

OSPA Fall Conference 2012

Ohio School Psychologist of the Year Award



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Good afternoon and welcome to the 2012 School Psychologist of the Year and Scholarship awards banquet. My name is Melissa Bestgen, and I am Co-Chair of the Awards Committee along with Cindy Thompson.

The School Psychologist of the Year award was established in 1991 to recognize one school psychologist each year who provides outstanding service delivery within the practitioner realm. It is required that at least seventy-five percent of a candidate's time be spent providing school psychological services to students, teachers, and parents, typically in a school setting. This year, three outstanding psychologists were nominated.

Amy Such – Cleveland Regional

Our first nominee is Amy Such, who could not join us today. Amy graduated from Cleveland State University after completing her internship with Berea City Schools. She then worked with the Fairfield County ESC before moving to the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. For twelve years, she has worked in Cleveland, fulfilling the typical school psychologist duties as well as working as a practicum and internship supervisor, a member of the committee to develop an evaluation system for the school psychologists of Cleveland, and a member of the professional development committee for Cleveland. Amy is also very active in the Cleveland Association of School Psychologists as co-chair of the Children's Advocacy Committee, past chair of the Professional Development Committee, and past secretary. She is highly involved in volunteerism, working with NAMI,

Autism Speaks, Ronald McDonald House, Beechbrook, and Toys for Tots. This past year, she was chosen as the Cleveland School Psychologist of the Year. A round of applause for Amy!

Elaine Semper – Elyria/Lorain Regional

Our next nominee is Elaine Semper. Elaine has worked in education for over forty years, first as a general education teacher, then a special education teacher, and finally as a school psychologist. She has worked as an administrator, ensuring her students received the most up-to-date interventions and were serviced according to their federal rights. A tireless advocate for mental health, she worked with the Lorain County Department of Human Services to bring mental health services to her students and worked with parents to help provide a continuum of care between home and school. She coordinated services for students who didn't know what to do, and provided professional development to her colleagues in how to help these students succeed. She now works on a contract basis in Medina County, Cuyahoga County, Elyria, and Strongsville. Elaine is also very active in her local, state, and national association. She is the current Spring Conference co-chair and Secretary of ELASPA, the previous president of ELASPA and OSPA, and a regular attendee and volunteer at NASP conventions throughout the US. A round of applause for Elaine!

Jeff York – Kent/Akron Regional

It is my pleasure to introduce today the nominee from the Kent Akron Association

Continued on page 28

OSPA Fall Conference 2012

continued from page 27

of School Psychologists, my former colleague and friend, Jeff York. Jeff and I practically started our professional careers together, working in Akron and signing our contract within hours of each other! Who knew at that time I'd be standing here and presenting this award to him.

As I share from his nomination packet, it becomes clear Jeff represents what it means to be SPOTY. As a member of the Akron Public Schools' Child Study department, Jeff has been an exemplary role model for his colleagues. He maintains the highest professional and ethical standards. Jeff consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty and willingly accepts any opportunity to serve on a committee, provide his expertise, offer his advice, and take the initiative to put forth the needed effort to accomplish the goal at hand.

Jeff is described by everyone as dependable, reliable and responsible. He is an insightful and energetic problem-solver. Once Jeff commits to a task, it is certain that the job will be completed efficiently, accurately and accomplished beyond any reasonable expectation. His collective breadth of knowledge is remarkable. Jeff has shared his expertise and knowledge to enhance the organization and efficiency of the Child Study Department.

Jeff is licensed by the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Board of Psychology as a school psychologist and holds the Nationally Certified School Psychologists credential from NASP. Over the course of his tenure in the Akron Public Schools, Jeff has delivered exemplary school psychological services to students in a variety of contexts. Jeff has been working as a school psychologist for 16 years, 14 of those with the Akron Public Schools. The majority of those years have

been with the Early Learning Program, serving the special needs of hundreds of preschoolers.

