work reimbursement requires approval of the NYASP Executive Committee.

Application Form

Name_________________________________ Current Position __________________________
eMail Address _______________________________________________________________
Address _________________________________________________________________
City/Town __________________________ State & Zip Code _______________________
Office Phone _________________________ Home Phone _________________________
Title of Research Proposal ________________________________
New TOD™ | Tests of Dyslexia
by Nancy Mather, PhD, R. Steve McCallum, PhD, Sherry Mee Bell, PhD, and Barbara J. Wendling, MA

The solution to your state's legislative requirements to identify students with dyslexia

The first comprehensive measure of dyslexia is on the way.

Rather than pulling tests from different batteries, the TOD is one easy-to-use assessment. An initial set of screening measures helps identify those who need further diagnostic evaluation, while the supplemental tests facilitate further one-on-one administration. The TOD is a comprehensive measure of dyslexia that also offers the flexibility of multiple stand-alone tests. Self, parent, and teacher rating scales provide additional information.

Skills measured in the TOD:
- Basic Reading Skills
- Spelling
- Decoding Efficiency
- Reading Fluency
- Reading Comprehension Efficiency
- Phonological Processing
- Auditory Working Memory
- Rapid Automatized Naming
- Orthographic Processing
- Vocabulary
- Reasoning
Urban Voices: School Psychologists in New York City Meet the Challenges of Quarantine
Carleta Joseph, Gregory Mellon, and Anurag Singh

Times of crisis often call for moments of perspective and deep analysis on how to remediate difficult circumstances. It makes sense to take a breath, a pause, stopping even just to gather our thoughts and manage our mental and emotional health in difficult times. Shockingly, it’s apparent that school psychologists in New York do not know what it means to STOP. After all, does advocacy ever stop? Do compassion and care ever stop? Does the fight for social justice ever take a break? It doesn’t! In New York City, school psychologists, despite all odds, have shown that in the face of adversity, our children are still the number one priority.

In late February/early March, parents and school staff urged for a school shut down in New York City in response to the safety concerns around the COVID-19 pandemic. After much deliberation, the mayor announced on the evening of Sunday, March 15, 2020 that NYC public schools would be closed from March 16th through sometime in April. At that time, we all felt a wave of relief due to growing safety concerns, but what about our work responsibilities? What about all the children we serve? School psychologists weren’t aware of next steps until later in the week when new guidance trickled in. Within one week, all staff began an endeavor for which we hadn’t planned or been trained, to transition to various online platforms. For school psychologists, it meant the introduction of tele-health and the hint of conducting remote assessments, folded into our daily practice.

As school psychologists we know that our job responsibilities can vary from state to state, district to district and even within a different building in the same district. New York City educates over one million students from various ethnicities and backgrounds. This means that individual school psychologists serve a high number of students, sometimes exceeding the national average of 1:500 -1:700. Fulfilling job responsibilities can be particularly challenging dealing with such large caseloads, in addition to locating resources for families of varying ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic status, and providing mental health services. Such responsibilities can prove to be a daunting task for any individual. But now, in the face of a pandemic when health concerns are at an all time high, with schools being closed and having to work remotely, how could we effectively get the job done?

Remote learning meant adjusting to a “new normal”: working from home with the goal of maintaining connections to our children, to ensure their continued progress. This has proven to be a challenging but on-going process as we are already more than five weeks in. For many individuals, this “new normal” meant becoming the co-teacher, co-service provider or paraprofessional to their own children, while continuing to execute their own job responsibilities. For others, their job responsibilities took a backseat to the growing demands of the family, especially if they were affected first-hand by COVID-19. The scenarios described are well-known and many media outlets, organizations and schools made every attempt to provide needed information to parents with a variety of tips on ways to cope. Although well-intended, many of the emails, phone
calls and media postings became overwhelming and caused undue stress to individuals. Some school psychologists needed to manage their own fears and anxieties during this time in order to provide mental health services that, in many cases, are only available to children in schools. And many found themselves supporting the entire family during these times, by lending an ear to talk, calling with a weekly check-in, or scrambling to find the needed resources to access the materials required to start remote learning. In this instance, school psychologists continued to promote and strengthen the school-family collaboration.

Our new normal consisted of virtual platforms and online modalities that had not been used before as we mostly did our work in person, face to face and sometimes by phone. This virtual environment has opened a door to great efficiency and practicality in the way we complete our daily tasks and responsibilities. It was pleasantly surprising that Microsoft Teams was readily available. Google Meets and Zoom were also available, although the usability of these platforms among school psychologists who are more “old school” varies.

Additionally, this global pandemic influenced test publishers to provide school psychologists in NYC with unprecedented, online access to all sorts of behavior ratings scales. One NYC colleague noted, “This was just as much a shocking miracle as the global pandemic is an unthinkable horrific nightmare come true. It’s literally unreal!” However, one must wonder, when we get back to the physical environment of school, will we lose all of this access? We are already at the end of the school year and in dealing with the severity of this pandemic and how it may impact various people in various ways, it’s unclear how much of this gold mine of psychological assessment resources are being used. It’s concerning to think that we may lose access to those resources.

In the midst of all these amazing tools of technology being offered and making a big chunk of our work more efficient, multiple issues arose. School psychologists had tons of questions on how to handle open cases in which face to face assessments were required. Additionally, how would we manage the upcoming assessments or address concerns regarding the provision of special education services? Information came in sporadically through the state department of education, our national organizations and through our employers. School psychologists are being asked to document and log every aspect of the job including logging efforts to communicate with parents in a computer database, for administration to review, and this creates an added layer of job responsibility that falls on the shoulders of the school psychologist. Another issue is the lack of face to face contact with students. No complete guidance was issued on how to handle such cases. Lastly, it is difficult to ensure confidentiality when conducting virtual counseling with a room full of other family members.

All this being said, this virtual environment influenced a greater efficiency and encouraged practicality in the work we do. It also sheds light on yet another issue, which is the irreplaceable component of being in the physical presence of others. We miss out on face to face interaction and incidental personal contact, such as passing by a student or a colleague while walking to a classroom, or going to lunch with colleagues. In the virtual environment, we miss experiencing the entirety of another person by seeing their body language, or speaking to them in person without the sound cutting out and images freezing and blurring. We cannot experience how close, or far away, the student sits, and how much they lean in or lean back, or how much they look at you or
look away. You’re not going to be able to see how a student interacts with other students and their teacher in a physical classroom. As school psychologists, this wealth of information is lost and there is no way to recreate this virtually.

Already, we are months in, and it continues to be a difficult adjustment with a lingering uncertainty of when we will be returning “back to normal” or what that will look like. However, in New York City, school psychologists are taking on this work with pride and hope. While uncertainty lingers, we continue to uphold our students’ educational rights. We continue to support families during transitional periods such as through the Turning 5 process, transitioning to middle school or graduation from high school and on to post-secondary endeavors and hopefully, the transition back into a physical environment. When thinking about transitioning back into society, with the use of technology, the option of doing IEP meetings virtually should continue and some options of work from home days could and should be explored! We have always sparked creativity in the work that we do. The work that we do will continue because we are needed, especially now when the world is re-imagining education. Ψ

Carleta Joseph, MS Ed. is an NYC school psychologist and the chapter N co-representative. She earned an MS Ed from LIU-Brooklyn in school psychology and an advanced certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis. During her time at LIU-B, she worked on the NYASP board as student representative, and as president of the Student Affiliates of School Psychology program on campus before transitioning into an early career role within NYC. As a practicing school psychologist, she has worked in an elementary setting in East New York, Brooklyn, as well as a specialized school setting for children on the Autism spectrum, before transitioning to a high school setting in Brooklyn. During this time, she worked as an ABA therapist in Early Intervention programs throughout the city for approximately two years. Her research interests include the application of ABA in classroom or instructional interventions, racial/ethnic disparities in special education, inclusivity in education, and trauma-informed practices in schools. She can be reached at carleta.joseph@nyasp.org.

Gregory Mellon, MS Ed. is the chapter N co-representative for New York City. He is a school psychologist employed by the DOE, and he can be reached at gregory.mellon@nyasp.org.

Dr. Anurag Singh is a school psychologist at Brooklyn Technical High School and Boys and Girls High School, both in Brooklyn. He also a licensed psychologist, and is the co-chair of the NYASP ethics and professional practices committee. He can be reached at anurag.singh@nyasp.org.
Rural Voices: Crisis Responses From Around the State
Jessica Hussar, Rachel Gardner, Aileen O'Connor, Christopher Van Houten, and Jolene Koehler

Introduction:
It is my pleasure to set the structure of this article and introduce its authors. First, let me introduce myself. My name is Jessica Hussar and I am the NYASP Rural Initiatives Chairperson. Mike Paff, Editor of the New York School Psychologist, approached me and asked if I would write an article for this edition focused on rural experiences and responses to crisis situations. I was immediately excited by the opportunity and knew that I wanted more than my voice represented regarding such an important and timely topic.

Thus, this article is split up into four separate sections representing different perspectives from across the state. In the first section I detail my district’s response to student deaths this school year as well as the events related to COVID-19. Section 2 was written by Rachel Gardner, a school psychology professor at Alfred University; her section details the challenges faced by her community and her graduate students through the COVID-19 crisis. Moving to Section 3, Aileen O’Connor and Christopher Van Houten, school psychologists in the North Country, also detail the response of their school district to COVID-19. Christopher is also the recently-elected president-elect of NYASP. Finally, Jolene Koehler, another rural school psychologist, provides her district’s experience and response to the COVID-19 crisis.

I am honored to be the organizer of this article and to bring to you perspectives and responses to crisis situations from across the rural parts of New York State. My goal for this compilation of stories and experiences is to give a voice to the rural school psychologists around the state. Rural school psychologists at times can feel isolated and unsure if their work is making a positive impact on their school communities. I believe that I and my fellow authors have accomplished this goal. It is my hope that no matter where you live in the state, you can relate to the stories told across our rural communities.

Section 1:
In 2011 Dr. Cris Lauback, then associate professor of school psychology at Alfred University, wrote an article that was included in Volume XXX Number 1, Fall 2011 issue of the New York School Psychologist. His article focused on Owego Apalachin Central School District’s (OACSD) crisis response to the Flood of 2011, which is how it is referred to in the Southern Tier anyway. Owego Apalachin Central School District is a small rural school in Tioga County. It is 30 minutes away from the City of Binghamton in Broome County.

Both counties are part of Chapter I.

Dr. Lauback also happened to be a former school psychologist of the OACSD, and continued weekly consultation with the district post-retirement and in his new position at Alfred University. I also had the privilege of being one of his graduate students at Alfred University, and now I am following in his footsteps as a school psychologist at OACSD in the very building in which he worked. Well, actually, it’s a new building, because his building was destroyed in 2011 by the flood caused by Tropical Storm Lee. [Editor’s Note: You can read more about the flood of 2011 in the From The Archives section of this newsletter.]

It is interesting how sometimes things come full circle in such an ironic way. It is with a heavy heart that I find myself reading the article and telling readers again about OACSD’s crisis response efforts in the wake of tragedy. Unfortunately this school year, OACSD has suffered three tragic events which have inundated the district in much the same way as the overflowing banks of the Susquehanna River did in 2011.

In Dr. Lauback’s article he talked about the resilience he witnessed on the part of the staff and students in the OACSD and specifically at his former school, Owego Elementary School (OES). I too have had the opportunity and privilege to witness, as well as participate in that resilience exhibited at OES and within the district.

In the wake of COVID-19, Owego Elementary School 2.0 again finds itself with darkened hallways, abandoned classrooms, and void of jubilant student
voices and the clatter of everyday school life. This new building which came to life with the roar of student and staff voices on January 6, 2016 - four years after the flood destroyed the first OES - has now experienced its own dramatic shuttering.

Prior to COVID-19, OACSD experienced the unexpected deaths of three students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels during the fall of 2019. The elementary and middle school students’ deaths hit my elementary school (OES) very hard, as one of the students was a second grader at OES and the middle school student had gone to OES for elementary school. Both students were siblings who were killed in a tragic car accident. The high school student was a well-known and liked student who became ill suddenly and died. Although I was part of the district crisis response team for all three deaths, my focus here will be on the crisis response that took place in my building related to the death of the second grade student.

As the school psychologist and only mental health provider for OES, it was primarily my responsibility to lead the crisis response team in my building with my principal. Neither of us had experience with the death of an elementary-age student before, although we both had previously been part of crisis response efforts at the high school level. To say this hit us both like a ton of bricks is an absolute understatement. But, my principal and I are a great team and we quickly sprang into action organizing our Student Support Team to provide classroom teachers with relief and a sympathetic ear. One of the district’s other school psychologists assisted in supporting OES and was present for emotional support for staff and students as well.

The superintendent quickly reached out to a hospital in neighboring Broome County that deploys a mental health crisis team for situations such as these. That team was invaluable to our efforts to provide individual staff and students more mental health support. I was looked to as the expert that would guide the elementary school through the what-next and what-do-we-tell-students phase. I jumped right into action pulling resources from NASP and accessing NYASP resources and individuals through my membership.

The whole time I was developing our plan of what exactly we were going to tell students, I was thinking, “you need to be emotionally strong. Your school is counting on you right now. You’re the only mental health professional.” That was a lot of pressure to put on myself, but at the same time, it was empowering. With my consultation, the crisis team agreed to implement my recommendations regarding intervening with the four second grade classrooms. I would go into each classroom for an hour and read the book “I Miss You: A First Look At Death” by Pat Thomas and then facilitate a discussion with the students about their feelings and questions regarding death and their friend being gone forever. Doing this and helping my students and school was one of the most powerful moments of my career so far. Teachers were grateful I was there to relieve the pressure on them to explain death to their students. The students were grateful to know there was another caring adult in the building to guide them through this situation and listen to them. And, parents were grateful that the school acknowledged the accident and was taking steps to assist students in processing the tragedy.

Such a powerful experience has both rewarding aspects and emotionally draining aspects. I made sure to take care of my own mental health needs through this process. I gave myself permission to put mandated timelines and other time-sensitive tasks on hold for a little bit. I made space for myself to experience the situation instead, and be present and respond in a genuine way. I also took advantage of debriefing opportunities with the mental health crisis team deployed by the local hospital, and I gave myself permission to actually take lunch with my office door closed, cry, and talk to my husband on the phone. It is important to remember that although our communities call on us for emotional and mental health support in a crisis, it is our ethical duty to also make sure we are emotionally available at the necessary level by addressing our own mental health needs.

As the school year progressed, normal routines resumed and individual students and staff continued to be more affected by the student deaths than others. These students and staff sought me out for support. However, we had no idea that an already tough school year would turn out to be the most disruptive and difficult school year of any of our educational careers.

When OACSD shut down due to COVID-19, it was a week prior to the mandated shutdown implemented by New York State, and a few days earlier than when other schools in the Southern Tier region closed. My district unfortunately has dealt with significant catastrophic loss far too recently and we were on guard and ready for the challenges COVID-19 posed.
Although OACSD is a rural district with far fewer resources than other districts, for the past several years the district has implemented an aggressive plan to get 1:1 devices to all students in grades 3-12. So, by the time shut down came, all students in grades 3-12 had their own iPads to take home with them. The challenge then became getting individual iPads to students in Pre-K through 2nd grade. Within two weeks that task was accomplished.

OACSD teachers and staff jumped into action immediately doing many of the things that schools across the nation have done during the COVID-19 pandemic: creating Google Classrooms, holding Zoom class meetings, developing virtual lessons, connecting with families, etc. The main priority for OACSD was first to get breakfast and lunches to students, many of whom count on those daily meals. Multiple locations within the district were set up to distribute food. School buses were also deployed to deliver food to the most distant ends of the district where transportation is scarce for families. The next phase was setting up distance learning and identifying students without internet access. The district is in the process of setting up hotspots and getting iPads with cellular data plans to students without access to the internet in the remote areas of the district that do not have access to any internet let alone high speed internet.

