



# Elkton Elementary School

## Placement Description

---

Rockingham County Elementary School placement that offers practical foundational experience working with students.

## Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

---

- One-on-one mentoring with 4-8 students (ages 5-12)
- Group counseling experiences (with counselor)
- Consultation with parents and teachers
- Classroom instruction assistance (Guidance Classes PK-5)
- Student Study, ASSIST, and other team service coordination meetings

## Contact Information

---

- Contact Person: Cindy Hepner, M.Ed. Licensed School Counselor and L.P.C.
- Address: 302 B Street, Elkton, VA 22827
- Telephone: (540) 298-1511
- Email: [chepner@rockingham.k12.va.us](mailto:chepner@rockingham.k12.va.us)
- School Website: <http://ees.rockingham.k12.va.us/>
- My Website: <http://schoolcounselingees.weebly.com/>

**Read about students' experiences at this site below:**



*Spring 2021 – Megan Ludwig*

This past semester at Elkton Elementary School has been the biggest point of growth in my college experience. The school counselor at Elkton, Cindy Hepner, provides a variety of different services for students and faculty to engage in. The main focus this past year has been the focus groups that my supervisor leads surrounding the topics of anxiety, stress, and worry. In addition, she does classroom lessons for all grade levels putting an emphasis on the 5 pillars of the school, responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, citizenship, and fairness. Her lessons use these concepts in order to educate the students of Elkton what should and should not be done as honorable members of society. Mrs. Hepner also met individually with students and faculty to come up with intervention and/or prevention plans to keep students safe and allow them to successfully continue their education.

Coming into this semester at Elkton, things were still slightly up in the air because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, my supervisor worked really hard and pushed for things to continue as normal as possible. So, with keeping in mind that COVID-19 was still a hinderance, I was able to complete a variety of tasks. First, I completed a lot of the normal intern errands, such as, making copies, creating books for students, and running things to or from other educators in the building. A main part of my job was to develop the character pillar board that Elkton places an emphasis on. While I was there, I was required to make a board for caring, responsibility, trustworthiness, and fairness. This is where students are selected for behaving characteristically similar to one of the pillars. Teachers would send my supervisor the list of names and I would develop the saying along with what goes on the board. For example, we did “Racing with Responsibility” and “Fishing for Fairness” for two of the four. Another aspect of my role as intern was to assist in all guidance lessons and lunch group sessions. Here, I did a lot of classroom management and working with students who were falling behind during the class period. In addition, I had the opportunity to help out a kindergarten teacher and her class. This entailed a lot of arts and crafts and working alongside the students in the class. I often helped them with assignments or class activities while the teacher was occupied with other students. The biggest aspect of my internship was the mentoring that I did. I was assigned 4 students to work closely with, whether that be playing games with them, helping them on homework, or just creating a genuine relationship with them.

My first impression of Elkton Elementary School was very welcoming. The staff and the students really love having someone there to help out in any way possible. The advantages to interning at Elkton is that you get a great understanding of how school counseling works and what happens throughout the school day. In addition, the teachers are always willing to answer any questions you may have about what they are expecting of you. The same goes for the school counselor, she is happy to help you and is open to working through your curiosity about this profession. There are not many disadvantages for this school, the only one I want to say is that COVID definitely makes working in a school more difficult, but it is heartwarming to see students returning in full capacity. My favorite thing about this placement is the opportunity to work with the students. I saw this as the best part because school counseling is mainly about the children you work with, so I wanted to get as much experience working with the students at this school.



Ever since I enrolled in my first psychology class at James Madison University, I knew I wanted to be a school counselor. My placement has done an excellent job of showing the skills necessary to be successful as a school counselor. I believe that there are still aspects that I need to improve on, but I definitely developed more skills in managing and dealing with students. Sometimes, students can be wild and misbehave and I was nervous coming in and having to be an authority to them. However, my supervisor gave me the confidence needed to believe in myself. In addition, the experience of just working with students and getting to know them on a more personal level allowed me to feel more comfortable working with all students. I think having this experience only solidified my dreams of being a school counselor even more than what they were.