Jeff has been coordinating with program and district staff in the development and implementation of RTI/IAT structure within the preschool program, which is now in its second year. Jeff works collaboratively with other school psychologists and related service providers in the program to continually refine a complex system of evaluating and intervening with these children. Jeff has used his considerable skills in technology to positive ends for the Early Learning Program. He has led the initiative to coordinate the data collection for both state- and district-wide assessments. Jeff has been the primary analyst of these data and has used them to develop local norms for preschoolers, which is believed to be unique among the large city school districts in Ohio. In his spare time, Jeff also shares his skills by acting as the building Technology Coordinator. In this role, he routinely facilitates all technology upgrades, training, and computer maintenance within his entire building. Jeff is known throughout the Akron Public Schools not only for his technological competence, but by the ways that he can use his skills to train others and use his technological skills to gather and disseminate data to inform instruction and maximize student learning.

Jeff holds a specialization in working with students with Multiple Disabilities and other low incidence disabilities, such as Autism. Jeff has undertaken extensive and advanced training in serving students with low incidence disabilities and has been a primary resource in working with these student populations, both among his Child Study Department colleagues and across his school district. Jeff also has chaired the Technology Committee in the Child Study Department since its inception. With all of these remarkable achievements and contributions, Jeff continues about his daily work

as a school psychologist and integrates his service delivery with teachers, counselors, principals, related service providers, administrators, outside agencies, and other parties to make positive contributions to the wellness of their students. Jeff provides more than 100 comprehensive school psychological evaluations to students each year, and maintains highly visible position among a dozen school buildings with thousands of students.

In addition, Jeff has made profound and lasting contributions to the Ohio School Psychologists Association and the practice of school psychology across our state. Jeff has been the Technology Chair, Webmaster, and co-moderator of the OSPA listserv for the past six years. Jeff worked with TOSP Editor Rob Kubick and Historian Kate Bobak to craft a call in the TOSP for any back issues that members might have. Jeff worked with a past OSPA President to conduct the first statewide membership survey in well over a decade. He developed an on-line survey of member needs and preferences to assist in data-based decision making regarding the Association's practices and services. Jeff also collaborated with a past OSPA President to comb through the OSPA Constitution and Operations Manual and make timely revisions to these documents. Jeff has served OSPA and the profession in numerous other ways including serving on the technology and scholarship committees.

In addition to his assignment in the Akron Public Schools, Jeff also provides services to the Akron Digital Academy, a hybrid "brick and mortar" and on-line school sponsored by the Akron Public Schools serving students grades K-12.

Last but not least, Jeff routinely does a variety of professional presentations at the local, state, and national level. In the past year, he has presented on topics such as the role & function of the school psychologist, mental health service delivery, autism,

technology, and alternative programs.

Above all, however, friends and colleagues describe Jeff as an honest, hard-working, highly-skilled family man of the highest moral fiber. He is articulate, personable, charismatic and funny. He is a good father, good son, good husband, good colleague, and good friend.

I am so honored to be able to present the SPOTY award to my friend, Jeff York.



Remarks from Jeff York

Good afternoon, everybody. While sitting and listening to the nomination statements, I thought to myself, how can we pick out just one person? There are just so many positive things happening for students in our profession and our state. The Awards Committee really has their work cut out for them. I would like to start by saying how humbled I am by this acknowledgement. Every time I think about it, it is almost surreal.

Like many of us, the profession of school psychology did not enter into my mental list of career options until late in my education... I didn't know I wanted to be a school psychologist when I grew up. During my undergraduate program at Ohio State, I enjoyed courses in both psychology and also the natural sciences. You can

guess my career choice as I am here with you all today.

My experiences at Cleveland State cemented my final career path. I was enrolled in the Clinical/Counseling program and happened to have Dr. Connie Hollinger as my graduate advisor. She also happened to coordinate the school psychology program. After many discussions with Dr. Hollinger, school psychology seemed like a good fit for me and I enrolled in the school psychology specialization. I want to thank Dr. Hollinger for her career counseling as the choice I made many years ago still seems like a great fit.

