

winter 2019

Psych Perspectives



A publication of the West Virginia School Psychologists Association

School Psyched about Social Justice

The LGBTQ+ Center at WVU held an event on Saturday, January 12. The focus of the event was to show support for Michael Critchfield. The event was family-friendly and offered various resources on how to support transgender individuals at school and in our communities. After hearing from several speakers, including Michael, participants sang “Happy Birthday” to Michael and networked discussed advocacy and support for LGBTQ+ individuals. For helpful information regarding LGBTQ+ issues, visit <https://lgbtq.wvu.edu/community-resources>. Further information will be made available soon on the WVSPA website’s Social Justice page.

If your district is interested in conducting a staff development session with a focus on LGBTQ+ issues, particularly concerns regarding individuals who identify as transgender, consider reaching out to Natasha Stone, the Transgender Visibility Organizer, at Fairness West Virginia. Her email is natasha@fairnesswv.org.

Looking ahead: February is here, so let’s talk about Black History Month! It’s a time to celebrate the multitude of achievements by African Americans. The Association for the Study of American Life and History (ASALH) dedicated the theme of Black History Month 2019 to Black Migrations with a focus on the 20th Century through today. Visit <http://www.pbs.org/black-culture/home/> for some great Black history and culture information including classroom resources and lesson plans, shows and films, discussion forums, and quizzes on your knowledge of Black history. If your schools do something unique and interesting to celebrate Black History Month, post to the new Facebook group, School Psyched about Social Justice.

Book Study Winner: The majority of those who responded that they want to participate in a book study indicated that they would like an online discussion forum followed up by a discussion at next fall’s conference. The winning book study idea was the option including both Beautiful Boy by David Sheff and Tweak by Nic Sheff. Both books tell the same story of an adolescent’s struggles with heroin and how he overcame substance abuse disorder. However, Tweak was written by the child, and Beautiful Boy was written by his father. These books provide two very unique perspectives of the opioid epidemic. Participants may choose to read one or both. We can communicate an online forum on the soon-to-be WVSPA Social Justice page. All are welcome to join the book study and begin posting to the discussion forum when it is up and running. We will also hold an optional discussion during the 2019 fall conference. Email and let me know if you are having difficulty finding or purchasing either book.

Movie Night Winner: Paper Tigers will be shown the night before Spring Conference. Time and location to be discussed! All are welcome to attend our first Social Justice Movie Night.

We will be watching Paper Tigers the night before the Spring Conference. The film is a documentary featuring the Aversive Childhood Experience Study as well as students and staff an alternative school in Walla Walla, Washington. Based on the ACEs study, the school revolutionized and began implementing trauma-informed practices. It's an incredible story of hope.

Coming soon: We are hard at work designing a comprehensive social justice page on the WVSPA site. The page will serve as a forum for the book study and include information on community and national resources as well as literature dealing with social justice topics. Additional social justice resources are being added, please check in often.

Legislative Happenings

Bills to watch impacting the practice of school psychology in WV:

- HB 2397: (Ratio Bill) Requires county school board to provide adequate mental health and counseling services
- HB 2674: Creating a student loan repayment program for mental health providers
- HB 2817: Youth Mental Health Protection Act
- SB 451: Comprehensive education reform

A special thank you to our GPR Chair, Karen Cummings! WV was recently featured in NASP's [In Brief](#)

Save the Date

WVSPA Future Conferences

Spring 2019: April 25-26, 2019, Embassy Suites, Charleston, WV

- Dr. Milton Dehn-Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses for SLD evaluations
- Dr. Celine Saulnier-Autism evaluations, report writing, and communication of results

Fall 2019: October 17-18, 2019, Glade Springs Resort, Daniels, WV

TBD

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Marshall University School Psychology Program is recruiting educators with existing Masters degrees for a cohort beginning Summer 2020.

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**School Psychology
A Career That Makes a Difference**



School Psychologist in the Spotlight:

Stephanie Oberly

An accomplished school psychologist of more than 20 years, Stephanie Oberly

has a diverse background in education as a teacher, writer, and leader. Prior to becoming a school psychologist, she was a teacher of the gifted for 15 years and a general education teacher for six years. She earned a B.A. in Education (with a specialization in Social Studies) from the West Virginia Institute of Technology, and an M.A. from West Virginia University in Special Education-Gifted. She obtained her M.A. and Ed.S. in School Psychology from West Virginia College of Graduate Studies. Oberly additionally maintains her National Certification in School Psychology (NCSP) through NASP.

Oberly is presently the Coordinator of Psychological Services in Monongalia County Schools (MCS). Her district team of school psychologists has grown from five school psychologists to ten school psychologists since she joined the department in 2008. This growth is largely attributed to adoption of national NASP model and support from Deputy Superintendent, Donna Talerico. Her department employs various delivery models to meet the needs of their schools. She explained that some school psychologists are school-based, while others are involved in itinerant or collaboratives models. Oberly is very proud that in addition to traditional gatekeeping and assessment responsibilities, the MCS school psychologists have broadened roles, serving as district leaders in promoting best practices in curriculum, academic and behavior interventions, school climate, crisis intervention, policy/procedure development, mental health knowledge, and general trouble shooting. The psychological services department is also responsible for Student Assistance Team (SAT) manual development and annual SAT trainings. In addition to consultation problem solving roles, psychologists have been tapped to provide paraprofessional, on-line, teacher/academic coach, and parent information trainings.