My ideas for the contribution project were focused on the current state of our students. The coronavirus effected so many people, but from my point of view it affected students the most. My paper portion of this project was focused on the impacts that students experienced on their mental health, academics, and their ability to transition. I touched on the idea behind government lockdown led to isolation and loneliness for students and the rest of their family. The application portion of this project was at first difficult to develop, but when I landed on the final outcome, I was excited to begin working on it. I decided to create a hallway transition for students to return to Elkton after Spring Break and feel welcomed and at home. In Rockingham County, students returned full capacity, four days a week after being mostly virtual for about a year. I saw this as an opportunity to help students through this difficult time. I saw that students were still experiencing aftereffects of the virus, so I thought decorating the hallway to make them feel more at home would be beneficial. The kindergarten teacher I teamed up with said that she would like to see a nursery rhyme theme since she will be covering that unit shortly. Therefore, I researched popular nursery rhymes and then had a few weeks of arts and crafts. I began this project by lining the walls with blue and green construction paper to give the illusion that we were in the middle of a field with bright blue skies. Then, I created “humpty dumpty” a brick wall with flowers surrounding him. I also cut out stars to make the nursery rhyme “twinkle twinkle little star” come to life. I finished off with “itsy bitsy spider” where I had the water spout, rain with clouds in the sky, and spiders all along the wall. To add more flare to this project, I also created a spring theme with it, so I had flowers and a rainbow and butterflies all over the walls. Overall, I think this project went over really well with both students and teachers alike. If you have the opportunity to work at Elkton, I highly suggest taking it because not only will you learn a ton, but you will also feel so welcomed and important while you are there!

### ***Fall 2020 – Taylor Bronaugh***

My field placement site this semester was at Elkton Elementary School (EES) in Elkton Virginia. My participation in this site was one of the most impactful experiences I have had while at JMU. This year there were approximately 310 students enrolled at EES. Their mission statement is *“We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology and problem solving*



*skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community.”* From my experience working at EES, I believe this mission is upheld. EES strives for all students to succeed. My future career goals include working in a public school system. With that in mind, I was looking for opportunities where I could enhance my knowledge and comfort working in a school. I looked forward to making an impact on the students' lives with whom I worked.

One of the main responsibilities that I had at my placement was to serve as a mentor for a group of students. We met individually once a week. Our meetings were a time where I offered unconditional positive support to the students. During this time, students were given a safe space where they had the opportunity to be themselves and interact with me. Sometimes I would bring specific materials that targeted a student's individual needs, or opportunities for growth. I worked with my supervisor and some of my students' teachers to brainstorm ideas for what I could do during our time together that would have a sustained impact on them. For example, with one student, I prepared worksheets and activities around positive self-image and personal development. We worked together on these activities, so it didn't feel like "work" per se. I made it fun and engaging, and we would talk about the answers we put down and how they made us feel. This was something I enjoyed because during my time working with this student, I could see small improvements, which was so rewarding for me. I had planned to create more activities that targeted my students individually after our spring break, but unfortunately my time with them was cut short due to COVID-19.

Another role that I had was assisting my supervisor during group counseling sessions. Group counseling consisted of my supervisor planning themes or topics around issues that were of a particular need to the student body. During my time, I worked with the second grade and fifth grade group on anger management and impulsivity. I was initially nervous about working with the fifth-grade group, because I was unsure of the severity of their counseling needs due to their age and the topics we were discussing, but they ended up being my favorite group of students. At the end of our time, I felt like I was able to develop relationships with them. I enjoyed group counseling because it let me meet more of the students in the school, and I had the opportunity to play a role in their personal development. During group counseling it was my responsibility to assist the students in completing worksheets, and reminding them to stay quiet and on task while my supervisor was talking.

I also prepared materials my supervisor needed for her counseling class, group counseling sessions, or for the latest bulletin board she was creating. Doing these small tasks for her gave me a sense of accomplishment because I knew that with my completion of these, she could complete her more pressing tasks. While it might have been tedious work for me, I was happy to help with it because I knew that it would be something off her full plate.

Finally, my other role was to assist my supervisor during her monthly counseling classes. In this position, my role was closely associated with one of a teacher's assistants. I made sure the students were staying on task, I would help hand out materials, and overall make sure that our lesson time ran smoothly. If my time was not cut short, I would have worked it out with my



supervisor to have a larger role in this position. That could have been offering to read the story that went along with the lesson or explaining the activity that the students were going to complete.