As I finished up my coursework and was preparing to start my internship, Dr. Kathy McNamara came on board at Cleveland State. Unfortunately, my only class with Dr. McNamara was Internship Seminar. After finishing my internship and plunging into my career, I ran into Dr. McNamara occasionally at OSPA or NASP conferences but it was not until my involvement with the OSPA Executive Board that I saw how plugged into the field she was. After seeing her long-term involvement in both NASP and OSPA, I started to understand the importance of involvement at the systems level. I'd like to personally thank Dr. McNamara for being a role-model for professional involvement.

I'm going to shift to my friends and colleagues in the Akron Public Schools. I have been there for about 14 years now and work with top-notch colleagues. I was fortunate to wind up in Akron after another job lead fizzled out. Prior to applying, I had heard urban legends about how difficult the work load was, how tough the kids were, etc. but also knew that if I had a professional question, no matter how obscure, someone in Akron could give me the answer.

So that brings me to Dr. Perry Clark, our supervisor. Dr. Clark is one of the hardest

working people I know, not only in regards to the volume of work, but in his drive and stamina. Dr. Clark is also a very creative thinker. The adage "thinking outside of the box" doesn't really apply to Dr. Clark... there really is no box for him...he just thinks. Many of the technological implementations I have helped with in Akron began with a statement from Dr. Clark... things like... "Wouldn't it be awesome if we could just....?" or "Isn't there a way we can do this better or more efficiently?"

I also want to mention that without Dr. Clark's administrative support, very few, if any at all, Akron psychs would be here today. While Dr. Clark helps us be very productive in our traditional roles in the district, he strongly supports us in our professional involvement outside of the district, whether it relates to learning, teacher or doing. Thank you, Dr. Clark, for your support.

I do have several other colleagues I would like to thank. I had the fortune of being hired in Akron during a time of growth in the Child Study Department. I was hired with five others that summer, including Rob Kubick and Brian Hill. Early on, Rob and Brian invited me to join a presentation they had previously given at an OSPA conference entitled "Getting your First Job as a School Psychologist." Ever since that time, we have been invited back to NASP every year, and to many Ohio intern conferences, to present to students, interns and other interested job seekers. Through these presentations, we have had the opportunity to talk to many early career professionals, numbering in the thousands, and to learn from them. It has also given us the opportunity to network at the state and national levels. But through these presentations, I also got to know Rob and Brian better.

Let's start with Rob. While maintaining a substantial caseload, Rob has always

Continued on page 30

OSPA Fall Conference 2012

continued from page 29

thrown himself into many projects, far and wide. He is the energizer bunny that we all try to keep up with. I mentioned earlier that Dr. Clark is one of the hardest working people I know. Well, Rob is another one. Rob is also the professional equivalent of an exercise buddy...you know the one who talks you into signing up for marathons. Rob also believes in work at the system's level and puts great effort into this endeavor. He is also a good friend, and is always willing to help out in a pinch. Rob, I thank you for all of the encouragement and opportunities for involvement you have provided. It has been quite a journey so far—who knows what we'll achieve next.

Let me next talk about Brian. Brian is a fantastic model for preparedness. He is truly a master at planning and does a thorough job at leading our district and state level crisis teams. He has materials prepared so that at a moment's notice, he can have our team mobilized and on the site of a crisis with any materials that would be needed. Last year, I called on Brian for help. One of my preschool students, who had significant medical issues, had died during the night at home. Brian quickly responded to my request, giving me customizable form letters for parents and staff, advice and resources about how to talk to others about grief and death...and most importantly, giving me the support I needed to do the most difficult professional task I have ever had to do...informing the children in the class that their friend had died and then leading a discussion on death and dying with the group. I hope I never have to do that again, but know if I do, Brian will be there to help. Thank you, Brian.

I do have 20+ other colleagues in our department in the Akron Public Schools. I would like to say something about each

and every of you but don't want to filibuster and go well into the afternoon. What I will say is that I value each and every one of you and learn so much from you all. I know that there is not a professional question I could pose to the group that would not get an answer or a resource in response. I am truly fortunate to work with such a fine group of professionals.