Now in week seven of the school being closed, the superintendent formed a district-wide Student Connectivity Team. This team brings together administrators, teacher leaders, counselors, and school psychologists from across the district to intervene with students and families that have not been connecting to distance learning, teachers, or other staff during the shut down. The goal is to assist these families in reducing barriers to access to education, mental health resources, and ensure that students are staying connected and engaged with the school.

It has been a truly humbling experience. I have talked to many parents and I have served as an emotional support for them. I have carried on with behavioral, academic, and social-emotional consultation with teachers and parents. Helping to navigate this new world of distance learning and students home all day and night with their families. I have continued with counseling sessions with my counseling caseload virtually. I have created resource documents for staff, parents, and students regarding mental health and have set up a Google Classroom to contain it all.

My Google Classroom also contains activities related to social-emotional well-being and mental health for students to participate in each day. Some activities include the Daily Question that students can answer, where I respond to each student individually. Another feature is the Daily Video, which provides students with information about feelings or guides them through relaxation exercises. Finally, there is the Daily Positive Thought, where I post an inspirational quote that applies to adults and students. Similar to others, I am Zooming and Hanging out in Google for virtual meetings. I also have a small following of students who send me instant messages each day within the Google Hangout App. I am always excited to have a conversation with a student and check-in on a daily basis. It has resembled in some ways the daily visits some students paid to my office while the school building was open, which has helped make a difficult situation have some semblance of a normal feeling. Even though daily routines have drastically changed, my mission to support students’ education and mental health needs remain unchanged.

Section 2:
The town of Alfred, which is home to Alfred University, is nestled on the eastern edge of Allegany County, the sixth poorest county in New York State (U.S. Census Bureau Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2018). Furthermore, according to estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (2018), the three counties of NYASP’s Chapter G (i.e., Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Allegany), which are located in the Southern Tier region spanning all the way to the western edge of the state, comprise half of the six counties with the highest percentage of residents living in poverty in the state. In addition to serving as a co-representative for Chapter G, I teach in the School Psychology Program at Alfred University (AU), training and supervising graduate students in the provision of comprehensive school psychological services in one of the most impoverished and highest needs areas of the state. During these unprecedented times, there have been significant disruptions to training students and providing much needed services to local school communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When our students left Alfred for spring break in early March, the possibility of not returning to campus for the remainder of the semester would have seemed entirely surreal, but that is the reality we all found ourselves living.
From a training program perspective, we are making due with providing remote instruction and supervision. What has been much more challenging and concerning is meeting the myriad of needs for the children and families we serve, which are compounded by the high rates of poverty in our region. We have many advanced practicum students and interns in the field who have, similarly to all school psychologists in the state, struggled with finding a sense of normalcy and ways to connect with the students and school staff who depend on them for support. The specific roles and responsibilities of advanced practicum students and interns during this time have varied greatly from district to district, but all are continuing to provide as much support as is feasible. For instance, at AU’s Family and Child Services Center, a community clinic that operates on a sliding fee scale to meet the mental health needs of youth and families in our rural communities surrounding Alfred, our graduate student clinicians and their faculty supervisors have provided telehealth services and supports to their clients who found themselves suddenly without face-to-face therapy and parental consultation. Interns are participating in virtual CSE meetings, providing consultation to parents and teachers, and in some cases providing telehealth mental health services to students. In short, everyone is doing their part to meet the complex needs of the communities in which we live and work. I have been impressed with our students’ creativity, passion, and desire to be helpers throughout this crisis.

Another concern in our very rural part of the state is lack of access to mental health providers in the community. According to NYSED’s Office of Professions, as of January 2020, there are just 13 licensed psychologists in Allegany County and six each in Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties. Particularly when schools are not in session, where a majority of students who receive mental health services are located (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000), and when social distancing guidelines are in place, youth with mental health concerns now more than ever need access to providers and services. Three of AU’s School Psychology Program faculty members are licensed psychologists serving residents of Allegany County in addition to being school psychologists and trainers. All have moved to exclusively telehealth platforms indefinitely until the danger of COVID-19 passes and are dedicated to continuing to provide services for the various mental health needs of clients as they struggle to cope with social isolation on top of their primary diagnoses.

These are unique and challenging times, and although we may be weathering different storms, we are all in this boat together. We are all doing the best we can to meet our own needs and the needs of those vulnerable youth and families within our spheres of influence. I am encouraged by the countless displays of empathy, devotion, and ingenuity of educators at all levels from pre-k through higher education, mental health providers, other essential workers, and the general public. As Fred Rogers once said, in the wake of uncertainty, tragedy, and scary times, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.” I commend our NYSP members state-wide, “the helpers,” but especially those serving our most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and youth.

Section 3:
Four hours and thirty-five minutes north of Owego, is a rural town called Malone, in Franklin County, NY. According to the April 1, 2010 population census, 14,545 persons reside in Malone (U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: Malone town, Franklin County, New York).

During the 2018-2019 school year, Malone Central School District had an enrollment of 2,170 students K-12th grade within its three elementary schools (Davis, Flanders, St. Joe’s), middle school, and high school (Franklin Academy). Of those total students, 96% were reportedly White in ethnicity, 0% English Language learners, 17% students with disabilities, 57% economically disadvantaged, 2% migrant, 1% homeless, and 1% of students were in foster care placements. Out of 199 total high school seniors, 83% graduated and 11% dropped out of school. During the 2016-2017 school year, 1,109 (49%) of students were
eligible for free lunch and 116 (5%) of students were eligible for reduced lunch (MALONE CSD: NYSED Data Site).

Similarly to Owego Elementary School, in the wake of COVID-19, Davis Elementary School within the Malone Central School District also found itself with darkened hallways, abandoned classrooms, and void of jubilant student voices walking through the hallways everyday. This is a heartbreaking trend in schools throughout the country. Early March brought upon an eerie feeling for all administration, teachers, therapists, school psychologists, school counselors, support staff, students, and parents. We never thought we would have to experience a crisis such as this particular one during our lifetime.

School psychologists play a major role in the district’s Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), also known as Crisis Response Plan. Prior to COVID-19, Davis Elementary School’s two school psychologists, Christopher Van Houten and Aileen O’Connor, had active roles on the Davis Emergency Response Team (DERT). The Malone Central School District is responding to COVID-19 not only at a district level but also at individual building levels.

District Response: At the district level, our district website’s home page is now solely focused on COVID-19 resources for staff and families. Families can find links to free and reduced lunch applications in the case their employment status temporarily changes when school reopens, food service information, child care services, transportation information, WiFi information, social-emotional resources, and a responsive Q&A forum for families to ask questions. As mentioned above, an estimated 52% of students receive free and reduced lunch. Therefore, families within the district rely heavily on their children being fed at school. Our district has scheduled food deliveries for students under the age of 18. During the closure, students under the age of 18 within the district are eligible to receive breakfast and lunch, Monday through Friday at no cost to the student. The meals are delivered via district buses every Tuesday and Thursday at no cost to the families. The families receive multiple meals of breakfast and lunch. As of April 24th, the district was averaging 10,682 meals delivered per week for a total of 42,727 meals delivered.

Along with food, another major barrier that we experienced was internet (WiFi) access and access to technology devices. On March 17th, families were able to pick up packets that their child’s teachers and therapists created. If families were unable to pick up the packets due to limited access to public transportation or their own transportation, the district’s buses delivered the remaining packets to the students’ homes. Most families within our district had access to at least one technology device and internet to complete online work. However, if families did not have access to a device, our district distributed extra Chromebooks to those families in need. As of April 24th, dozens of Chromebooks had been delivered. Also, the district had many designated remote locations for free public WIFI access, such as in the parking lots of the district, fire departments throughout the neighboring towns, and the county fairground. The district’s IT department noted that those devices were averaging 60 hours of use per day (across multiple devices all accessing WIFI at the same time) at these remote locations.

Building Level Response: At our individual building level, Chris and Aileen each have their own unique roles which together create a comprehensive school psychological service delivery model. On March 17th, our special education department sent home a packet with COVID-19 resources, social-emotional resources and websites, as well as contact information. We created Google counseling classrooms (Grades K-2 3-5). The Google counseling classrooms were created as a central space where teachers, students, and families can have access to social-emotional resources and activities. Every Wednesday, a mindfulness activity is posted and on every Friday, a read aloud is posted. There is a student “check-in” form that is also posted on the district website to which the school counselors and school psychologists have access. Not only do we want to check in with the students well-being, but we also want to check in on staff well-being.

One fun activity that we facilitated was to host an hour long “Coffee with the Counselors” on Google Hangouts. It was a safe place for teachers to share any
concerns that they were having as well as talk about what they were doing for self-care. We also have joined various teachers’ Google Classrooms, Class Dojo, Class Tag, Seesaw, etc., so that we stay up-to-date on how the students are doing academically. It is also just another way for families to contact us through their child’s classroom forum.

Aileen continues to meet 504/IEP counseling needs via phone calls, video chats, emailing, and the aforementioned classroom forums. Counseling through these means has definitely been challenging. It doesn’t seem as personable or effective as face-to-face sessions. However, the response rate has been higher than she had originally expected and the families seem to really appreciate the school-home connection. It brings joy to her heart checking in on the students and hearing about the activities that they have been engaging in with their families. One father reported that he had noticed that his son has been getting along better with his younger siblings. Many families are getting outside more, cleaning up trash, raking the yard.

There are two perspectives that one can take during these trying, scary times. It is easy to take the negative perspective, but we try to focus on the positive stories that we hear when talking to families and that surely helps us take on a much more positive perspective.

Chris has also been busy preparing and participating in 504 and CSE Annual Review meetings for the district’s three elementary schools. He has also been reviewing IEPs and 504 Plans to help ensure students are getting support and services at home. BIPs have also been reviewed and recommendations have been made to parents in the home setting.

While maintaining academic skills are important, there is nothing more important than our student’s mental health, and social and emotional well-being. This message has consistently been communicated from the Malone CSD Superintendent and Board of Education and all building administrators. Even during this crisis, students continue to be at the center of all that we do.

Community Response: They say small town charm reveals itself the most in times of crisis and the current COVID-19 pandemic is no different in that respect. The Malone Federation of Teachers (MFT) Union, immediately reached out to school psychologists, school counselors, and teachers to develop a list of students and families that would be impacted the most and would be in need of extra meals and groceries. A donation fund was established and the MFT reached out to local restaurants to provide family style meals to families in need. Each family was contacted and asked if they would need basic grocery essentials as well. The response has been overwhelming to families who have shown great appreciation, as well as shared stories of increased hardship. One teacher put it best by saying, “we don’t stop caring about our students just because they’re not in the school buildings.”

Local businesses have also donated needed school supplies and our home-school coordinators have compiled these items to be sent out to families. A local internet provider is offering free internet to families through the end of June so that students can participate with school and socialize with their friends online. Through this crisis, people have come together to help each other in creative ways. Schools have come into focus more than ever as the backbone of our community. And Malone, NY has lived the Mr. Rogers phrase, “when I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” It indeed takes a village.

#MaloneHuskiePride #MaloneHelpers #MentalHealthMatters

Section 4:
In the counties that NYASP Chapter H represents, there are a total of 28 school districts represented; 13 in Steuben County, 8 in Livingston County, 3 in Chemung County, 2 in Schuyler County, and 2 in Yates County. (Counties: NYSED Data Site). School districts in these counties are facing many of the same challenges across the state. Some specific difficulties that are proving to be challenging include limited to no access to the internet, lack of transportation, loss of employment of one or more parents/guardians, and limited access to outside mental health services.

As of the 2018-2019 school year data listed on the NYS Data website, Campbell-Savona Central School District had an enrollment of 801 students Kindergarten through 12th grade within Savona Elementary and Campbell Jr./Sr. High school. There were also 50 students enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten. Of those total K-12 students, 95% were reported White in ethnicity, 17% students with disabilities, 57% economically disadvantaged, 1% homeless, and 1% in foster care placements. There were no English Language learners or migrants reported. Out of 61 total high school seniors, 90% graduated, 7% dropped out of school, and 3% were still enrolled. (CAMPBELL-SAVONA CSD: NYSED Data Site).

Many of the school districts within Chapter H have similar demographic information to Campbell-Savana’s as most are considered to be small and rural, which can also mean that many staff members play multiple roles. Many staff members are working outside of their traditional job duties by volunteering to deliver meals and school work, calling families that are not in their classes, delivering technology “how-to’s” to parents, and providing support wherever families are at in the current moment.
Specifically, Campbell-Savona’s response to the COVID-19 school closure has identified numerous resources listed on their website and are continuing to work diligently between the two buildings. Administrators and secretarial staff have been working around the clock to respond to the daily changes, find solutions to challenges, and keep staff informed and upbeat as we all adjust to our new daily functioning. Some of the resources include free WiFi access in the school parking lots and the bus garage, a regular schedule for food service pick-up and delivery options, and hard copy packet pick-up and delivery of school materials for those without regular internet access.

The social-emotional support staff in both buildings have been providing support to students and parents as well as helping to connect with outside services, such as mental health and primary care physicians, helping to fill out unemployment forms, and create daily schedules for families. Related service providers have attended trainings on how to deliver their service online and are conducting speech, counseling, occupational and physical therapies via teletherapy.

Teachers have been engaging in a new way of teaching all their students by utilizing multiple programs and apps including Google Classroom and creating hard copies or loading information onto jump drives. Approximately 25% of students within the district have limited to no internet access. The district is working with AT&T to provide hotspots for those with limited internet capabilities. As of April 22, 95% of the elementary students picked up their hard copies of work. The remaining 5% were either delivered to their home or mailed per the parent/guardian preference.

This is just a small snippet of the incredible transformation that has taken our daily functioning from a brick and mortar school to a virtual learning experience. It has been truly uplifting to see every single person come together to provide creative solutions to one of the biggest challenges we are facing today. When you look around, you see teachers becoming technology whizzes, administrators serving and delivering meals, cafeteria workers becoming social-emotional relief, counselors becoming proficient in academic support, and IT staff becoming instant miracle workers!

Closing Remarks:
The authors hope that you have found this article enlightening and validating during a time of extreme uncertainty and chaos. School psychologists across our state are doing amazing work to help their schools, communities, and students navigate crisis situations.

The authors have provided numerous insights into how rural school psychologists, schools, and circumstances. School psychologists are rising to the occasion in spite of being faced with many obstacles such as limited resources, living in remote areas, and having to provide services in a way never before imagined.

In our experience, school psychologists always rise to the occasion and represent the best that the educational and mental health fields have to offer. During a crisis, it is clear that one of the best qualities school psychologists possess is resilience. It is that resilience that allows them to do the important work of serving, protecting, and providing for students, schools, and their communities. This truly embodies NYASP President John Garruto’s call for New York State school psychologists to be the Pride of the Profession. Ψ

References


Supporting Staff Virtually
Sara Dool

As the 2020 year started, I never expected what would happen in the middle of March. To say I was shocked about the abrupt school closure due to COVID-19 is an understatement. Transitioning to online learning was a hectic and stressful process, for both staff and students. Navigating my role as a virtual school psychologist was also difficult. Finding the balance between what kind of support, and how much, to provide to staff and students was a challenge. Fortunately, within those first few weeks I had the opportunity to collaborate with the school psychologists in my district, as well as those across the county, regarding the challenges and next steps. It was comforting to know that we were all experiencing similar difficulties and pressures. Through this collaboration, I was able to develop ideas for my new role moving forward. As I developed ideas and spoke to those within my building, it became clear that the staff would need just as much support as the students. Providing support to the staff became one of my top priorities. How could staff support students, if they were struggling themselves? The school counselor and I decided to create a google classroom for our staff, similar to the one we had for our students. In creating the staff classroom, we wanted the focus to be on self-care and the various ways to incorporate this in daily life. We posted materials related to relaxation strategies, exercise, fun things to do with children at home, gardening, podcasts, and resources within the community. Personally, I found journaling and cooking to be fulfilling during this time of uncertainty and decided to share this with staff. I began posting google form journal prompts and recipes I had cooked, a few times per week. Within the first week, I had staff members commenting on the recipes they tried, as well as sending links to ones they had enjoyed and wanted me to share in the classroom. Additionally, several staff members began filling out the journal prompt google forms. Eventually, staff members began posting in the classroom pictures of what they had been up to at home, thoughts about current events, and comments to just say hello. Over time, it became clear the classroom turned into a virtual community where people were comfortable sharing about their experiences. It was rewarding to see these virtual connections as a way to stay in touch. Moving forward, it is my hope staff continue to reach out to one another virtually through the classroom and that when we do return to school, we can continue with these activities in person. Ψ

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NYASP has concerned ourselves with crisis response ever since our organization was established. Various kinds of crises have occurred which have impacted children, families, schools and communities. School psychologists have taken leadership roles in addressing crises, which have mainly been school shootings, suicides, deaths of students or school personnel and the effects of natural disasters, including hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes and floods.