Overall, I am so thankful for the time that I had at Elkton. I felt welcome, and my supervisor was incredible. She encouraged me to gain as many experiences as I could while at EES. I attended meetings with her and had the opportunity to supervise and assist in some special education classes because that was something I was interested in observing. I am thankful that my supervisor was flexible and encouraged me to get as much extra experience as I could. One big take-away that I had during my time at EES was that this experience solidified to me that I am on the right career path. I have so much enthusiasm for going to school each day, and finding ways to better the experience of the students and teachers with whom I will work.

It is hard to think about any disadvantages that I had while at Elkton. One could see the 30-minute drive as a disadvantage, but I always found it as a relaxing way to start my day. A main advantage of this site is the flexibility of the job requirements. Like I said before, with the help of my supervisor I was able to better tailor my time at Elkton in ways that were unique to my own learning needs. Outside of my mentorship and group counseling times that were all predetermined, I had the opportunity to make my experience unique to me.

My contribution project unfortunately was not able to be implemented this semester due to COVID-19. I was planning on creating a mindfulness intervention for a second-grade class. The purpose of this was to help these students increase their self-awareness and attention to the present, i.e. paying attention during classroom lessons. I would have worked out a time with their teacher that fit both of our schedules where I would come to their classroom and lead them in a mindfulness activity. I would have “Mindfulness Activity Cards” with different mindfulness prompts that could be completed in approximately a minute. I would also have mindfulness body scans and other longer forms of re-centering through predeveloped scripts. Finally, I would have taught the students breathing techniques that they could use when they were feeling overwhelmed. They would have received individual handouts of these techniques for their own visual assistance and future reference. I would have also created a poster where students and the teacher could refer to if they felt like there was a need for a group mindfulness breathing break.

Working at EES was a positive experience. While I was sad that my experience at EES was cut short due to COVID-19, I know that I gained invaluable knowledge and had an amazing experience. I would highly recommend working at this school.

### ***Fall 2020 – Sam Scully***

This semester I had the opportunity to be a part of the JMU psychology field placement. I interned at Elkton Elementary shadowing the counseling department. Elkton is located in Rockingham county and home to about 370 students, pre-kindergarten through fifth. Due to covid-19, the school was at limited capacity with only grades pre-k through first. Many challenges came with going to school during a global pandemic. However, Elkton continued to ensure a positive, safe environment for all faculty, teachers, and students. Their mission statement is, “We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of



Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology, and problem-solving skills.” Elkton prides itself on giving students all the necessary tools for success. Whether that be advanced technology, individualized learning, and special education. The goal of Elkton is to bring together school, home, and the community. When parents, teachers, and students are one cohesive unit, education is at its best. Elkton strives to provide everyone with an effective education to promote long term academic achievement.

During my time with the counseling department, I learned a tremendous amount about the role of a school counselor and school psychologist. I delved into the logistics and daily routine of their jobs. My supervisor, Cindy Hepner has been the school counselor for over 18 years. She has duties ranging from guidance lessons and individual/group counseling sessions to scheduling and lunch duty. Due to Covid-19 Ms.Hepner's routine was slightly different from years past. Every other week, she would hold guidance lessons. We would travel to various classrooms and give the scheduled lesson of the week. Usually consisting of yoga and breathing activities. All centering around alleviating stress and mindfulness strategies. Our curriculum for the first semester involved feelings and moods. We encouraged students to express themselves through feeling words. We wanted them to practice communicating emotions such as angry, excitement, and upset. The breathing activities teach the students to take a second and calm down after an intense emotion. My other intern duties consisted of individual mentorship. I would meet with students who were struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. I was there to be a friend and make them feel more comfortable at Elkton. I visited them weekly and we set goals in hopes of accomplishing them by the end of the semester. I also made copies, helped in the cafeteria, and assisted other teachers. For my contribution project, Ms. Hepner and I collaborated on making a multifaceted resource to assist parents during COVID-19 and online learning. We added links to sources related to coping with a child's newfound anxiety, depression, and pandemic related stressors. In addition, we had tips to promote socio-emotional learning at home, handling grief, loss, bullies, and divorce. Online learning created difficulties for many families. The parents corner is meant to aid parents, and hopefully, alleviate any added stress due to virtual learning.