Oberly discussed that, as Coordinator of Psychological Services, she still retains some direct assessment responsibilities with students. This helps her maintain her clinical skills and appreciation for the testing demands. She also serves as her district's SAT and 504 coordinators. Oberly serves on the Deputy Superintendent's Curriculum and Instruction Team and on the Superintendent's Executive Council. Oberly shares her department leadership role with all of her staff, as she believes they are all leaders, developers, helpers, communicators, problem solvers, and innovators. This team generally conducts PLC activities twice monthly to discuss assessment/identification issues, policy implementation/procedures, update skills, share school district information,

and to work on department goals and plans.

Oberly acknowledges there will be times when system level problems and political issues arise within the schools. However, she firmly believes the primary role of school psychologist is advocate for children. In order to fulfill the role for child advocacy, school psychologists must remain neutral and out of school politics. When mediating, consulting, and offering suggestions, she recommends school psychologists offer objective advice based upon data, assessment results, research, and/or knowledge of evidence-based practices. School psychologists should not advocate for someone's personal agenda or viewpoint; rather the child's welfare should be the central focus of the school psychologist's advocacy. Another major aspect of being an effective school psychologist is being able to connect with children, parents, teachers, and administrators. The best approach in connecting with all in Oberly's eyes, is to develop positive relationships by communicating interest, empathy, honesty, compassion, trust, and respect for human dignity. Once this is communicated, the work can begin and things can be accomplished.

With the culmination of her experiences, Oberly offered her thoughts on the most pressing challenges we face in education. "The greatest challenges for our educational system," Oberly stated, "is to deal with mental health issues and behavior challenges in our schools. Drawing from her experiences in Monongalia County, she reports schools often excel in promoting and teaching academic skills. They, however, must also address the physical, mental, and emotional needs of children for optimal learning to occur. Oberly elaborated further, stating, "While teachers are trained in pedagogy, learning theory, and child development, they often lack mental health knowledge and feel unprepared to deal with challenging student behaviors." As a result, MCS has been focusing on establishing mental health supports, community partnerships, and training for all employees about adverse childhood experiences, physical/mental sequelae of childhood trauma, importance of positive school climate, behavior skills/emotional functioning needed for life success, development of multi-tiered behavior intervention/ supports, alternative learning programs, community resources/partnerships, and

causes/treatment for common childhood mental disorders. These processes are on-going and evolving, but the MCS psychologist team has been and continues to be integral to these efforts.

Oberly also expressed how fortunate MCS is to have community mental health resources, WVU supports, materials needed to support programs/personnel, opportunities for professional development, technology tools, and community support for these goals. The voting populace in this thriving community has been most supportive of these goals, providing overwhelming support for excess levies, education, and building projects. Indeed, this community seems eager to provide its youth the academic, social, and psychological edge they need to adapt and thrive in this ever-shifting world.” Looking forward from here, Oberly noted the ultimate challenge will be “to maintain and promote the on-going evaluation needed to make adjustments/adaptations, refine interventions, implement new solutions, and sustain continued improvement in an ever-changing environment.”

Otherwise, Oberly describes her greatest accomplishment as being selected as “Teacher of the Year” for MCS and being one of seven finalists for the West Virginia Teacher of the Year in the 1989-90 school year. Additionally, she was a contributing author of the book, Sylvia Rimm’s Guidebook for Implementing the Trifocal Underachievement Program for Schools. She described the most positive aspect of her career as promoting the value and supporting the expanding role of school psychologists. She described other challenging aspects of her career have been to secure quality personnel and salaries, as well as retaining the exceptional personnel needed to fulfill departmental goals when living in a border county. Transitioning from traditional assessment roles and instruments to meet demands related to WVDE leadership and policy changes, DSM-5 updates, and changes to the field of school psychology are added challenges.

What insight, therefore, does Oberly provide for school psychology as a field of practice? Oberly expressed how she was concerned the broadened roles of a school

psychologist advocated by NASP might be stymied by national school psychology shortages coupled with a lack of proper funding and resources from a systemic level. She illuminated how vital these broadened roles are to our students, families, and schools and to the discipline of school psychology. Indeed, she said, "School psychologists have much to offer schools concerning mental health, learning theories, education research, academic/behavior interventions and accommodations, mental disorders in children, child development, and best practices."

In closing and in light of all of the challenges and opportunities described so eloquently by Oberly she exclaimed: "Wow! Let me congratulate you on your career choice. You are about to embark on a most exciting, challenging, and fulfilling adventure!" These words not only reflect the insight of a dedicated and celebrated teacher, writer, advocate, and caring human being, but they are also an example of the spirit one should hold throughout their journey as a school psychologist.

This article was written by Linda Goad, Morgan Brown, and Landon Marcum. It served as a course requirement for SPSY 601.