In September, 2011 a flood of unprecedented destruction occurred in Owego, NY and surrounding environs. Owego is a town in Tioga County, just west of Binghamton, on the north branch of the Susquehanna river, on the border with Pennsylvania. The population as of the 2010 census was 19,883.

Owego Elementary, in the Owego Apalachin Central School District, was a PK-5th grade school. The school year started on September 7th, amid extremely heavy rain, which had been taking place for a long time, as remnants of Tropical Storm Lee, which developed from a broad tropical disturbance over the Gulf of Mexico. The river was predicted to rise well past flood stage of 30 feet. During the day many roads became flooded and normal routes were closed to traffic. Some students were stuck at school with teachers and staff, who stayed as long as it took for all students to arrive home safely.

At 4:00 AM the next day the water peaked at 39.9 feet, six feet above “major flood stage”. This was the highest the river had ever crested during the period that records were reported. Owego Elementary School was inundated with over three feet of water, the maximum height for nearly everything in an elementary building. The school lost nearly 300 teacher-years worth of accumulated educational materials, including books, teaching props, manipulative materials, PE equipment, every computer and printer, school nurse’s files, school counselor and school psychologist’s materials and everything every child left behind.

Cris Lauback, PsyD, then an Associate Professor of School Psychology at Alfred University, had had been the school psychologist at Owego Elementary for 26 years. He reported on the events and the response by school personnel, parents, students and communities. He described this school as having always been one of high standards and morale; one where staff remain for long careers, where teachers take ownership of even the most challenging kids and where over 80% of parents show up for every open house.

The damage was widespread, with 90% of the homes and business in the village flooded, including the district offices. A large percentage of students and school personnel lost their homes and were living in temporary housing. Dr. Lauback noted, that while the school was lost, most school psychologists are aware that it’s never just a building. In this case, while it was determined that no one could safely return to the building for months, the amazing faculty and staff, with district support, resolved to maintain their school.

A neighboring district, the Union Endicott School District, offered the use of its recently closed Linnaeus W. West primary school. The parent teacher organization, teachers, bus drivers, food service staff, teacher aides, secretaries, specialists, administrators, custodial and maintenance personnel, and information technologists all mobilized to begin the overwhelming task of converting an empty building into a fully functioning school. On September 19th the relocated school opened its doors.

The school psychologist, principal, school nurse, home school coordinator, counselor, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, reading and math, AIS teachers and special education teachers all recreated the necessary spaces needed for their work in a building with fewer spaces to go around. The teachers and teacher aides did the same in classrooms and hallways, with little more than what they brought themselves, in an effort to make it “look like a school”. Many of these educators were still displaced themselves, living without hot water, worried about financing their own repairs, struggling to make FEMA applications, and often sick from toxic clean-up work in their own homes in Owego.

By the time school re-opened on September 19th each student had a desk and chair and a “cubby” with their name on it (a key to belonging). The PTO
had created a district-linked web page that told parents that they would re-supply all students with basic needs. In four days time the IT staff were able to secure computers for the new computer lab. Other donations of supplies made classrooms look less lean.

While there were many signs of stress and fragile emotions, the students were clearly glad to see each other and their teachers again. Over the next few days a routine was established that was fairly predictable. Fire drills, outdoor gym classes, reading groups, speech, lunch time with the counselor were reinstituted. Sneakers were distributed from the nurse’s office for those who needed them. Children were greeted by the principal each day when they arrived at school. New art work went up in the halls.

The normal high attendance by parents at open house signified that Owego Elementary School had returned.

Everyone learned that a school is more about being together and less about where the school building is located.

Following assessments by engineers and architects, the building was demolished in June, 2013. Senator Charles Schumer announced that over 24 million dollars in federal funding was awarded to the Owego Apalachin school district through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This, along with state funds, allowed for the rebuilding of Owego Elementary School, as well as repair of other buildings which were damaged. It was set two and a half feet above the highest level of the floodplain.

Teachers and parents welcomed Owego Elementary students to their new building on Wednesday, January sixth, 2016. School buses were escorted by blaring Owego fire and police vehicles through downtown before arriving at school for the first time. Senator Schumer was in attendance.

“This school is the king of natural disasters. And it won’t let anyone in its castle”, said a fourth grader. Ψ

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Ruth Steegmann, NCSP (ret) worked for the West Seneca School District for 35 years, and the school psychology training program, University at Buffalo, retiring for the second time in 2011.

The theme for the next issue of The New York School Psychologist is "Hot Button Issues!"

NYASP members are encouraged to submit articles!
Submission guidelines are listed on page i of this issue.
Email: Dr. Michael Paff at michael.paff@nyasp.org with questions.
VUCA in a post-COVID-19 world
Andrew Livanis

When I was a child, my father also would often start a bedtime story and then mid-way through, he'd ask me to come up with an ending. We'd come up with a few endings together - we'd often work together to come up with awesome stories (I mean, at the time, I was really impressed). From my mom, I learned how to improvise on the piano, using jazz as well as Greek and Eastern modes. From there, I learned that improvisation was about telling similar, but different versions of stories with music. As I got older, I started reading lots of historical non-fiction as well as science fiction, and developed an appreciation for how the knowledge of the past did not necessarily prevent the same mistakes, but allowed us to envision multiple possible future scenarios. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve continued to engage in this future-seeking. I’m not good at predicting, but I find that the exercise helps me prepare for the unexpected.

And so, I sit here writing this on April 30, 2020, in New York City, the epicenter of the COVID-19 virus health emergency. I follow the rates of confirmed new cases, and fatalities, hospital beds and other data that are thrown our way, and do the one thing that any sane psychologist steeped in statistical training would do - I use a digital data collection platform to chart city-wide and state-wide data and post them on Facebook semi-regularly. Looking at the trend lines helps me wrap my head around what is happening in this world, and place everything in perspective. But, my mind instantly goes towards how this health emergency will affect society broadly and school psychology specifically.

The further away from today that we go, the more volatile the predictions become - it becomes clear that charting a specific course as to what will happen post-COVID-19 is ridiculous. The best way to think about this health emergency is to develop an ethos about how we can adapt to a “new normal.” To understand how we will need to approach the problem, we will need to appreciate that our post-COVID-19 environment will be full of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, a set of conditions referred to as VUCA.

VUCA

In the early 1990’s the world was adapting to new conditions. On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, which then led to an easing of hostilities between the US and USSR, essentially signaling the end of the cold war. But, faculty and students at the US War College were troubled about this detente, but not for any conspiratorial reasons. Sure, peace is great, but the change in this dynamic brought about questions about who we were as a country and what we should (or should not) be doing. Who are we? Who are the bad guys now? Are there even bad guys? Where should we be spending our money and what should our strategy be when approaching the world?

Faculty and students devised the acronym VUCA (Vulnerability, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) to define a set of conditions that they were facing.

The acronym perfectly described what the military and business leaders faced then, but it is especially relevant when considering what we will face in our communities, our profession, and our societies in a post-COVID-19 world. At some point, I am confident that we will learn how to manage this crisis, but what type of world will we be living in afterwards? What have we learned to help us deal with the VUCA that this emergency has engendered?

The initial letter of VUCA stands for volatility - a condition where there is instability in a system. The speed of this change is quite rapid and sometimes difficult to acclimate to. By the time we’ve adapted to one change, a separate, different change may be upon us. This rapid rate of the shifting environment forces us to adapt at a dizzying pace and often demands that we take on new roles, and can challenge our identities tremendously. For example, during this crisis alone, our agency needed to make no more than five
revisions to how services would be delivered to our clients within the span of three weeks, and I transformed myself from a supervisor of services into an IT manager responsible for teaching platforms such as Zoom and Explain Everything to our clients and employees. I also needed to morph into a compliance officer to ensure that teletherapy was being implemented appropriately. School psychologists will need to be ready for a volatile post-COVID-19 period.

**Uncertainty** is just as it sounds - when the future is not clearly predictable. In psychometric terms, we are not able to clearly identify any models of explanation that account for a good portion of the variance, and our attempts at determining causation or correlation fall terribly short. In these instances, people oscillate between trying to maintain the status quo and trying new approaches, and the refrains of “this wasn’t how it was done back when...” increase in frequency and intensity among school staff, parents and even children. As I write this, I’m plagued by questions that I know that I can’t answer: “How long will this health emergency last?” “Are we looking at a ‘new normal’ in the delivery of therapeutic services via online platforms?” and “How will my client’s progress (or deficits) be affected by this change?” There are really no ways to answer these questions since we really have no parallel in history to compare ourselves to.

The third letter in VUCA stands for **complexity**. Put simply, complexity refers to the number of variables that need to be considered in dealing with any issue in depth. My suspicion is that children (and adults) who have experienced this health emergency will process the event in radically different ways depending on how they run up against systems in their lives - schools, families, community. Even basic behaviors such as how to greet people in the street will need to be re-conceptualized (Do you shake their hands? Give them a “high-five”? Embrace them lovingly? Nod?). Complexity also refers to how complicated systems interact with one another. For instance, we have historically bemoaned the fact that the federal government does not fund special education services fully, but this health emergency and its equally complex federal/state response to it may change that (although I would love to say positively, I am not so optimistic). School psychologists need to be ready to deal with this complexity at the molar (e.g., each individual child that you work with) and the molecular levels (e.g., systems interacting with one another.

Finally the last letter in VUCA stands for **ambiguity** - how are we all supposed to interpret the presence and spread of COVID-19? What does this health emergency tell us about future health emergencies, specifically how to prevent them? How do we pick up the pieces when we emerge from this crisis? We know some things about how to answer these questions but lack enough knowledge to fully answer these questions.

Ambiguity gives rise to anxiety as well as rumors and conspiracy theories. I have heard all sorts of wild rumors and conspiracy theories over the past few weeks about rates of illness to various levels of quarantining people. That’s because ambiguity arises when information that we have is either incomplete, contradicting, or too inaccurate to draw clear conclusions. School psychologists should be ready to help people live with this uncertainty - one can imagine a sort of generalized population-level (read: Tier 1) mindfulness/DBT set of interventions to help children and the broader public recognize and then accept this uncertainty.

**How can school psychologists deal with a post-virus VUCA environment?**

The social impact of this health emergency will be felt for a long time to come and we should expect that our systems will be changed, but be comfortable with the fact that we don’t fully know how they will change. Bill George of the Harvard Business School outlined a model for dealing with a VUCA environment which calls for people to foster a set of skills he termed VUCA 2.0 - **Vision, Understanding, Courage, and Adaptability** - to counter the adverse conditions arising from the COVID-19 health emergency.

**Vision**, George states, is the process of clarifying your own and your organization’s “true north.” School psychologists can be essential in helping their school and their organization go back to basics and embrace their mission and vision statements (or possibly help their organization re-define their mission and vision statements). Sometimes, the answer is built into the foundation of what systems believe in and want the world to be; the solution is to remind everyone what values the school holds.

In order for school psychologists to engage with others, they should first identify their own personal mission. I’ve been particularly moved by the process outlined by Chris Lowney in his book *Heroic Leadership*. I looked at developing my personal mission by defining who I am, clarifying what I value (both personally and professionally), and becoming
painfully aware of what weaknesses I have that can stand in the way of achieving what I value. You’ll undoubtedly recognize that this is a process similar to developing a sense of self-awareness which is never complete - who you are and what you believe in should be an ongoing and evolving process. Contrary to what many people think, having an unyielding or unbending personal mission is not only not desirable, but can be a sign of psychopathology. Now is a good time to engage in this process of personal mission clarification, as I suspect that this event will challenge our understanding of who we are as individuals, what we stand for, and where we want to go.

Furthermore, clarifying the vision of the organization should encompass taking stock of the mistakes that were made by the district staff and personnel, by the school psychologist herself, or by other stakeholders. Highlighting mistakes should not be done to place blame on one person or another but to identify what we have learned from this experience and lay plans to ensure that our reactions are different the next time this event happens (I hope that everyone understands that I write this assuming, de facto, that there will be another health emergency like this). Perhaps we might do well to consider what the protocol is for the next health emergency. Maybe everyone under-estimated the value of online delivery of educational and therapeutic services, and we need to ensure that training in digital technology is focused on more intently, among staff, faculty, students, and parents.

**Understanding** refers to helping others become aware of their capabilities and strategies to tackle a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous future. The school psychologist can focus on working with children directly but she will be most effective if she also practices understanding with teachers, parents, as well as administration directly. Understanding is difficult, and school psychologists appreciate the value of listening to different viewpoints, even those that are tough to hear. Three times a year, I send out anonymous questionnaires to staff and parents asking them what they think of the services we deliver; sometimes it’s hard to hear the critiques, but it’s important that I do (and subsequently learn from it).

Another feature of understanding is the ability to focus outward on the big picture and examine the interdependence of all the variables that have been in play. I continuously hear of communities and districts whose parents have fallen victim to a variety of different hoax theories which led to a variety of misinformed COVID-19 pajama parties, or large-scale funerals, which led to the hospitalization of many people, and the spread of the virus exponentially throughout communities. School psychologists should work to develop a better understanding of how misinformation transforms into mainstream ideas, and (more importantly) develop methods to ensure that we can relegate them to the fringe once again.

**Courage** is as it sounds - the willingness to take risks, say the things that need to be said, and do the things that need to be done. Many of us hear the word “courage” and instantly think of battle scenes, or situations where one sacrifices themselves for the sake of another (I still think there was room on that raft for Leo DiCaprio, but that’s a debate for another time).

However, I’d encourage you to think of the courage that you, as a school psychologist, display on a daily basis, whether you are in your office consulting with a teacher or at home in your pajamas doing spot checks with your students on Google Meet. Just getting up in the morning and doing what needs to be done is possibly the most courageous thing that you can do. I mean, the world is falling apart and you continue this important work with children - that, right there, is the stuff of legends. I’ve said this many times before - school psychology is not a job, it is a calling which we keep going back to, over and over again, whether it is in a school or on Zoom. Over and over and over again. That’s what courage is to me.

Courage also takes other forms as well - the courage to consider what we would do if a similar but more deadly virus caused another health emergency, or what to do if there is a second COVID-19 wave (which is very likely). I present this scenario to you not to worry or stress you out, but to have you think about what types of things we should be planning for. Being courageous means forcing others to think about and design plans for worst-case scenarios and even worse-case scenarios.

In order to deal with volatility, the first letter of VUCA, we need to apply the last letter in VUCA 2.0, which is **adaptability**. Many organizations develop five or seven year strategic plans; if your district falls into that category, well, you can just hit delete on that plan. Being adaptable means standing ready to develop another multi-year strategic plan and also including contingencies for when things will go wrong. A school psychologist who is adaptable is one
where she has developed Plans B, C, D, and even E, and accepts that even those well developed plans, when actualized, will require significant modification.