The school psychologist would typically come into Elkton once a week and evaluate the students. The school psychologist would use assessment strategies to determine the needs of the students. Both the school counselor and psychologist are looking to provide all the tools necessary for a child to succeed. Once the assessment process is over, they may intervene in the students' learning. The counselor and psychologist were primarily responsible for special education testing. Based on what they observed during the assessment, and information given by others they would decide what is best for the student. Typically there is a consultation with the parents, teachers, school counselor, other faculty before any permanent changes are made. These experiences allowed me to better understand the difference between a school counselor and a school psychologist.

My field placement was a very hands-on experience that strengthened my knowledge of the field of psychology. I learned skills that I can certainly use in my future academic and career endeavors. Communication and asking questions was essential during my field placement experience. When a student had an issue that I couldn't solve directly I made sure to find a source



who could. Collaboration with students, teachers, and faculty was extremely important. Asking questions and being attentive help promote teamwork. I plan to continue prioritizing collaboration in future jobs and while working with colleagues. I was also able to improve my time management and organizational skills. Balancing an internship, college courses, a job, and COVID-19 was not a simple task. I learned ways to devote time with the students while also ensuring all my intern duties were being met. I had to be cognizant of time and schedules. This helped me carry out tasks that needed to be done by certain deadlines. Working in an elementary school is very unpredictable. One never knows what a student might say or do at any given moment. Therefore, I always allocated time in my day for the unexpected. Especially in a time of COVID-19, schooling is ever-changing. I learned to adapt to the constant shift of the school day and in turn affected my daily life. Adjusting to new health precautions and teacher, student needs was something I learned to strive off of. Being prepared and organized was essential to succeeding at my job.

Elkton Elementary has a very friendly, inviting atmosphere. I always felt welcomed and truly enjoyed my time this semester. The teachers and faculty made me feel a part of the Elkton family. The students were always eager to talk to me about anything on their minds. My favorite part of interning was the in-depth look at the role of a school counselor. My interest in integrating psychology and helping children grew. Counseling is certainly a passion of mine. Elkton gave me an amazing opportunity that in turn taught me more about the imperative job of a counselor. One limitation of this field placement site, however, would be the distance. Elkton is a 30-minute drive from JMU. I am lucky enough to have the time and means to travel an hour each day for the internship. Not everyone is as privileged, and this is something to take into account before accepting this field placement. Overall my time at Elkton was a positive experience that I will cherish forever.

### ***Spring 2020 – Meredith Hynes***

This semester I completed my Field Placement experience at Elkton Elementary School with the school counselor, Cindy Hepner. Their mission is to guide students to success by providing them with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology, and problem-solving skills in order to pass SOLs and become positive and productive members of society through an active partnership of school, home, and community. They aim to accommodate all students and provide the best learning experience possible. Services offered by the counseling department include: individual counseling, group counseling, monthly classroom lessons, and crisis intervention.

Although I was unable to observe individual counseling sessions due to legality reasons, I had the opportunity to mentor eight students of my own for 30 minutes each week. Many of these students had difficulties with social skills, behavior, home life, and/or forming positive relationships in the classroom but did not or no longer qualified for individual counseling. During our time together, we played games of their choice, ate lunch together, and formed



positive relationships to facilitate growth in other areas of their lives. This was the most meaningful and rewarding aspect of my placement at Elkton as I had the opportunity to learn about these students and form bonds with them while also practicing some aspects of individual counseling. Additionally, I assisted in two lunch groups (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades) on anger management that consisted of six to seven students each. In these groups, students worked in booklets and shared their personal experiences in managing their emotions especially regarding situations that caused anger. While I did not facilitate these groups, I assisted in managing the students, picking them up and taking them back to class, and preparing materials. I also observed and assisted in classroom lessons by preparing materials, setting up the classroom, and monitoring students during activities. I observed Pre-K lessons every week, 5<sup>th</sup> grade lessons every two weeks, and all other grades once a month. Also, once a month, the staff held ASSIST meetings that I had the opportunity to observe and participate in. There was one meeting for each grade in which the counselor, special education supervisor, either the principal or assistant principal, and all of the teachers for that grade were in attendance. These meetings were held to discuss struggling students either academically, behaviorally, or emotionally and their progress and next steps to take with them. Their primary aim was to keep all of the staff on the same page and highlight any red flags to look for in those students. Occasionally, I sat in on calls that my supervisor made to Child Protective Services to report incidents of concern. Through these calls I learned about the process of reporting cases for a child and the necessary next steps to take. Lastly, I developed and created a bulletin board based on the Character Pillar “Trustworthiness” for the counseling department.