I also feel honored to work with the OSPA Executive Board. This group volunteers countless hours to our profession in regards to advocacy, education, and improvement of our practice; subsequently continuing OSPA's reputation as a premier state association. I personally want to thank our Business Manager, Cheryl VanDenBerge for her behind the scenes work to ensure the daily functioning and long-term stability of our association. I also thank her for trusting me and responding to my technological blunders with grace, particularly for not firing me from the Board when she gets dozens of phone calls in response to erroneous OSPA emails that have gone out under my watch. I also would like to thank Ann Brennan for her tireless advocacy for our profession and am grateful for all she does.

I would also like to thank those involved in putting together my nomination. Much effort went into this process, effort from my APS colleagues, effort from the Kent/Akron KAASP board, effort from the OSPA Awards Committee and effort from those providing letters of recommendation. These were tasks far above and beyond the call of duty in our daily work...I am deeply grateful to all involved.

I would also like to thank the members of the OSPA Technology Committee: Chris Sweeney, Rachael Folkman and Erich Merkle for their efforts in maintaining the listserv and social networking groups.

My final acknowledgments are to those who have provided me with the greatest

support...my family. I am thrilled that my wife, youngest son, and parents could join me today to share in this celebration.

Let me start with my parents. I was very fortunate to have been told from an early age that I could do anything I set my mind to. I was also fortunate to receive the message of the importance of continuing my education so I could support myself while doing something I enjoy. These are important messages that many of us may take for granted but the reality is, many of our students may not hear these things. It is critical that we go out of our way and communicate these to our students whenever the opportunity arises.

And then there is Therese, my wife of nearly 10 years and soul-mate of nearly 20...on that count, nobody can accuse me of impulsively making life choices. Therese has been at my side through the joyous times and the difficult times of my career ever since grad school. She has supported my involvement in the extra professional duties I have taken on, whether it was managing the day to day household operations while I was away at conferences or while I was working on special projects from home on evenings or weekends. She has demonstrated more patience and understanding than I might have if the roles were reversed...that is why she is my better half.

Finally, my sons, Anthony and Alex. Anybody who has children can attest that they are unbelievably adept at helping us detach from the thoughts and worries of work. They help us reconnect to the rest of the world through our involvement in their extracurricular activities, whether be through scouts, swimming lessons, or any others. They also help us to learn about the nuances of growth that cannot be found in any child development textbook. I thank them for the richness in life they have brought me.

Before sitting down to write this speech, I

was grateful to those in my life who supported me. But after sitting down reflect, I realize how truly fortunate I am to work in a rewarding profession, to have multitudes of people who support me and my work, and to be in a position in my district, through the OSPA executive board and through NASP to be able to support the important work of others.

Now, before I wrap up, I'd like to share a belief of mine which guides where I try to spend some of my professional time. It is stating the obvious that the work we do at the individual student level is invaluable, there are no arguments there. In addition, in many districts we are spread too thin and not able to meet the all of the needs of the school community. But it is my belief that we need to do whatever possible to carve time out of our schedules to effect change at the systems level, whether it be through our districts, regional affiliates, through OSPA committees, or involvement with NASP. I do value the work we do at the individual student level, but have come to believe that while that is absolutely necessary...is it simply not sufficient. I will personally continue to do whatever I can to facilitate systems change, and I encourage you all to do the same.

In closing, I am thoroughly honored by this recognition, more than I am able to express in words. As group, we are so fortunate to be able to serve in such a rewarding profession. We have the unique opportunity to help our students and their families at both the face-to-face and also systems levels. I also look forward to seeing and participating in the continued shaping of our profession and am excited to work with you all in this endeavor.

Thank you.



L to R - President Denise Eslinger, Executive Director Ann Brennan, Recipient Jeff York, and Awards Committee Co-Chairs Cindy Thompson and Melissa Bestgen