So where does this leave us? What do we need to do? Here are some things that I’ve been mulling over, while I get up, work, play with the kids, eat 10 times a day, and go to sleep, all in the same pajamas.

The future of our schools.

The short term forecasts of this pandemic suggest that as the summer of 2020 approaches, we should see fewer and fewer cases emerge over time, and return to some modified semblance of normality. But, while we will (try to) enjoy our summers, the virus will only take hold in countries in the southern hemisphere - Central and South America and sub-Saharan Africa, only to return to North America, Europe, and Asia in the Fall of 2020; the possibility of a second wave is very real, and we need to consider how we can continue to deliver evidence-based psychological services remotely.

The first and most important issue, one which was not considered with this current health emergency (given that we migrated to a virtual model of service delivery suddenly) is the issue of equity and bandwidth. Many parents don’t have access to WiFi bandwidth that is strong enough to support online learning and service delivery. Some families do have high speed internet in their homes, but much of that bandwidth is taken up by parents working remotely. If we are to effectively plan for a pandemic, we will need to consider how the poor and disadvantaged children can access the internet. If a steady and high speed internet connection is necessary for FAPE, then schools may be on the line to pay for this service, similar to what might happen if a special program that is necessary for FAPE is located on the other side of the county (I’m no lawyer, but that analogy makes sense to me). School psychologists need to engage their districts in discussions of social justice, equity, and bandwidth to help school personnel adhere to the mission and the collective vision of the district.

Already some school districts across the country have begun to consider introducing blended or hybrid classes in the fall of 2020 - where students would physically attend school for part of the week and then work remotely the rest of the time. This is an interesting model and we will need to consider how school psychological services can adapt to this model. One way that we’ve seen virtual delivery change is an increased interaction with parents, and in many instances they have become more involved in therapy directly or indirectly - this adds a new dimension to the concept of “parent participation.” In some cases, I have spoken to some school psychologists who will initiate check-ins with the parents as well as the children and will take some time to teach caregivers how to use apps like Google Meet and demonstrate its functionality (especially older caregivers such as grandparents or great aunts and uncles). Should this be part of the protocol to get families in districts ready for the future remote delivery of services? School psychologists need to be adaptable to help parents deal with the volatility of these conditions.

As a field, we need to get a better handle on what can or can’t be done with telehealth models of psychotherapy. I suspect that the answer isn’t simple - outcomes are probably moderated or mediated by the type of issue targeted (e.g. Generalized Anxiety Disorder vs. emerging Psychotic Disorder), home environment, as well as parental and child knowledge of online platforms (among many other variables). Telehealth can’t be a “one-size-fits-all” modality, and there are possibly interactions that work tremendously well and others that don’t work at all. We need to figure this all out and disseminate this information. Like, right away. We really only have a few months until the fall. I’m happy to say that three of our NYASP board members are currently investigating these, and many more ideas, and I look forward to their results. But, in the absence of hard data, school psychologists must take accurate notes (now) as to which technologies work well and which students/families/teachers respond best to technology and should research what can be done for those students. And share these data with others. School psychologists need to demonstrate understanding in order to deal with the complexity of multiple variables that impact virtual learning and virtual therapy.

Should we move to these blended models of instruction and service delivery, we’re going to need to rethink a variety of pedagogical issues. For example, manipulatives are typically used in the classroom, especially in the younger grades, to teach concepts such as math and science, but how will parents respond to having their children use classroom objects that other children have touched and played with that may not have been cleaned effectively? Will each teacher need to dedicate one of their prep periods per day to disinfecting their classroom materials? And if we need to move to remote delivery of telehealth or
tele-education, how can we use manipulatives in the home (and from an equity standpoint, what financial responsibility does the district have in providing these materials to children at home).

On a more philosophical level, the role of the school psychologist will have to shift. In New York State, the school psychologist is permitted to engage in all the activities that a licensed psychologist can, as long as she is bound by the four walls of the school. Well, since the governor asked us to “stay put,” we have been dealing with all sorts of issues that are related to the educational functioning of the child, and both school psychologists and students have not been bound by the walls of the school. How many of you have logged into an online counseling session only to find the parent there (and child nowhere to be found) only to have her spill her guts out to you for 40 minutes? Or while engaged in a counseling session, you had to intervene and help your student effectively manage his relationship with his younger brother (the one he had been complaining about back in December 2019)? If school psychologists are to deliver services virtually, the powers that be will need to realize that this boundary between home and school will not be as clear cut (or do not exist). School psychologists need to demonstrate courage and help others examine the ramifications of teletherapy.

Challenges affecting children.

I am a Generation X’er - our conceptualization of intimacy was framed by the AIDS epidemic. Early on, when there was little to no information on HIV and AIDS, we did not hug, or give each other “high five” when we met. My guess is that that’s when the cool half nod came into play (like Judd Nelson gave to Molly Ringwald in the Breakfast Club). There was no six foot distance recommendation given to us, but when socializing, we did keep away from one another while I was in high school. The next generation after us, the Millennials, had their entire worldview shaped by 9/11 (and the events that followed) as well the economic downturn in the late 2000s. It has shaped and molded their entire understanding of life and job security, as well as their interactions with authority.

The current generation which is in school now will be shaped and transformed by the COVID-19 health emergency as well as its aftermath. Current conceptualizations of what intimacy and leisure look like will change, and we may see a shift in the frequency of interactions between children (fewer playdates, fewer trips to the park or playground, more concern about contact sports, etc.). School psychologists should be ready to help students and families adapt to these changing attitudes and behaviors, and support families and they struggle with the volatility inherent in these adjustments. This is especially an issue for children who have a diagnosable condition. Remember, almost all diagnoses usually include socialization difficulties and the less those students interact with one another, the more issues they may experience.

More broadly, this health emergency has exposed the weaknesses of our society’s economic structure and we will see regional and national companies bought out, re-organized and/or moved from their current locations. As a result we should see the dislocation of the families whose members work or are supported by these corporations. Moving or relocating gives rise to adjustment issues in students (and adults) and can amplify existing pathologies. School psychologists should stand ready to deal with these issues in our students. In addition to the trauma, anxiety, stress and depression that many children already need to deal with, many will also have to deal with a change in their environment.

Already we have seen a backlash of racist attacks across the country directed against Asian-Americans, given that initially, the COVID-19 virus was identified in China. We should be ready to deal with other racist attacks and a round of xenophobia; school psychologists should stand ready to combat this potential issue. As was mentioned above, experts have predicted that the incidence and prevalence of COVID-19 should decrease in the northern hemisphere by the summer months, but should increase in the southern hemisphere at the same time (when Central/South America and sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing winter). That strain should migrate north again once our summer is complete and the fall begins. It is not a far-fetched thought that many would (erroneously) blame individuals of Central/South American and African descent which would potentially give rise to more racially-motivated hate attacks. School psychologists would do well to teach understanding and an appreciation of others, coupled with some education about how this virus travels (i.e., the virus knows no ethnicity or race and is an equal opportunity infecter).

Final thoughts about VUCA and the COVID-19 crisis

I didn’t set out to write this to make you feel depressed or anxious, but I wanted to have us all
consider what conditions the future may hold. I wrote this piece because I strongly believe that school psychologists are in a unique position during this health emergency.

On a final note, one of the best things that school psychologists can do is to help staff, parents and students understand the nature of science. School psychology is a distinct science, and we have a responsibility to not just share the results of that science but also what the process of science looks like. I’m amazed at how many of my friends on Facebook have become experts on epidemiology and immunology since the virus hit. It’s not a bad thing for people to read scientific articles and educate themselves, but it’s possible to read too much and become drowned in knowledge without really understanding the process of science. That understanding is critical to make sense of all the information.

People expect that science will give them blockbuster results immediately, as if this was an anxiety-provoking movie with the lone scientist who saves the day at the end. That’s not how it works. Science is a slow, unsteady stumble towards lesser and lesser uncertainty. The most humbling aspect of science is the acceptance that we can never know anything for certain, and that the best we can do is to know something with very little uncertainty (e.g., being 99.999999% sure of something and being comfortable knowing that we can never be 100% sure of anything). That’s not a play on semantics, and that’s why scientists, when reporting results, will often use qualifying statements such as, “may be the result of,” “possibly may cause,” or “appears to be related to,” because we can never be totally certain of something, but we can be pretty certain of that specific something.

These semantic acrobatics are not comforting to laypersons - most people espouse the idea that you either know something or you don’t. When scientists offer qualifying statements instead of absolutes, it sounds like no one knows what’s going on, and creates opportunities for people who present as skeptics. That’s where the “colored glasses treat dyslexia,” or “immunizations cause autism,” “COVID-19 was developed in a laboratory and is an example of biological warfare,” or, the even more ridiculous, “there is no such thing as nCoV-19 - people are getting sick because of the 5G towers.” As school psychologists, we need to be active in battling this sort of disinformation as it can affect any and all of the information that was presented above.

That’s what I have for you and I apologize if this increases your anxiety or deepens your sense of sadness that you are experiencing. I look at this in a positive lens. Practices that are not necessarily effective or equitable may need to be eliminated or re-conceptualized. For example, the practice of circle time in younger grades, which in my opinion drags on for long periods of time, may need to be reconsidered since it requires that the children be seated in close proximity to one another. Other issues that were somewhat ignored or not addressed appropriately will now become critical - one thought that comes to mind is the needed increased focus on physical health of our students and of their immediate and extended family members. President Obama had talked about community schools and perhaps this is an idea that needs to be resurrected.

Our conceptualizations of how education and psychotherapy worked in February 2020 - and more broadly our entire way of life - will probably not hold post-COVID. We will need to build different models of just basically how we can be. But I feel optimistic that school psychologists will play an important part in shaping models of education and service delivery. In essence, I feel that school psychologists can lead the way in designing newer and better ways of life.

I am interested in hearing what you all have to say about this - please email comments to me at Andrew.Livanis@nyasp.org or contact me via Facebook - I’d love to discuss these things in more detail. In the meantime, stay safe, be healthy and #WashYourDamnHands.

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**Dr. Andrew Livanis** is the NYASP past president, a certified school psychologist, licensed psychologist, licensed behavior analyst, and a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. He is the ABA coordinator and supervisor at All in One Spot, providing EI services to children diagnosed with ASD. He is also Chief Psychologist and Behavior Analyst at LBC Services, where he sees clients with a variety of developmental, externalizing, and internalizing disorders.
News from NYASP

Meet your newly elected Executive Board!

Thank you to all members who voted. Our newly elected team will start their new roles on August 1, 2020.

The NYASP President-Elect is: Christopher Van Houten
Christopher is a school psychologist in upstate New York in the Chapter B region (Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties).

The NYASP Secretary is: Jennifer Arroyo
Jennifer is a school psychologist in the Hudson Valley in the Chapter K region (Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Sullivan, and Ulster counties).

The NYASP Treasurer-Elect is: Sarah Shen
Sarah is a school psychologist in Central New York in the Chapter E region (Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, and Oswego counties).

The New York Association of School Psychologists is proud to share a valuable member benefit with the school psychology community: The NYASP Mentorship Program.

The goal of the NYASP Mentorship program is to build interpersonal relationships and resources for early career individuals, while also fostering a long-term relationship with NYASP. Participation in the program is purely voluntary. To be a mentee, you must be a NYASP member and be practicing in the field of school psychology for less than three years. While students are not eligible to be mentees, setting yourself up for the experience post-graduation is highly encouraged!

In addition to developing relationships and sharing ideas with others in the field, the NYASP Mentorship Program also provides opportunities for those to earn CPD credits usable for NCSP renewal, following guidelines from NASP.

Mentors from across New York State are available to connect with mentees immediately, so don’t wait! For more information on how to become a member of NYASP and take advantage of this member benefit, visit www.nyasp.org.

“Having a mentor for the first few years of my career helped me to feel more confident in my abilities as a school psychologist. My mentor often shared a different perspective on situations, which led me to be more inquisitive and effective. The best part is the relationship we developed and getting to see each other at the NYASP conferences!”

– Former NYASP mentee
NYASP Notes

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NYASP Executive Council met remotely on March 14, 2020. Topics of discussion included a budget update from the Treasurer, possible locations for the 2022 conference, and NYASP election procedures. The dynamic situation of the pandemic was also examined. The spring board meeting has since been postponed and the Legislative Committee is planning a virtual lobby day in place of the usual in-person meetings with legislators. The NYASP Executive Board will continue to stay up-to-date with resources and potential changes in educational procedures due to the pandemic. Visit www.nyasp.org for updated resources and information.

Courtney Huguenin, NYASP Secretary

News from NASP

We have a vital role in this moment, and it starts with listening and learning and then using our voice and actions accordingly.

I encourage you to seek out the solidarity of peers to process all that is happening and prepare yourself to address challenges your students and their families are facing. There is a lot of dialogue around antiracism resources and efforts in the NASP Member Exchange. If you have not done so, please read and share the NASP statement calling for action to end racism and violence. NASP also has signed on to the “School Psychology Unified Anti-Racism Statement and Call to Action.” We will be developing more supports in the weeks and months to come.

We also released the “Ask the Expert” webinar series this spring to aid with COVID-19 recovery. I encourage you to bookmark the page and listen over the summer. We’ll continue to add more webinars over time, particularly related to school reentry. We also have a few Interest Groups on virtual service delivery and using computer and technological applications, and we just launched one on distance learning in graduate education.

We are moving forward with cautious optimism in planning the NASP 2021 Annual Convention in Salt Lake City. The Call for Presentation Proposals Submission System closes on Wednesday, June 17. The 2021 Convention Committee is particularly interested in receiving proposals for advanced, skills-based presentations that will appeal to seasoned practitioners and assist them in delivering high-quality, evidence-based practices. Review detailed instructions on submitting a proposal and submit yours today!

And given the numerous changes coming (daily) from the state and federal government, please renew your membership in NYASP. Advocacy in the state falls squarely on the volunteer leaders of NYASP. NYASP has offered regular guidance updates as well as some spectacular online PD. Check them out at www.nyasp.org.

If you need to earn additional documented CPD in lieu of cancelled in-person workshops, seminars, and conferences, NASP is continuing to offer a 50% discount off on-demand content in the Online Learning Center, including on-demand versions of recent webinars. Use code NASPS0 at checkout.

Peter Faustino, NASP Delegate
The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) recognizes the extraordinary challenges that the COVID-19 outbreak presents to schools in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. NYASP, as the organization representing school psychologists across New York State, is dedicated to assisting schools in meeting these challenges.

NYASP understands that now, more than ever, the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students, families, and educators is of the greatest importance. In losing the ability to attend school, students have lost important connections to peers and supportive adults, including school psychologists. These professionals have been working diligently to connect with students and families to offer support during this time.

While there are many challenges that schools are facing, we would like to address the specific issue of “virtual evaluations,” as they relate to the provision of special education services. NYASP appreciates the flexibility provided at the federal and state level which recognizes that conducting evaluations with students present some unique circumstances. Based on the March 27, 2020 memo from NYSED, “Evaluations and reevaluations, including bilingual evaluations, that do not require face-to-face evaluations or observations may take place while schools are closed, if the parent consents. If an evaluation of a student with a disability requires a face-to-face meeting or observation, the evaluation would need to be delayed until school reopens. A reevaluation may be conducted by reviewing existing evaluation data.” Determining appropriate evaluation tools to obtain needed information to guide a student’s educational program is challenging at the present time. Testing of cognitive and academic functioning, as well evaluation of social, emotional, and behavioral functioning is part of what school psychologists do in the schools. NYASP would like to offer the following comments and guidance on the appropriate use of tele-evaluation practices during this time.