Elkton was truly a great fit for me. All of the teachers and staff were so friendly, accommodating, and willing to help and involve me in activities and events whenever possible. They all worked really well together and it showed in each of the students that I worked with. They were willing to help me whenever I needed it and made me feel very welcome and a part of the community. I thoroughly enjoyed how full my days were in order to maximize my experience and have the most time hands-on working with students. Despite having a set schedule every week, each day brought something new and exciting for me to conquer. I love the unexpectedness that children bring to the table and how ready and willing they are to take on new and exciting tasks. Most days, I had my set responsibilities and carried them out on my own. I was rarely a shadow which made me feel like I was doing valuable work that benefitted both the students and the school as a whole. I felt as though I was a trusted member of the staff and this independence gave me confidence.

I plan to go to grad school for school counseling and carry out a career in the field. Therefore, all of the things I learned at Elkton are very applicable and provided me with real life experiences that I had previously learned about in my classes. In high school I completed a similar internship with a much smaller hours requirement; however, I never had the opportunity to observe group counseling. Learning about group counseling at Elkton was extremely valuable to me and broadened my horizons. I really enjoyed group sessions as I was able to observe how



the students interact with each other which provided insight on how they typically act in the classroom and why they were in these groups. Many of the students that I mentored individually were also in these groups which provided a contrast that I was unable to see when I was solely working one-on-one with them. I believe it will be very important in a counseling career to have the ability to understand the different dimensions of students when they are in different settings. Simply because they are pleasant when they are one-on-one with an administrator does not mean the same is true in the classroom, on the playground, or at home. My supervisor was extremely involved and aware of many students' home lives and families which I saw to be extremely beneficial when it came to students suddenly acting different at school. She was quickly able to deduce that their dad was back in the home, they were off of their medication, etc. This is a skill that comes with lots of practice and a skill that I hope to gain in the future.

I spent some time researching drug education for elementary students and updating my supervisor's lesson plan for fifth graders. Although I didn't have the opportunity to see any of these lessons in action, I found that activities such as role playing and decision making are essential in implementing effective drug prevention programs for elementary aged students. Through my experience at Elkton, I learned that many of the students I was working with had parents, guardians, or siblings who were involved with drugs and regularly brought them into the home. Through this knowledge, I found that students who are exposed to drugs and alcohol are more likely to experiment with them sooner.

I loved being at Elkton and I cherish the relationships that I formed with each of those students. I learned to manage my time wisely and carry out my responsibilities with confidence. This has been an extremely valuable experience for me in which I learned so much about school counseling and the importance of interacting with a wide range of both students and faculty. I am grateful for the opportunity and the knowledge that I am walking away with.

### ***Fall 2019 – Alison Palmer***

The mission of Elkton Elementary School is that all children can succeed. Elkton Elementary believes that effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community. We serve approximately 380 students from pre-k through fifth grade with a sixteen to one teacher to student ratio. We provide services such as special education, counseling, speech, TDT and extra reading and math help. My experience at Elkton Elementary consists of meeting with eight kids individually once a week for thirty minutes. During this time, we play games, play with cars or dolls, eat lunch together or go to recess together. I help facilitate lunch groups consisting of 6-7 children who struggle with the same things such as divorce of their parents or death of a loved one. For these groups, each student receives a work booklet dealing with the situation that I make for each kid. I have sat in on TDT meetings and a CPS call. I also make copies, sharpen pencils, create and hang bulletin boards and clean the classroom.