Concerns Related to Social, Emotional, and Behavior Evaluation

Another evaluation technique commonly used by school psychologists to conduct comprehensive psychological evaluations is the use of behavioral and social/emotional rating scales. These are typically completed by the student and/or someone who knows the student well (e.g., parent or teacher). Many rating scales are available online and can be completed via secure online platforms. For some students, the virtual administration of rating scales is still possible during this time. However, this may not be possible in all circumstances because of issues related to access to and proficiency with technology. Some families do not have reliable access to the internet. Additionally, unless a school district has an account with a publishing company that allows for virtual administration of rating scales, school psychologists will not have access to this option. It is unethical to copy and/or scan copyrighted material to send to parents. Therefore, caution is urged for schools that do not have an online subscription for virtual administration of behavioral rating scales.

Additional Areas of Concern

Current circumstances dictate that testing would be taking place in a time of heightened anxiety, uncertainty, and possibly trauma for youth, families
and caregivers, and school personnel. This may result in students performing differently on tests than they otherwise would. The possibility of making inappropriate eligibility determinations based on invalid evaluation data is heightened. This could lead to CSEs over-identifying students with disabilities.

Additionally, individual evaluations require direct classroom-based observation of the student in the child’s learning environment to document their academic performance and behavior in areas of difficulty. As classroom observations are impossible during this time, this requirement would have to be waived.

**Recommendations**

While there are significant concerns for virtual evaluation, the following recommendations are offered:

- **Evaluations must be administered in the manner in which they were developed and validated.** If adaptations are made for remote administration, there must be high-quality evidence that such adaptations produce results that are similarly reliable and valid to the face-to-face administration. Any such adaptations should be documented in the evaluation report.

- **Evaluations should be administered remotely only on platforms designed for that purpose.** Appropriate training is needed for both the school psychologist and any individual at home who assists the student. Even when appropriate supports are available, school psychologists should still identify and report any validity issues given the student’s level of anxiety, disruptions during the testing session, etc.

- **Although rating scales, interviews, and possibly home-based observations could be conducted remotely, it is important to remember that students’ social, emotional, and behavioral functioning during school closure may not be typical for that student. This may reduce the utility of those evaluations, particularly when planning interventions that may eventually be delivered when school resumes.**

- **Some reevaluation decisions can be made based on data available prior to the school’s closure.** School psychologists should carefully consider whether there is sufficient evidence to support the continued need for special education services without further 1:1 testing for individual students.

- **Part 200 defines an individual psychological evaluation as a process which uses “a variety of psychological and educational techniques and examinations in the student’s native language, to study and describe a student’s developmental, learning, behavioral and other personality characteristics.”**

NYASP recommends that the “techniques and examinations” herein be understood as including clinical judgement, observation data, record reviews, existing progress monitoring data, performance on state and local tests, phone interviews, and rating scales and questionnaires administered online.

- **Consideration of developmental factors and age of the student is important.** Younger children may need greater supervision and support during a virtual evaluation, whereas older youth may be more independent in responding to test items.

- **If the evaluation or reevaluation cannot be completed safely, ethically, and/or legally, school personnel should communicate with parents about this and request extensions to timelines until a date when the comprehensive evaluation can be completed with integrity.**

Ultimately, the determination of what tests to give as part of an individual psychological evaluation has always been left up to the professional judgment of the school psychologist completing the evaluation. During the time that schools are closed due to COVID-19, or any other future public health emergency, NYASP recommends that evaluations be administered in a legal, ethical, and valid manner using the guidance above.

NYASP would like to reiterate that many of the direct services that school psychologists provide in schools, such as counseling to address emotional difficulties or consultation with teachers, administrators, and parents, can be provided virtually. In addition, evaluations that do not require face-to-face testing can still be completed, with parent permission. ettings.
NYASP's Virtual Assessment Clarification
May 11, 2020

The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) recently released a statement related to “Virtual Assessment of Children” during the pandemic. NYASP recognizes that we are all living and working under extraordinary conditions. The disruption to the lives of children and youth and the impact of this crisis are of significant concern to school psychologists. While conditions have changed under which school psychologists perform their work, it is clear that our services remain critical to helping students access appropriate educational and mental health supports. Assessment continues to be an essential activity for school psychologists to engage in to help students learn and thrive within the educational context. Alternative strategies to assessment and the delivery of supports to students are imperative during this crisis. Further, NYASP recognizes that potential changes in assessment practices reflect an adaptation to current circumstances and may not represent ongoing practices when school buildings reopen.

NYASP’s recent statement regarding virtual assessment is clear in raising concerns regarding the use of procedures that require face-to-face testing with students. To reiterate:

- Assessments must be administered in the manner in which they were developed and validated. If adaptations are made for remote administration, there should be high-quality evidence that such adaptations produce results that are similarly reliable and valid to the face-to-face administration. Any such adaptations should be documented in the evaluation report.

- Assessments should be administered remotely only on platforms designed for that purpose. Appropriate training is needed for both the school psychologist and any individual at home who assists the student. Even when appropriate supports are available, school psychologists should still identify and report any validity issues given the student’s level of anxiety, disruptions during the testing sessions, etc.

- If the evaluation or reevaluation cannot be completed safely, ethically, and/or legally, school personnel should communicate with parents about this and request extensions to timelines until a date when the comprehensive evaluation can be completed with integrity.

However, this guidance should not be interpreted to indicate that no assessment of students can occur under our current circumstances. In fact, the NYASP statement indicates that:

- Some reevaluation decisions can be made based on data available prior to the school's closure. School psychologists should carefully consider whether there is sufficient evidence to support the continued need for special education services without further 1:1 testing for individual students.

- Part 200 defines an individual psychological evaluation as a process which uses “a variety of psychological and educational techniques and examinations in the student’s native language, to study and describe a student’s developmental, learning, behavioral and other personality characteristics.” NYASP recommends that the “techniques and examinations” herein be understood as including, record reviews, existing progress monitoring data, performance on state and local tests, phone interviews, and rating scales and questionnaires administered online.

To explore this further, alternatives to face-to-face assessment may include the following:

Preschool Level Assessment

An individual evaluation of a preschool child must include information about functional areas related to cognitive, language and communicative, adaptive, social-emotional, and motor development in order to determine the child’s individual needs. A variety of assessment tools and procedures should be used to gather relevant functional and developmental information related to the preschool child’s participation in appropriate activities. Both formal and informal evaluation strategies are appropriate in the evaluation of preschool children. Formal strategies use standardized criterion- or norm-referenced instruments, which are developmentally appropriate for preschool children. In addition to standardized tests, practitioners may use informal measures. These strategies include non-standardized instruments such
as checklists, developmental rating scales, observations, interviews, teacher reports and performance-based assessments that are developmentally appropriate for the preschool child. Informal evaluation strategies rely upon the knowledge and judgment of the professional and are an integral part of the evaluation.

Some instruments can be both formal and informal tools. For example, the observation may incorporate structured observation instruments as well as other informal observation procedures, including professional judgment. When evaluating a child's developmental level, a professional may use a formal adaptive rating scale while simultaneously using professional judgment to assess the child's motivation and behavior during the evaluation process. In fact, guidance is offered on the use of various assessment strategies for preschool students (http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/preschool/guide/indeval.htm).

These include:

1. **Interview** - Information is gathered by interviewing family members/caregivers and/or teachers about the child's abilities, strengths and weaknesses and their concerns about the child's development and learning.

2. **Play** - Evaluation during play provides important information about a child's developmental skills such as cognitive/perceptual motor skills, language skills, fine and gross motor skills, social-emotional skills and daily living skills.

3. **Ecologically-based Assessment** - This is also referred to as a naturalistic evaluation of context. This technique focuses on the physical and interpersonal attributes of the setting in which the child's behavior occurs. Physical attributes include spatial arrangements, lighting, and noise; interpersonal attributes include family, peer, and teacher relationships.

4. **Arena Style Evaluation** - The multidisciplinary team simultaneously evaluates a child using formal and/or informal evaluation strategies. Team members should design a schema prior to the evaluation so that a common sample of behaviors can be observed. In using this technique, one team member facilitates interaction with the child while the other team members observe and record the child's performance across all testing domains.

5. **Individual Assessments** - Individual discipline-specific evaluations of the child are performed separately by each member of the multidisciplinary team using both formal and informal evaluation strategies, (for example, speech, motor, etc.).

The psychological evaluation assesses a student's cognitive, developmental, behavioral and emotional status. School psychologists may review existing evaluation data and other information from the family to determine if such assessments or evaluations fulfill the requirements of the individual evaluation.

Examples of other appropriate assessments or evaluations are as follows:

- **Cognitive Evaluation** - Information about a child's cognitive functioning may be obtained from sources in addition to the formal psychological assessment. A cognitive assessment measures attention span, thinking processes, and concept formation, as well as visual discrimination, imitation, memory, sequencing, classification, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. This assessment provides developmental skill levels and areas of strength and weakness, as well as learning styles. The cognitive evaluation process can use a variety of formal and informal assessment strategies. Many assessment instruments that utilize reports from others, observation, and material in the child's environment are frequently used (e.g., DAYC-2, DP-3).

- **Adaptive Behavior** - Adaptive behavior is defined as the performance of developmentally appropriate daily activities required to meet personal needs and social responsibility. Areas of adaptive behavior to be assessed include, self-help skills, play skills, learning styles, communication skills, motor skills, and social interaction/behavioral skills. The adaptive behavior evaluation process can use a variety of formal and informal assessment strategies (e.g., Vineland-3, ABAS-3) and are often completed through the use of an interview or questionnaire.

- **Social-Emotional** - A social-emotional evaluation measures interpersonal relationships, social interaction skills with adults and peers, learning styles, personality traits, and social-emotional development. The social-emotional assessment process can use a variety of formal and informal assessment strategies and ratings scales and are often completed through the use of an interview or questionnaire (e.g., BASC-3).

- **Functional Behavior** - A functional behavioral assessment is the process of identifying behavioral concerns that impede learning or participation in developmentally appropriate activities. A functional behavioral assessment is not a separate evaluation...
component from the multidisciplinary evaluation process. Information from the psychological observation may be used in the functional behavioral assessment. This type of assessment often involves reviewing curriculum, instructional and motivational variables in relation to a student’s behavior and/or examining classroom arrangements. A functional behavioral assessment may include, but not be limited to, indirect assessment, such as structured interviews and review of existing evaluation information, and direct assessment, such as standardized assessments or checklists, observation and recording situational factors surrounding the behavior, and data analysis such as a comparison and analysis of data to determine whether or not there are patterns associated with the behavior.

- Observation - Observing the behavior of a child in a natural setting is required part of the evaluation process. A natural setting may include the classroom, playground, rest room, bus, or home. Observations should occur in places familiar to the child where he or she is comfortable and will have the opportunity to demonstrate typical behaviors. Observations add a critical dimension to the evaluation process, particularly when they are used in conjunction with objective tests, behavioral checklists, questionnaires, interviews, a videotape of the child in a familiar or natural setting and other evaluation strategies. This observation may be completed in conjunction with the administration of another evaluation component such as the psychological or other needed assessments and evaluations.

**School-aged Assessment**

While assessing school-aged students presents challenges at the current time, school psychologists are encouraged to utilize existing data and alternative strategies to determine educational needs. NYASP continues to endorse that if a face-to-face assessment is needed as a part of the individual psychological evaluation, that this evaluation is delayed until such time that it can be conducted in a safe manner.

However, for school-aged children, it is important to highlight that there may be alternatives and there are times when not every child requires a face-to-face evaluation. Such situations may include:

- Although an individual psychological evaluation is a required part of all initial evaluations, it is important to note that Part 200 allows for this requirement to be waived by the school psychologist if they determine that available data is sufficient to determine students’ needs. The school psychologist is required to write a report indicating the data reviewed and the reason no further testing is required. This might be the case in the primary problem is a speech-language concern or an orthopedic concern, where the psychological is not needed to determine the presence of a disability and need for specially designed instruction.

- As indicated earlier, Part 200 defines an individual psychological evaluation as a process which uses “a variety of psychological and educational techniques and examinations in the student’s native language, to study and describe a student’s developmental, learning, behavioral and other personality characteristics.” NYASP recommends that the “techniques and examinations” herein be understood as including, record reviews, existing progress monitoring data, performance on state and local tests, phone interviews, and rating scales and questionnaires administered online.

- It is important to remember that districts are also permitted to use a Response to Intervention (RTI) process to determine eligibility as a student with a learning disability. Specifically, it is noted that a student may be eligible as a student with a learning disability if a student has not made sufficient progress to meet age or state-approved grade-level standards in reading, writing, math, or language, when using a process based on the student’s response to scientific research-based intervention.

While not specifically related to virtual assessment, districts should consider implementation of evidence-based general education supports of appropriate frequency and intensity prior to consideration of an individual evaluation. NYSED has provided guidance on the use of Response to Intervention (RTI) to determine the level of need for educational supports for school-aged students (http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/RTI/guidance-ct10.pdf). RTI represents an important educational strategy to close achievement gaps for all students, including students at risk, students with disabilities and English language learners, by preventing smaller learning problems from becoming insurmountable gaps. It has also been shown to lead to more appropriate identification of and interventions with students with learning disabilities. While RTI is a framework that guides the provision of educational and behavioral supports along a continuum or “tiers,” it is important to note that it is designed to provide the appropriate level of services based upon that data indicates how the student is performing or responding to instructional opportunities. Students should not have to “wait to fail” or for an individual evaluation to receive supports in school. Initial screening and progress monitoring data inform decisions about the level and type of interventions needed to help
individual students make progress.

Summary

While the pandemic has disrupted the work of school psychologists, we cannot allow it to prevent schools from supporting students with learning and social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Albeit challenging, NYASP recognizes that alternative methods for evaluating students exist. It is appropriate to delay assessment of students when face-to-face methods are the only valid, ethical, and legal options to completing testing. However, school psychologists are encouraged to seek valid, ethical, and legal alternatives that are available to help determine the needs of children and youth. When a virtual evaluation or an evaluation with alternatives to face-to-face administrations are possible, NYASP endorses their use. Furthermore, when there is consideration of a learning disability, there may be preexisting data present to contribute to eligibility determination by using a Response to Intervention framework if that is a method that is utilized by school districts. NYASP maintains that each evaluation should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The evaluation is specifically tailored to students and an assessment plan is developed. While there are many cases where evaluations will require a face to face assessment, there are also times when existing records and other types of remote assessment (e.g., interviews and questionnaires) can be effectively utilized. Ψ

NYASP Mission Statement

The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) is the statewide organization that represents the profession of school psychology.

NYASP serves children, their families, and the school community by promoting psychological well being, excellence in education, and sensitivity to diversity through best practices in school psychology.

NYASP Statement on Discrimination Against Persons of Color

June 3, 2020

The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) represents school psychologists across New York State, for whom advocacy for social justice is a foundational part of our practice. New York State is one of the most diverse states in the country, and many of our members are, and work with, individuals from historically marginalized and oppressed communities. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) practitioners serve students and families with such diligence and compassion, while simultaneously managing and negotiating the trauma that comes from the systemic injustice, oppression, and violence in their own lives.

NYASP stands firmly against discrimination against persons of color. NYASP expresses both outrage and deep despair regarding the recent, unjustified killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Dreajson (Sean) Reed, and George Floyd. NYASP expresses condolences to the families affected by their killings, and shares in the community’s sense of anger, outrage, and pain. We bear witness to their deaths and we share the legitimate anger felt by those who feel helpless against continued systemic injustice and oppression. As our nation is blanketet in the juxtaposition of peaceful protests and riots, we recognize that the most recent deaths only highlight the deep-rooted pain and trauma from a history of injustice that has characterized so much of American history.

NYASP recognizes that systems that perpetuate injustice continue to exist throughout this country and that they directly impact the communities we serve.
Without recognizing these systems, and taking concrete actions to dismantle them, school psychologists run the risk of perpetuating oppression on the children and families whose voices have been historically muted.

In 2017, the NASP Board of Directors highlighted the importance of having a social justice lens, noting: “Social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting non-discriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally-responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth.” (Adopted by the NASP Board of Directors, April 2017).