I believe that Elkton Elementary is a great school academically and as a work place. All the faculty are very friendly, knowledgeable in their fields and work as a team very well. One thing that was brought to my attention was that the teachers are not always on the same page with the counselor and special education coordinators in that meetings are constantly rescheduled for no reason and they bring specific kids to the attention of the counselor and special education coordinator but then do not follow through with meetings. I am not sure if that is an issue for higher ups such as the principal or district to address, or one that needs to be talked about through the parties involved. I loved how friendly and welcoming all of the staff is here. The lunch ladies and janitors would even hold conversation and keep up with me almost as much as my supervisor did. The kids were all amazing and I am so lucky to have been a part of their lives for even just four months. During my experience here at Elkton, I gained a very clear understanding of the difference between school counseling and school psychology. I learned that counselors do a lot more busy-work, such as bulletin boards and teaching classes, where psychologists do a lot more testing and intervention preparation. Before this experience, I did not fully understand the difference between school counseling and school psychology, which I heard is a big deal, so I am beyond thankful to be able to have an in depth understanding that has confirmed my goal of becoming a school psychologist. I have also realized through this experience that I do in fact want to be in an elementary school. I knew I loved working with young kids, but this semester has proved to me that I want to work with the elementary level because at this age, these kids do need so much help from adult supervision and they are so thankful to see you every day.

This experience was beneficial to me in so many ways. I am so appreciative of being able to spend full school days in a school mostly independently. I know that I work and learn better when I am thrown in to situations and am expecting to work through things on my own, figure out what I am struggling with, learn how to ask the right questions and then put that new insight into action – that is exactly what I was given here. I was able to ease my way into the school system and spend full days in the life of a school counselor which is an experience that not many other people are offered in their undergraduate years. I believe this will fully prepare me for graduate school and any real life experiences with kids or the school system I may encounter. This experience has also taught me just how much I can handle at one time. I was at Elkton Elementary from 8am-2pm on Mondays and 8-3pm on Wednesdays where I would then drive back to campus with barely enough time to find parking and attend 2 classes, with another 3 classes to attend on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So while I was taking 5 classes and attending school twice a week, I was also making time to do homework, apply for grad schools, study for and take the GRE, hold an officer position in my sorority, start a new club on campus and assist my younger brother in getting acclimated to college life as he is a freshman this year at JMU. I never thought I would be able to handle so much at one time, but this experience has really taught me how to manage my time, set priorities and make sure I get enough sleep at night, and I could never be more grateful.

*Spring 2019 – Alexis Grias*



Elkton Elementary is an elementary school in Rockingham County that serves over 490 students. Their mission statement is *“We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology and problem-solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community.”* The staff at Elkton Elementary works hard every day to ensure that each child is given a proper education in a fitting environment. They provide support, both inside and outside of the classroom. The school guidance counselor has many responsibilities that she must fulfill. She provides one on one counseling, group counseling, specific therapy groups, teaches guidance classes once or twice a month, does psychological and behavioral testing. On top of this, the guidance counselor works together with other members of the community that interact with children, such as doctors, parents, CPS, and Social Services. They also attend monthly ASSIST meetings, which help determine which services a child might need.

During my time at Elkton Elementary, I was given many opportunities to expand on certain skills and knowledge that I have. My main duty was to mentor nine children who either had severe academic or behavioral issues, some type of disorder (ADHD or Autism), or a troubled home life. I visited with them for 30 minutes each, and they decided what they wanted to do during that time. Another goal is to try and set goals with each of the children and try to meet them by the end of the semester. I did not have to explicitly tell the children about these goals, but would simply subtly work on them. This site also gave me the opportunity to teach and assist with guidance classes. I would prepare documents, ensure the classroom was ready for classes, and assist with many classes ranging in age group. I also was given the opportunity to teach one of the guidance classes by myself, which helped to improve my skill of managing over 20 children at once. Every week, there are lunch groups, which is group therapy for a specific topic, such as anger or anxiety. While I could not facilitate these discussions, I did help in preparing the necessary documents and worksheets for the children. I was also allowed to comment during these sessions when appropriate. On occasion, the school counselor allowed me to sit in when making phone calls to Child Protective Services. She would explain the process of reporting and opening a case for a child. Lastly, I was in charge of two bulletin boards that the guidance department does for the Character Counts traits. I had to plan, prepare, and execute an idea for two boards about Fairness and Trustworthiness.