As a practitioner, trainer, mentor, and colleague, you may be asking yourself what you can do. NASP recently published a document that outlines what we can do at the individual and institutional level to support communities grieving due to this national crisis. Furthermore, it is paramount for us to develop cultural humility. Cultural humility demands of us to understand the realities of the other. It is a process approach to developing cultural competency. Waters and Asbill (2013) note that cultural humility is the “ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the person.”

It is likely that many of us are in a state of shock which immobilizes us from acting; we may be afraid of saying the wrong things, so we remain quiet. Yet, given the cries of communities who have been muted, whom we serve, we must move beyond immobilization to action. While the journey to aliyah is an individual one that may look different for each of us, we offer the following recommendations in the form of concrete suggestions:

1. We must understand the accumulated impact of systemic oppression on communities that have been marginalized. Some resources to help in this area can be found here: https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity/social-justice.
2. We should commit to self-evaluation and self-critique. The NASP Social Justice Task Force and Teaching Tolerance both have provided excellent resources to examine such concepts as oppression, privilege, and racism in their work with historically oppressed groups: https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity/social-justice/sp4sj-podcast-and-google-hangout-series or https://www.tolerance.org/topics/race-ethnicity.
3. We should review the NASP press release on “NASP calls for action to end racism and violence against people of color.” There are suggestions for allies and non-allies in supporting these communities: https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psycho/press-releases/nasp-calls-for-action-to-end-racism-and-violence-against-people-of-color.
4. As we consume the information above, we should explore our feelings and emotions toward what is happening (i.e., indifference, anger, resentment, empathy etc.), and not be afraid to turn inwards.
5. We should be intentional about how we use social media, for example, by following #sp4sj (school psychologists for social justice), #blacklivesmatter, #citeblackwomen, #citeblackscholars, and other hashtags to immerse ourselves in the narratives of the “other” whose voices have been muted. We should also follow scholars of color and other scholars from marginalized communities who are talking about social justice.
6. We should be intentional about our summer reading. How To Be An Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi, White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo, and Me and White Supremacy by Layla F. Saad are good places to start.
8. We should engage in discussions with our own children about what is happening. Dr. Byron McClure (@SchoolPsychLife on Twitter)
provides excellent resources online to help us do this.

9. We should check in with a BIPOC colleague/friend. If you are struggling with what to say, the YouTube video below provides a good example of differentiating empathy from sympathy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HznVvCVOk10&feature=youtu.be

10. We should develop partnerships with groups who advocate for communities that have been marginalized and ask them what we can do.

11. We should reach out to colleagues to talk about ways to support communities who are traumatized by the current climate as we begin to think of re-entry policies.

12. We should be vigilant for examples of discrimination or bias in the communities and schools in which we work, call them out, and work to remediate them. These include overt, obvious examples of hate speech (e.g. graffiti), as well as microaggressions against persons of color and other historically marginalized and oppressed communities. This also includes individuals of Asian descent, as there has been an increase in anti-Asian sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

13. In our consultation work with teachers, we should consider ways of integrating these themes into the curriculum. See, for example, the National Council of Teachers of English: There Is No Apolitical Classroom: Resources for Teaching in These Times at https://ncte.org/blog/2017/08/there-is-no-apolitical-classroom-resources-for-teaching-in-these-times/

References


October 22nd - October 24th 2020

Building Bridges & Making Connections

The New York Association of School Psychologists is preparing for the 2020 conference and we are now accepting paper submissions. After careful consideration and concern for the health and safety of our community, we have decided to hold the NYASP 2020 Annual Conference virtually. The in-person conference that was originally scheduled for October 22-24th at the Long Island Marriott will be held on the same dates on a virtual platform.

The theme of the 2020 NYASP conference is Building Bridges and Making Connections.

For more information on the conference, please visit www.nyasp.org

We will be discussing topics including school neuropsychology, positive psychology, legal and ethical practice, improving practices with culturally and linguistically diverse youth, dialectical behavior therapy, suicide prevention and intervention, academic interventions and progress monitoring, social/emotional health and well-being, eating disorders, media use, and the use of evidence based-academic and behavioral interventions to support all students. We are soliciting paper and poster submissions that would reflect the theme and goals of the conference. Priority will be given to proposals that align with the theme for this conference. Be sure to indicate whether your submission is intended for a presentation or poster. If interested, please complete this form: https://forms.gle/LeCqBis6npdY4xhz8

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Introducing the Battelle Early Academic Survey (BEAS), a new academic solution for those wanting to assess literacy and mathematics skills for children ages 3 years 6 months to 7 years 11 months.

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Web Resources for Youth Experiencing Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Kristen Chiriani, Mariangely Hernandez, Aubrey Horvers, & Stacy Williams

In the past several weeks, many families have been exposed to the trauma of COVID-19. In order to stem the infection rates, businesses and schools have been closed. Due to stay-at-home policies, many have lost jobs and families have been co-opted into teaching their children at home. In New York State, K-12 schools have moved online challenging students, parents, teachers, and school psychologists to adjust abruptly to this new normal. It is likely that all parties are experiencing stress unlike ever before. The impact or level of stress in which the student responds to a traumatic event depends on the relationship between the specific event and the individual (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017). A student’s inner resources have a large impact on their ability to bounce back from these events (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017). Exposure to trauma or adversity during adolescence can lead to long-term maladjustment effects such as post-trauma anxiety (Malhi et al., 2019). Thus, students without adequate coping skills are likely to engage in a number of self-destructive behaviors. These students are also at an increased risk for developing psychopathology (Bluth et al. 2016).

Developmentally, adolescence is a period filled with vulnerability. They are experiencing cognitive, physiological, and neurological growth and change constantly (Bluth et al., 2016). Adolescent students may experience additional stressors such as navigating their own self-identity, parental divorce, schoolwork, and difficulties in relationships (Bluth et al., 2016; Low et al., 2012). Anxiety is one of the most prevalent forms of psychopathology in adolescence (Mychalszyn, 2017). Adolescents who are exposed to trauma are predisposed to anxiety. Additionally, students who come from low-income, racial and ethnically diverse families are at heightened risk for being exposed to trauma (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017). In fact, Governor Cuomo highlights in his daily briefings the disproportional impact of COVID-19 in communities of color.

Hence, many of our students will need support in managing levels of stress in order to survive this period of uncertainty. While students are engaging in virtual learning, it is important that self-help resources for coping with anxiety are accessible. The following five websites provide information on mental health, various resources, and apps for students and families to help cope with anxiety. In particular, the web resources stress integrating a mindfulness routine into daily schedules to manage stress levels. Each of the websites highlight free resources that can be accessed by peers, teachers and families. Finally, each web resource has curated COVID-19 materials that are responsive to families and students’ needs.

Smiling Mind

Smiling Mind has an abundance of resources for students to incorporate mindfulness into their lives. This website has a free app available on Google Play and the App Store that provides students with mindfulness resources. They created a specific program called “Thrive Inside” to support people during COVID-19. In this section, there are mindfulness activities that parents can do with their kids, and guided meditation audio files specific to the COVID-19 experience. They recently released a mindfulness program for families, which can be found on the app.

Students can go to the “Kids & Youth” section where mindfulness modules are laid out in different categories, grouped by age. They offer mindfulness for kids ages 3-18. In each age range, the mindfulness activities are aimed to help students through the typical struggles they endure at their age. Each module within these categories offers guided meditation, breathing exercises, and activities to incorporate mindfulness in all facets of their day. The app allows the students to track their progress by rating their feelings towards relationships, sleep, awareness, focus, responding and stress per day. This is a great resource for students to help teach effective and healthy coping mechanisms or promote ease of anxiety during times of crisis.

Change to Chill
URL: https://www.changetochill.org/change-to-chill-virtual-care-package/

Change to Chill has many free resources for adolescents dealing with anxiety and stress. First, they provide resources on stress and what it looks like for teens. They also have a section on resilience, providing resources in guided imagery, mindfulness, how to create a balanced life and a specific toolkit for athletes. These resources have easy to follow videos and scripts.

Recently, Change for Chill introduced a Virtual Care Package for students due to the Coronavirus outbreak. This virtual care package is offered in
Somali and Spanish, in addition to English. The care package includes breathing, guided imagery and mindful movement exercises. There are also mindful worksheets, including topics like finding positivity and expressing gratitude.

**Youth Beyond Blue**

URL: [https://www.youthbeyondblue.com](https://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

Youth Beyond Blue has many resources for adolescents. They provide information on anxiety, suicide prevention, bullying, depression, grief and loss, family-break up, self-esteem, body image, and more. Youth Beyond Blue also provides videos and The Brain Quiz to help individuals understand how their brain functions. The brain quiz has ten questions, which measure the individuals' mental health in the past four weeks. The quiz is confidential and can be printed to be given to their doctor or school psychologist. Youth Beyond Blue also provides The BRAVE Program. The BRAVE Program is a ten session, interactive online program for the prevention and treatment of anxiety.

The website also provides information on how to help a friend who is in need of support. One key feature is The Check-In app. The Check-In app is for individuals who want to check in with a friend, but are concerned about saying the wrong thing or making the situation worse.

Recently, Beyond Blue launched a Coronavirus Mental Well-being Support Service. Services include immediate support and an online forum. There are also resources available for managing daily life during the pandemic, as well as information if you have been diagnosed with Coronavirus, if your job has been impacted, and how to support others.

**Stem4 Supporting Mental Health**

URL: [https://stem4.org.uk/](https://stem4.org.uk/)

Stem4 is aimed at informing teens and their support systems about coping with anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders, and addiction. Stem4 provides general information on each disorder, its signs, and steps to change through four steps. They include acknowledging, breaking the cycle, maintaining, and getting back on track. They also provide resources for staying on track, which includes information on resiliency and the MindYour5 program. MindYour5 includes five categories such as healthy practice, activity, positive thinking, positive emotions, and your connections to promote positive mental health.

The Stem4 Supporting Mental Health website offers three free apps. The Calm Harm app aims to help teenagers manage or resist self-harming by using techniques like calm, distract, express yourself, release, random and breathe. The Clear Fear app uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to reduce anxiety and the physical response to threat by learning to breathe, relax, and be mindful while changing thoughts and behaviors and releasing emotions. The Combined Minds app helps individuals provide mental health support to others. Specifically, it helps families and friends find ways to provide a supportive environment to help the individuals grow through a “strengths-based” approach.

**Anxiety Canada**

URL: [https://www.anxietycanada.com](https://www.anxietycanada.com)

Anxiety Canada provides evidence-based information and free self-help resources for youth who experience anxiety. Individuals are able to contact Anxiety Canada through their email: info@canada.com with questions related to anxiety; and a response will be provided with self-help resources. They also provide resources for educators that aim to increase their awareness of how anxiety impacts students.

Anxiety Canada recently updated their site to include resources related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This update includes how to manage parental anxiety during the pandemic and how to discuss it with children. In addition, suggestions are provided on how individuals can balance their public and mental health during the coronavirus.

Anxiety Canada created a free app, MindShift CBT, which can be found within the App Store and Google Play. MindShift CBT utilizes Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) strategies to help individuals cope by being mindful and developing effective ways of thinking. Specifically, MindShift CBT provides individuals with strategies to cope with worry, panic, perfectionism, social anxiety, and phobias. MindShift CBT features the following: CBT-based tools, quick relief, thought journal, coping cards, belief experiments, facing fears, expanding your comfort zone, chill zone, checking in healthy habits, and goal setting.

Anxiety Canada also created My Anxiety Plans (MAPs), which is an anxiety management program for children/teens that incorporates techniques of CBT. Included are step-by-step instructions on how to manage symptoms related to anxiety disorders and general strategies. Tips and techniques are provided to help users relax, plan for healthy living, set goals, and change their mindset. Ψ

**References**


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**Mariangely Hernandez** is currently a second-year student in the Marist College school psychology program. Mariangely’s professional interests are in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), social justice, and risk assessment. She is currently completing her practicum experience at Highland High School with Dr. Michael Paff. Mariangely previously completed her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology-Applied Behavioral Analysis Track at Binghamton University.

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**Aubrey Horvers** is a second-year graduate student at Marist College in the school psychology program. Aubrey’s professional interests are in promoting resiliency, as well as Autism and internalizing disorders. She is currently completing her practicum experience at Newburgh Free Academy North campus in the Newburgh Enlarged City School District. Aubrey previously completed her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at SUNY New Paltz.

**Dr. Stacy A. S. Williams** is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Marist College, a Licensed Psychologist and Certified School Psychologist in New York State.
Quarantine Writing Club
A Creative Writing Group Promotes Universality and Instills Hope

Christina Saylor and Michael Paff

Christina: As a classroom teacher, I knew what was coming. I didn’t know when, but I knew it would be soon. I knew school would close because the Coronavirus had arrived. During eighth period, when the announcement came on, it was a weird combination of concern and elation. School wasn’t going to happen for at least the next few weeks, but we weren’t going home to relax. We were going home to get sick.

What we didn’t know was what kind of sick we would be getting. While I expected to hear about respiratory illness, I didn’t realize in that moment that the harder struggle for us all would be in our heads and hearts. Many of us would have energy and curiosity and work that needed to be done and nowhere to do it. We would be bored and panicked at the same time, like a gerbil in a wheel.

Around day five, it began to become apparent that we weren’t going to go back to school in two weeks. The weather was terrible and I felt awful inside and out. But, it was also on day five that I got a message from a group of my colleagues asking me if I wanted to write with them.

The Hudson Valley Writing Project (HVWP) is part of the National Writing Project, which has over 175 sites in all 50 states. This is a group of committed school professionals and teachers from all disciplines who question, experiment and share best practices to teach writing. While they have many central beliefs, one of the most oft quoted is that “teachers of writing write.”

I went into a Zoom writing conference on day five feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders, but when I left, after writing and shedding some tears with my disheartened colleagues, I came out on the other side with a sense of strength and power. I had a clearer idea of what I was thinking and what I needed, because I had written about it and I had shared what I had written. While we couldn’t physically be together, we could work together. I felt like something flowed out of me that needed to get moving. I just felt better.

A few days later, on our school discussion board, one of my former students shared her experience. She talked about her struggles with quarantine and the struggles she was having before quarantine. She posted this publicly for everyone to see – teachers, students, psychologists, social workers, school administrators and even parents. She took a big risk and she felt great – just like I felt after I wrote and shared with my colleagues.

Unfortunately, she picked the wrong audience. Her post was removed. Such a personal post on a school-sanctioned discussion board concerned many of the adults in the building. I spoke to her after this. She told me she felt empowered to find her voice and then defeated by being silenced.

But, she made me realize that we had a need. If writing and sharing my work made me feel so much better, wouldn’t it help others do the same?

Through my work with HVWP, I had learned many strategies to teach writing. I used many of these strategies in my social studies classroom. I realized that, at this time, the same strategies could be used with students, virtually. I also knew that there was a great risk in asking students to write during such a stressful time, so I reached out to Dr. Paff to see if he would support me with whatever might come up. He was very supportive as was administration and we formed a group of about eight students and teachers, a few who were also HVWP teacher-consultants, and we wrote together.

One of the first strategies we tried is called “exploding a poem.” I provided a poem and had participants select one line to use as a springboard for their own poem. This was a low-stakes activity that gave all students a chance to write, and find their voice without having to come up with the first few words – sort of a strategy to get around writer’s block. Another early strategy we used was having students construct their own “random
autobiography,” using the poem by Mary Ann Larson as a mentor text.

The reality is, that while the topics aren’t really about being in quarantine, our life situation had subtle ways to sneak into what we were writing about. Writing this way is like creating art or music. Even though we were doing it separately, when we were all focused on creating the same type of piece, there was a power in that. It’s a medium that works well for me and it’s something that we can do when we can’t physically be together.

Almost every single participant told me beforehand that they “weren’t a writer,” but we all are now. The writing has forged a bond between us and provided an opportunity to both escape and dive into the quarantine experience. And, when the meeting ends, I always feel better. In fact, almost every week the students tell me that they do, too.

Michael: One of the things I love most about being a school psychologist is the opportunity to see students, face to face, every day. And I love working at a high school because I enjoy talking with high school students, hearing their opinions, and being challenged by them about current events. These students are smack in the middle of identity vs. role confusion and I enjoy seeing this stage play out and helping them meet the challenges they face head-on, develop skills, and cultivate their interests and their passions.

I love working at my current high school for a number of reasons. It is small; our student population is only around 530. We have very supportive administrators, and very mental-health-aware staff. Therefore, I can expand my role and take on new professional challenges without being told “there’s no time for that,” or “you need to get back to writing reports.” My evaluation, counseling, and chairing caseloads are all manageable enough that I have time for consultation, systems work, and preventative services (with the inevitable exception of annual review season, but even then I’m able to space things out so I’m usually not unavailable for too long). My office is in the guidance office, which gets a lot of traffic. One of my favorite things to do, in between appointments, is to sit in the guidance lobby and talk to students, or stand in the hallway during passing time. As we all know, in a job where it would be easy to get buried under mounds of paperwork, visibility is key.

And then, on the 13th of March, it felt like all those opportunities were taken away. I was going to be home, working from a makeshift office in my laundry room, sharing a computer with my kids (who are nine and eleven and were obviously, themselves, adjusting to the realities of online learning). I was trying to maintain connections with the students I had grown so accustomed to seeing every day, but I’ll be honest, I had no idea where to start. Of course, I did the things we all probably did. I reached out, via email and phone, to all the students I saw for counseling, and I offered virtual sessions. Some took me up on the offer, some didn’t. I worked with my colleagues to load a ton of resources onto the long-dormant School Psychologists’ Page on our district website. I joined some Schoology classes and tried to consult with teachers who were adjusting to virtual teaching. I also got busy with chairing virtual annual reviews, which were tedious, but at least gave me a chance to check in with students and their parents. But, it never felt like enough.

As psychologists, we know that crisis situations, like the COVID pandemic, have four possible outcomes in terms of mental health: some emotionally stable individuals “take it in stride,” and pull through without serious difficulty. Some individuals – the “worried well” – need a little support, but adjust well in the end. Some, who have no prior history of mental health difficulty, become catapulted into a mental health crisis. And, fourth, those with a history of mental health difficulty often find their conditions exacerbated. Having already offered all the support I could to the students who I knew would be in the fourth category, I knew I also needed to keep an eye out for students in the second and third categories. That’s why, when Christina asked me to join her quarantine writing group, I jumped at the opportunity. I knew it would give me the chance to interact with students whom I didn’t normally see. I also knew that new work routines call for new self-care routines, and I looked forward to the break at the end of every week.

I really enjoy writing, but I have not written creatively since college, so I was a bit apprehensive. And as much as I enjoy writing psychological reports, one can only be so “creative” with those. But, I took the plunge. And I quickly noticed that what Christina said is absolutely true: we usually didn’t talk, or write, explicitly about the pandemic. But it “snuck in” anyway, and we all benefited from having an outlet for our thoughts and feelings. A few times, discussion about the pandemic happened naturally, and we were able to express ourselves freely and find common ground in our mutual experiences. As time wore on, and the second national pandemic of systemic racism came to the forefront, we were able to explore that a bit as well. That was a difficult, but necessary, conversation.

I also took the opportunity, as I interacted with students at other times throughout the week, to invite some of them to join the writing group. Some did, and some didn’t, but I’m glad I got to promote a sense of universality and connection for students who were feeling isolated and alone.

To close, Christina and I want to share a random autobiography written by Isabella Fiorese, a 12th grade student from Highland. We are sharing this with Isabella’s permission, for which we are very grateful. We think it captures what we all have been experiencing in quarantine – a combination of reflection, and loss, and worry, and hope.

I have been to Maryland too many times to count.
Walking the same path on the boardwalk each year.
I have been stung by a bee only once.
on my eyelid
Once I spent a night in the hospital.
Watching the hours tick by,
worthing what would happen next.
I have been on my feet for countless hours
blood soaking through my pointe shoes.
I have eaten pizza and cereal and fruit.
or I have eaten nothing at all.
Twice I have misplaced my glasses,
walking around blind only to find them hours later.
I have made countless mistakes.
I have lost friends.
I have been held to expectations.
I have had hope.
I have stayed up all night
staring at the moon.
Who else is up at this hour? Ψ

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For more information on the Hudson Valley Writing Project,
visit https://www.newpaltz.edu/hvwp/

NYASP Webinar Series: Applying Trauma Informed Practices in a
Post-Pandemic World
Eliane Keyes

In May 2020, NYASP hosted Dr. Eric Rossen in a series
of interactive webinars on the theme of Applying
Trauma Informed Practices in a Post-Pandemic World.
The three part series comprised the basics of
understanding trauma, applying trauma informed
practices within the context of MTSS, and building
re-entry plans for schools with a trauma-informed
lens. Dr. Rossen, a Nationally Certified School
Psychologist, is the Director of Professional
Development and Standards at NASP. He provided
thoughtful discussion over these three one-hour
sessions and included access to a shared Google Drive
folder of resources and the opportunity for follow-up
discussions in a private Facebook group.

Session 1: Trauma Informed Schools 101.

Committing to trauma informed practices begins with
a common understanding of the definition of trauma.

Trauma-informed practices, as a concept, is nothing
new. Last summer, I along with the school counselor
and school social worker in my elementary school,
hosted a film series for staff members on the impact of
trauma on our students. We screened three films:
Paper Tigers, The Kids We Lose, and Resilience. The
staff discussions that followed were powerful and
resonated deeply with many. In a post-survey
presented to staff, there was a meaningful shift in how
some perceived the impact of trauma. One teacher, in
response to the query what will be done differently in
your classroom as a result of participating in this movie
series, responded “I’ll keep a paper with ‘What’s
wrong with you?’ crossed out with ‘What happened to
you?’ [so I can stay] in a mindset that all behaviors
have a function and be in a place where I can be less
reactive and more proactive.”

Now, within the shared trauma of the
COVID-19 pandemic and the long overdue focus on
trauma as it relates to systemic racism, trauma-informed practices are top of mind as we prepare for an eventual return to a school building. In his first session, Dr. Rossen spelled out the basics of trauma-informed practices as a way of thinking, which for many is often a shift in perspective. He delved into the weight of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) but pointed out the common misunderstanding that exposure to adversity is always connected to negative outcomes and that the terms childhood adversity, ACEs, and trauma can be used interchangeably. There was discussion about the academic, behavioral, and social emotional impacts of trauma and specifically what this may look like in the school setting. He also devoted a portion of the discussion to the importance of considering individual cultures as it relates to response to trauma, noting that the lens through which we view someone’s response to traumatic experiences and willingness to accept support may be skewed by a difference in culture and/or background.

Dr. Rossen then contrasted the ACEs with benevolent childhood experiences that help build resilience in our students. He spoke about six specific practices we can put into place now and continue to build as we re-enter a more traditional school setting. He spoke of six guiding principles of fostering resiliency in trauma-informed schools, first cited in The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success, which include the following:

1. Always empower, never disempower
2. Provide unconditional positive regard
3. Maintain high expectations
4. Check assumptions, observe and question
5. Be a relationship coach
6. Provide guided opportunities for helpful participation

I see each of these tenets as germane to the role of a school psychologist, and took a few moments to consider specifically how I personally strive to demonstrate each of these principles in the school setting. The one that stands out to me as something that I could work on is the importance of checking my assumptions. We often look to explain behavior based on the observable. I think it is critical to consider that which cannot be seen. One of the examples Dr. Rossen shared was of a student demonstrating off-task behavior during a test after repeated verbal reminders. It would be easy to think that the student does not care about the test, has not prepared for the test, or is being generally “noncompliant.” The teacher in this scenario, instead of assuming, asked the student to write down three things on his mind. The student wrote:

- Mom got locked up
- Dad got locked up
- Grandma don’t want me

It had absolutely nothing to do with the test, or anything visible in the environment at the time.

How many times have you heard a teacher, or other staff make the statement, “There is no trigger or pattern to the behavior, it just comes out of nowhere.” Now we know even more why we need to push back on that.

Session 2: Trauma Informed Practices within an MTSS Framework

The foundation of any effective school practice includes a solid base in tier one. I think this becomes even more critical when we consider how many students may return to school with a different mindset then when they left the building abruptly on March 13th. Absolutely, there will be a need for targeted support, but embracing widespread trauma-informed practices when considering the changes needed to the physical environment in the school building, approaches to school discipline, and the way in which we communicate with our students and families, will help staff, who are already going to be spread thin, to focus energies on those needing a higher level of support.

In terms of the physical environment, one of many example Dr. Rossen provided was the importance of offering calming spaces to students. He highlighted how teaching expectations for the use of the room is critical, as is incorporating skill-building or direct instruction in calming techniques. The concept of “chill or chat” resonated with me, when considering that some of my students need a quiet space away from others to regain a sense of calm.
while others need the opportunity to talk through or process their feelings verbally.

Dr. Rossen spoke of the differences between transactional interactions with students versus engaging transactions. We all have a role in ensuring that every single student in our building has a good relationship with at least one adult in school.

Staff self-care was another important focus of tier one support that may often be overlooked. We can’t do our best to support our students if we are not first considering our own basic needs. Dr. Rossen spoke of school-wide efforts to address secondary traumatic stress and gave a number of concrete examples that we can implement to support out staff at the start of a new school year, as well as throughout the year.

**Session Three: Trauma Informed Re-entry Considerations for Schools**

When we feel a bit of turbulence on an airplane, the natural response may be to look to the flight attendants for visual cues – *is everything okay? Are we in danger, or is this normal?* As we re-enter schools, we are going to be the flight attendants. Our students, families, and colleagues will likely look to us to gauge how things are going. It is our responsibility to balance a sense of calm, while avoiding the instinct to minimize the significant changes we have endured, and to pretend that “everything is normal.” Some students will return to school largely unaffected. Some will struggle to return because distance learning worked better for them than most. Some will struggle to leave their parents. Some will be traumatized in ways we can’t begin to fully comprehend. How do we meet each student where he or she is? Dr. Rossen described the use of universal screenings but cautioned against using the ACEs as a screener. He covered topics related to the widespread use of masks and how, among other things, that impacts one’s ability to full read tone and facial expressions of others. He touched on attendance policies and how these may need to change. Mapping triggers was a concept that Dr. Rossen spoke about over several of the webinars- the idea that certain changes to a typical school routine, or certain times of year, may trigger heightened anxiety and behaviors.

I found Dr. Rossen’s webinar series to be invaluable. I gained a deeper knowledge of trauma informed practices, as well as a list of practical suggestions that I could bring to my team as we start to develop our re-entry plan. For now we are focusing on incorporating discussions of wellness throughout classroom conversations. We have introduced a “Wellness Wednesdays” segment to the daily morning announcements. We hope to continue this into the fall. We are looking at ways to incorporate whole staff professional development on trauma informed practices so that we can all be speaking a similar language. We are working toward resource mapping in our area to strengthen our connections with outside agencies. Just prior to the school closure, we had entered into a partnership with Northern Rivers, an agency that provides a behavioral health clinic within the school building, a much needed resource in a semi-rural community where most providers are a 30-45 minute drive away.

There is so much from Dr. Rossen’s presentation that I did not include here-- it would fill the entire newsletter if I tried. Stay tuned to nyasp.org for upcoming information on how to view these webinars if you missed them the first time around.

**References**


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Public school districts across New York have been closed due to COVID-19 since at least March 16 – with some districts closing even earlier. The Governor recently announced that schools will be closed for the remainder of this school year (i.e., at least through June 2020). During this school closure, public school districts are required to engage in continuity of learning plans to continue to provide instruction to students to the greatest extent possible. While these continuity of learning plans are implemented, both the New York State Education Department (“NYSED”) and the U.S. Department of Education released guidance reminding schools of their obligations to continue to provide students with disabilities a free appropriate public education (“TAPE”) – to the maximum extent possible – during school closure. This means implementing students’ services pursuant to individualized education programs (“IEPs”) and Section 504 Plans. Many districts are implementing IEP and Section 504 services and accommodations through the same methods being utilized to provide instruction through school district continuity of learning plans.

Schools have been exploring all options available to them to implement remote IEP and Section 504 services. This has been accomplished in various ways, such as providing materials for students to work on independently, delivering consultation to parents to assist them with supporting their children’s special education and/or Section 504 needs, and/or direct services delivered either through the telephone or online platforms. Delivering direct services remotely is known as “teletherapy” (also called “telepractice” or “telehealth”). School psychologists around the state have been called upon to use teletherapy modalities to deliver various student IEP and Section 504 services, including counseling, parent counseling and training, and consultation. In addition to any mandated IEP or Section 504 teletherapy that may need to be provided during school closure, school psychologists are also supporting the mental health needs of all students – especially those who are experiencing stress, fear, or anxiety regarding COVID-19 and the related implications.

There are considerable privacy and confidentiality implications to delivering student services via teletherapy. This article examines the relevant privacy laws at issue and a school psychologist’s ethical obligations related to teletherapy, including some practical guidance to assist school psychologists with continuing to address student needs during school closure.

Relevant Privacy Laws
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”) is the federal law that applies to the privacy and confidentiality considerations for students. There is frequently confusion about the application, if any, of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (“HIPAA”) and the delivery of teletherapy for school-based services. Although HIPAA protects the confidentiality of records maintained by health care providers, a December 2019 joint guidance document from the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides that public school districts and related entities (e.g., NYSED-approved private schools, BOCES, etc.) are generally not covered by HIPAA’s Privacy Rule. This is because school psychologists and other service providers employed by or contracted with a school typically do not engage in covered transactions under HIPAA such as billing a health plan electronically for

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services. Moreover, the HIPAA Privacy Rule does not apply even when healthcare providers – such as school psychologists who are also licensed psychologists – engage in covered transactions under HIPAA (e.g., billing Medicaid electronically for services provided to students part of implementing their IEPs). This is because education records are expressly excluded from the definition of “protected health information” within the HIPAA statute. Accordingly, information related to a student's health that are contained in records of a school or healthcare provider working under contract with a school are considered educational records subject to FERPA rather than medical records subject to HIPAA. This general rule – that FERPA controls confidentiality of student records for any school-based service – applies to the provision of teletherapy delivered as part of a school-based service, regardless of who is implementing the service or the professional license they hold.

On March 30, 2020, the Family Policy Compliance Office (“FPCO”) of the U.S. Department of Education released guidance regarding FERPA and virtual learning during COVID-19.[3] This guidance provides that schools may use online learning platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet, etc., to deliver instruction and special education services provided that the online learning platform:

1. Performs a service or function for which the school would otherwise use its own employees;
2. Has been determined to meet the criteria set forth in the school's annual notification of FERPA rights for being a school official with a legitimate educational interest in the education record;
3. Is under the direct control of the school regarding the use and maintenance of the education records or personally identifiable information; and
4. Uses the education records or personally identifiable information only for authorized purposes and does not re-disclose the education records or personally identifiable information to other parties.

If all of the above criteria are met, FERPA’s school official exception applies, thus negating the need for specific parent consent to deliver teletherapy using those platforms. However, the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (“COPPA”), which allows parents to have some control over information that is collected online regarding their young children, requires parent consent prior to using online platforms to deliver teletherapy (or any other type of instruction or service) to students who are under 13 years old. Therefore, it is best practice, and required for students under 13, to obtain parent consent prior to using online platforms to deliver teletherapy services, regardless of the child’s age.