This site was truly an ideal fit for me. The site supervisor was extremely friendly and helpful while I was there. She was receptive to my ideas and always gave me opportunities to expand on my knowledge and skills. Her management style is fairly laid-back. You have a set schedule for the days that you are there, and sometimes she will leave a note about things that need to be done for that day. However, she does not hover over you all day, but instead gives you the freedom to do these things on your own. She will check in to ask about things are going with your mentees and will make helpful suggestions. She was very good at including me in things that are related to school counseling, such as letting me join her during a county counseling



department meeting. Everyone else at Elkton Elementary was extremely kind and receptive to having an outsider in their school. They all helped me when I needed it and treated me as one of their own. Sometimes, you have to change the schedule of one child to accommodate for another. It was also hard juggling the different schedules of nine different children, especially when I had to see all of them in one day due to days off or snow days. There were quite a few days where I had to visit with all nine children in one day, so it became hard to do other things during the day, such as eat or work on other things that needed to be done. However, this is rarer in the fall time. Some kids might not seem interested in the beginning, but you can't let this discourage you. Over time, I noticed that children who seemed unenthusiastic in the beginning were asking when I was coming to get them again. It is also crucial that if you miss time with a child for whatever reason that you make it up as soon as possible. For some children, it might not be a big deal to them, but for others, this time means a lot to them so it's hard for them going a week or more without seeing their mentor. Overall, Elkton Elementary is a wonderful and welcoming site that is good for someone who tends to be more independent but is open to suggestions. Any complaints that I have about this site are miniscule and can be easily solved.

Once I graduate, I plan to get a job as a mental health technician at a hospital within the child and adolescent unit. This site provided me with a lot of valuable information and skills that will hopefully prove helpful within this job realm. This site placement really helped me to develop my communication skills, both with children and with adults. I had to learn how to change my dictation to be more fitting for children. I also had to learn things about nine different children: family life, hobbies, favorite games, best friends, favorite treats, etc. This, in particular, will help me as a mental health technician, since I will be responsible for looking after up to 20 children and adolescents at one time. Being at EES also improved my communication skills with people who are higher ranking than me. This is a necessary skill for any job that requires you to interact with people who are above you. Communication is key for a job like mental health technician, so I am glad that I got to improve upon it while at Elkton Elementary.

Elkton Elementary is a perfect site for anyone who wants to go into a profession dealing with children. While this isn't exactly what I want to do as a career, it provided me with so much valuable knowledge and experience that I feel prepared to go off and use that in whatever field I pursue. The best part of the whole program was seeing all of the kids blossom by the end of the 16 weeks. The change becomes evident, and it is the greatest feeling ever as a psychology major.

### ***Fall 2018 – Elizabeth Spare***

This semester I interned at Elkton Elementary School with the guidance counselor Cindy Hepner. Elkton has Head Start, Preschool, and K-5 grades. Elkton's mission statement is, "We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology, and problem solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best



achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home, and community.”

Mrs. Hepner is the school’s only guidance counselor and has a plethora of duties, the first being individual and group counseling. I was able to attend and observe group counseling. The first group I observed was the divorce group with third grade. Before leaving, I also had the opportunity to observe a few of the grief group sessions. For the groups, I helped copy and put together the activity booklets that the children worked in each time we met. I also picked up the children from class, took them to get their lunches, and then after the session take them back. After the sessions, if there was something worth noting Mrs. Hepner would point out group dynamics or behaviors that she noticed to me.

Another one of Mrs. Hepner’s responsibilities is responsive services. When a child is having a meltdown or issue in a classroom, Mrs. Hepner is often a responder and goes to calm the child and deescalate the situation. She also makes many of the Child Protective Services (CPS) calls. This is because she often knows the child’s history from the time they arrived at the school, whereas their teacher has only known them since the beginning of the school year. Unfortunately, there is a lot of poverty in the area and many of the children that come to Elkton Elementary are underprivileged and have difficult home lives. Therefore, Mrs. Hepner makes a number of calls to CPS. One of the opportunities through this is that I was able to sit in and listen on the phone calls to see how they go, what information is told, and when or when not to make calls to CPS. Mrs. Hepner also helps send food home with children over weekends and holiday breaks to ensure they have food to eat.