New York has even greater requirements for protecting student confidentiality under the recently enacted Education Law Section 2-d. This law provides specific requirements for third-party contractors that receive student data, including online learning platforms being used by schools to deliver instruction and other services, including teletherapy, during school closure. This means that any teletherapy that is provided to students must comply with Education Law Section 2-d. School psychologists should therefore ensure that they are only using online platforms that have been approved by their school district or employer, as this will assist with complying with Education Law 2-d. Similarly, school psychologists who use teletherapy to deliver Early Intervention or Committee on Preschool Special Education (“CPSE”) services must also adhere to specific requirements for the delivery of those services.

Practical Guidance

Every guidance document on the delivery of teletherapy emphasizes the confidentiality and privacy implications of delivering services using an online or telephone platform. Such guidance has been released by the NYSED Office of Professions for the practice of psychology[4] and the National Association of School Psychologists (“NASP”).[5] Both emphasize the importance of a psychologist understanding the ethical implications of using teletherapy and ensuring that teletherapy does not hinder the therapeutic relationship. A psychologist who uses remote platforms has an ethical obligation to ensure that those platforms are as secure as possible. The school psychologist must also ensure that he or she personally understands how to use the remote platform, including any privacy settings that may be available. Similarly, the students who participate in teletherapy should also be instructed on the proper use of the applicable technology.

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Teletherapy should not automatically be used for every student who may require the services of a school psychologist during school closure. Rather, the determination of whether a student will be able to benefit from teletherapy should be made on an individual basis. Some students may be better able to access a teletherapy modality than others due to factors such as age, developmental level, and access to a private area to engage in teletherapy within their homes. Further, students will have varying levels of comfort with using teletherapy. School psychologists should consider a wide variety of factors in determining whether teletherapy is appropriate for a student and consider consulting with the student’s parent/guardian, the student, and school psychology supervisors in making a determination of whether to engage in teletherapy for particular students during school closure. In situations where an online platform may not be the best mode of service delivery, school psychologists are encouraged to consider other methods of addressing student needs as noted above, including, but not limited to, consultation with parents, phone calls with students, and/or providing written resources that can be accessed by students and parents/guardians.

Best practices advise that school psychologists should explain to students and their parents/guardians the limits of confidentiality and privacy when using teletherapy. Similarly, school psychologists, together with their school districts/employers, should consider developing a consent form for the use of teletherapy to assist parents or guardians with being informed of the practice of teletherapy and the opportunity to provide their informed consent prior to using these platforms. If group sessions with other students will be used, informed consent should also note the privacy implications of several individuals being on that session together, including a request that others in a student’s home respect the privacy and confidentiality of the session and refrain from recording the session in any way.

School psychologists, together with their employers, should collaborate with parents/guardians as much as possible to both identify whether to deliver teletherapy services and to assist with the implementation of those services as needed. It is conceivable that in some circumstances, parents or caregivers may need to be present to assist a student with participating in teletherapy, although we cannot require a parent or caregiver to participate. Any contacts with a student or parent/guardian via teletherapy should be thoroughly documented by the school psychologist. It is also important to collect progress monitoring data – especially for IEP goals being addressed by teletherapy – to the greatest extent possible.

The delivery of teletherapy raises various equitable considerations. For example, some students may not have access to the required technology to be able to participate in teletherapy. Other students may not be able to fully participate in teletherapy due to other factors, such as the impact of their disabilities, age, family situation, or availability of adult support. School psychologists are in a position to advocate for such inequities with their schools to problem-solve methods to make teletherapy more accessible to all students who require the service.

Of course, issues related to confidentiality and privacy can arise using teletherapy even with the most stringent precautions. We have all likely heard of videoconference hacking, also called “Zoom bombing,” being reported in the media, in which third parties gain access to virtual platforms being used to deliver instruction or other services to students. The FBI recently released guidance on protecting against videoconferencing hacking, including ensuring that online meetings are private, requiring a password to participate, the meeting host (e.g., the school psychologist) managing options available within the platform to the greatest extent possible, and using the most updated version of the online platform. If something happens that disrupts the privacy or confidentiality of a teletherapy session, the school psychologist should end the session and report the incident to a direct supervisor to determine whether further action should be taken, including reporting the incident to the authorities and/or informing the affected student’s parents/guardians. The risk of personal liability to a school psychologist who is employed by a public school district or similar entity (e.g., a local BOCES, NYSED-approved private school, etc.) is fairly low in these situations provided that the school psychologist engaged in ethical practice and complied with his or her employer’s requirements for using online platforms to deliver teletherapy, including using only employer-approved platforms.

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The emphasis during school closure, as always, is to support our students' needs to the greatest extent possible. Teletherapy is one of the best methods we have to address these needs during school closure. School psychologists are in a unique position to act as leaders in their schools to provide teletherapy in an ethical and equitable manner. Therefore, we have an ethical obligation to be aware of—and adhere to—any privacy and confidentiality considerations when delivering teletherapy. 💭

[1] Although this article focuses on teletherapy, we also suggest that you familiarize yourself with NYASP's guidance document on remote assessment during school closure, which can be accessed here: NYASP Statement on Tele-Assessment, New York Association of School Psychologists, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TrpuEfW0yK7ucsl2rRGnsSAKWo5D0drj/view.


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A Reflection on Unchecked Biases and Microaggressions in Schools

Carleta Joseph

In recent weeks, media coverage has been inundated with reports of riots and protesters reacting to the latest event of a brutal and fatal attack against a Black American, George Floyd, by the hands of the police. Once again, acts of violence against people of color are at the forefront of every American household, at least in MY America. Far too many Black Americans have lost their lives due to senseless acts that could have been prevented. Outcry from the Black community, which has been criticized at every turn, each time an incident is brought into the limelight, ends with no plan of action to STOP THE VIOLENCE. These senseless acts against people of color have gone unchecked for far too long, and as a result, we Black and Indigenous Persons of Color (BIPOC) end up with a repetitive ride on this roller coaster that every person of color is fighting so desperately to get off of. These recent events and the reactions from those outraged, has led this country, yet again, into a state of unrest.

As a person of color, a daughter, wife and mother, I am TIRED of actions from White America that threaten my existence, the existence of my family members, friends, and neighbors. I am TIRED of hearing about another life lost through a senseless act. I am TIRED of fearing that someone I love, including myself, may not come home because they have found themselves in a situation fueled by hatred and racism. I am TIRED that the color of my skin does not afford me the right to take a jog, to go bird watching, to ask for help after I have been in a car crash, to lawfully carry a weapon...the list goes on. I am also tired of individuals telling me that “they don’t see color,” because as much this person is trying to appeal to me, to create a connection and a safe space between us, they are also ignoring my feelings from 400 years of oppression. Saying “I don’t see color” is interpreted as “my very real feelings, do not really matter.” And so I continue to smile and show up, with years of pain having to take a backseat to everything else going in my world.

As a school psychologist, I am charged with the responsibility of advocating for a safe, healthy and supportive learning environment required in order for children to succeed academically, socially, behaviorally and emotionally. As a person of color, a Black American woman, I am asked to continue to do this job, in a system that doesn’t fully recognize my very real trauma. Many of my colleagues are attuned to the plights surrounding people of color, and many actively voice their concern. In my professional space, blatant acts of racism are not so pronounced as what we have seen in the media. Organizations, including my own school, have recognized a system of injustices and have tried to educate staff and students. However, microaggressions (although slight and possibly unintentional), perpetuate continued unjust treatment and continue to invalidate persons of color. And although these acts may be small, continued exposure perpetuates feelings of inferiority. And so, the roller coaster ride continues.

So, how do we evoke change? Where do we begin?

Start with an acknowledgement that my fears -- and those of my fellow persons of color -- are real, my pain is real, my feelings are real. Forcing a changed mindset by first acknowledging implicit biases in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the root/cause is a start. Although many people do not see the need to educate themselves or their children on how their words or actions, albeit unintended, can be considered examples of microaggressions, we must ALL actively participate in understanding the implicit biases that we carry continue to perpetuate an unjust system for people of color.

So, small changes in the things that you say, or your body language, can be a start. Individuals can create the push for the change we need. But some people may still be skeptical to see my point of view, because racist comments or acts do affect them directly or their daily lives. So think about this:

- I have had to remind someone at a meeting, that because a parent cannot attend a meeting at their child’s school in the middle of the day does not mean they do not care.
- I have been asked to bend over backwards to schedule meetings around other parents’ schedules, to bend over backwards to please them, but it’s hard not to notice that these families are not families of color.
- Even smaller acts such as making the
comment, “everyone is afforded equal opportunity,” indicates that the speaker does not understand, or does not want to acknowledge, that some Americans have had the upper hand at every turn. Privilege acquired through generational wealth, higher paying jobs, access to private tutoring, the best schools, or even constantly receiving the benefit of doubt that they received a scholarship for college based on academic merit and not athletic ability accumulates so that the fact is that everyone is NOT afforded an equal opportunity at success.

- When a colleague makes a comment right before a meeting such as “mom is limited, just use simple language,” in an effort to “help” a family of color who has a difficult time navigating the policies and procedures of special education, but somehow takes great care to explain, re-explain and advocate for resources for a family who speaks “proper English,” that is also an example of bias resulting in one family being treated unfairly. Nevermind the fact that this so-called “limited” mother migrated to America from a different country, spoke a different language, and yet somehow managed to adapt to the new American culture and learn to speak English could ever be categorized or conceived as “limited.”

These are just some examples of microaggressive acts which happen daily.

So, “we” want change?! Then, “we” ALL have to be the driving force in order to make change happen. It will be uncomfortable, and the roller coaster ride may last longer, but starting small, educating ourselves, being mindful of actions, creating a plan to move forward, and being consistent in intention, is a first step along this very rocky ride. 🌟

Carleta Joseph, MS Ed, is an NYC school psychologist and the chapter N co-representative. She earned an MS Ed from LIU-Brooklyn in school psychology and an advanced certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis. During her time at LIU-B, she worked on the NYASP board as student representative, and as president of the Student Affiliates of School Psychology program on campus before transitioning into an early career role within NYC. As a practicing school psychologist, she has worked in an elementary setting in East New York, Brooklyn, as well as a specialized school setting for children on the Autism spectrum, before transitioning to a high school setting in Brooklyn. During this time, she worked as an ABA therapist in Early Intervention programs throughout the city for approximately two years. Her research interests include the application of ABA in classroom or instructional interventions, racial/ethnic disparities in special education, inclusivity in education, and trauma-informed practices in schools. She can be reached at carleta.joseph@nyasp.org.
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A Reflection on Privilege
Michael Paff

This story is about me. But it’s really not about me.

Recently, my family and I decided to head to the Catskills, not far from where we live, to go on a bike ride on a rail trail we’d heard about. I have been to this part of the Catskills plenty of times, but not on this particular trail, so I didn’t know exactly where the trail head was. I found an address online, put it into my phone, and off we went. When we arrived, though, I started to suspect that we were in the wrong place. There was a trail, sure, but it was blocked by a metal fence that said “DEP Only. No entry without permit.”

There were several other cars pulled off to the side of the road there. I knew that, sometimes, people took the short DEP trails to get to other trails, so I still thought it was possible that I had the right place. We unloaded the bikes and started down the trail. We didn’t make it far, though, when it became obvious that we were wrong. So, we turned around and headed back to the car.

My kids and wife beat me back to the car. As they got in, and I came out of the woods, past the “DEP Only” sign, a police car came around the corner.

What do you think I did?

Without even thinking twice, I waved them down. They pulled over, I approached the side of their vehicle, and said “I’m sorry. I know there’s a rail trail around here somewhere but... [here I smiled and gestured vaguely in the general direction of the woods]... obviously I’m in the wrong spot. Can you tell me how to get there?”

The two officers smiled and started to give me directions. One of them saw the confused look on my face and said, “if you want, give me your phone, and I’ll drop a pin on the correct spot.” He did, I thanked them, they said, “have a good ride,” and we went our separate ways. Ten minutes later, we found the trail head, and all was well.

Now, if you’re a regular reader of this newsletter, you’ve probably seen my picture on the inside of the front cover. Pretend you haven’t. Based on the story I just told you, how would you describe the color of my skin?

Do I even need to say that I’m white?

I recount this story because it is illustrative of how easily I, as a white, cis-gendered man, instinctively trusted the police. Even when I was doing something that was technically illegal, I didn’t think twice about asking for help. I have never had any experiences in my life that would tell me anything else than that the police are here to help me, and that I can approach them when I need to. Also, as a white man, my interactions with the police are usually polite. They help me. They treat me with dignity and respect.

Meanwhile, according to the US Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (2018)...

- Although white individuals are more likely than persons of color to have contact with police, persons of color, are more likely than whites to experience the threat of, or use of, force by police (5.2% of blacks, 5.1% of Hispanics, 2.4% of whites).
- Drivers who are persons of color are statistically significantly more likely than white drivers to be stopped by police (and that is controlling for the overall percentage of each group in the driving population).
- Persons of color are more likely to be stopped on the street than white individuals by police and are more likely to be arrested than white individuals.
- Persons of color are statistically less likely than white individuals to initiate contact with police to report a crime, report a non-crime, or to seek assistance. This last difference, in which white individuals are more likely to ask police for help than persons of color, may explain why white individuals are more likely than persons of color to have some contact with police overall.

And, yes... all these differences are statistically significant at the p<.05 level.

If you, like me, are a white school psychologist, you may need work hard to find instances of police brutality in your personal life. It is likely that you have never had a negative interaction with a law enforcement officer outside of a traffic stop (and if you drive like I do, you’ve probably had plenty of experience with traffic stops), and that the unpleasantness that interaction was limited to getting a stern warning or a ticket. To be effective, culturally-responsive practitioners, though, we need to recognize that these experiences simply do not match the lived experiences of our friends, colleagues, and students of color. The first step towards being an advocate and ally is to recognize one’s own privilege. I saw mine by the side of Route 28 in the Catskills. I encourage you, if you are a white school psychologist, to examine yourself, your life, and your own circumstances and see yours.

If the concept of white privilege is new to you,
or if you feel defensive when I talk about white privilege, or get it confused with racism, I encourage you to read Collins (2018), in which the differences between white privilege, bias, and racism are made plain:

“So, what is racism? [Racism describes] ‘individual- and group-level processes and structures that are implicated in the reproduction of racial inequality.’ Systemic racism happens when these structures or processes are carried out by groups with power, such as governments, businesses or schools. Racism differs from bias, which is a conscious or unconscious prejudice against an individual or group based on their identity.”

Also,

“White privilege is not the suggestion that white people have never struggled. Many white people do not enjoy the privileges that come with relative affluence, such as food security...And white privilege is not the assumption that everything a white person has accomplished is unearned; most white people who have reached a high level of success worked extremely hard to get there. Instead, white privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, separate from one's level of income or effort.”

For a deeper dive into white privilege, do what some members of the NYASP executive board are doing this summer, and read Layla Saad’s *Me and White Supremacy*.

I will close by reiterating what I wrote in this newsletter exactly one year ago, in an issue devoted to advocacy. Among the NASP practice domains, the word *advocacy* appears in four of the ten. This means that advocacy is a core competency and area of practice for school psychologists. The actions that we take as advocates will differ from person to person, depending on our circumstances. But the first step towards being an effective advocate, and ally, if you are a white school psychologist, is to recognize your own privilege. No one can do it for you. Please have an open mind. We owe it to the students, families, and communities we serve. Ψ

**References**


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**Michael Paff, DEd, NCSP**, is a school psychologist at Highland High School in Ulster County, adjunct professor of psychology at Marist College, a licensed psychologist, and the chairperson of the NYASP culturally-responsive practices committee. Dr. Paff is also the editor of this newsletter, and he welcomes comments at michael.paff@nyasp.org

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**The theme for the next issue of The New York School Psychologist is “Hot Button Issues!”**

NYASP members are encouraged to submit articles!

Submission guidelines are listed on page i of this issue,

**Deadline: October 1, 2020.**

Email Dr. Michael Paff at michael.paff@nyasp.org with questions.
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