Mrs. Hepner also teaches guidance class once a month to all the grades. Additionally, she teaches fifth grade guidance class every other week. I am able to help Mrs. Hepner prepare for classes by sharpening pencils, making copies, making sure the classroom is straight, and occasionally making posters. I made two posters this semester. The first was attention grabbers for when the class gets chatty or rambunctious she can get their attention through the different sayings on the poster. The other poster I put together was an emotions chart Mrs. Hepner created to help the children learn to distinguish between different levels of emotions. I also help Mrs. Hepner during class by keeping the students on task and passing things out as needed. She is also open to letting you teach a class, all you have to do is ask! Mrs. Hepner teaches based on the six character pillars: Citizenship, Responsibility, Caring, Respect, Trustworthiness, and Fairness. She has a bulletin board showing the children nominated from each classroom for that character pillar. I was able to design the Caring bulletin board, so I did “Sharing the Gift of Caring” and put the children’s faces on presents.

Furthermore, Mrs. Hepner attends many meetings. She is in constant communication with administration, teachers, and parents. I was able to attend the ASSIST meetings for kindergarten. Those attending the meeting include vice principle, teachers, guidance counselor, TDT, and special education teachers. During these meetings, children’s behaviors of concern or academic problems are discussed to determine what resources the child may need.

At this site, one of your main priorities will be the children you are mentoring. I mentored seven children weekly for about thirty minutes. I would pick them up and drop them back off for class or the place they are supposed to be. For the first few weeks, you will start getting to know



the children and building bonds with them through playing games and having conversations. About halfway through the semester you will work with Mrs. Hepner to set goals to work towards with the children. To me, this was one of the most rewarding parts of attending this site. I had not had the opportunity previously to work one-on-one with children, and therefore this allowed me to confirm that I do want to work with children in my future career. I enjoyed getting to know the children individually and building a bond with them. To know that I had a positive impact on their lives is such a great feeling.

When I interviewed at Elkton I felt as though it was the right fit for me. It was able to offer me opportunities for the things I wanted to learn about and I just got a good feeling from the atmosphere. Although Elkton is not racially diverse, the children are diverse in socio-economic status and family backgrounds. This offered me many opportunities to learn about different situations and the outcome they can have on the child. One skill I was able to build upon was working independently. Mrs. Hepner is often very busy, and some days I would not see her as often as others. Another skill I acquired how to communicate effectively with the staff in the school. If you need to reschedule a child's time, you will need to be able to talk to the teacher and figure out a good time. I also learned how to recognize behaviors of concern in the children I was mentoring. If there was anything out of the norm, I would tell Mrs. Hepner about it to keep her up to date and in case she needed to get involved. Also, as I mentioned previously I was able to learn about group dynamics in group therapy, such as level of involvement over the course of the therapy, as well as the different roles the children can take on within the group. Additionally, part of the field placement class is to give back to your site through a contribution project. For my project I helped Mrs. Hepner put together and organize a list of socio-emotional bibliotherapy books as a resource for teachers to use.

I came to Elkton Elementary not knowing exactly what route I wanted to go in the psychology field, clinical or counseling. Through this internship and mentorship, I learned that I want to do counseling with children. My ultimate career goal is to work with children with chronic illnesses and their families. I will be able to take all of the things I have learned from being at this site and apply them to my graduate studies. Mrs. Hepner was wonderful to work with and I enjoyed all of my time spent at Elkton Elementary School.

### ***Fall 2018 – Katherine Landes***

The mission of Elkton Elementary is “We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology and problem solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community”. As a school counselor we focus primarily on bridging the gap between school, home and community. In addition, our services include teaching guidance class as well as counseling specific students. The guidance counselor also responds to emergencies in the classroom. The guidance counselor is the designated person to



call CPS when necessary and coordinates with other types of counselors and psychologists in the building.

At Elkton I had the opportunity to prepare materials for guidance class and then assist in teaching guidance class. I also put up bulletin boards throughout the year in order to show off the children whose teachers picked them as exemplars in whichever pillar of guidance we were teaching at the time. There are six pillars to teach throughout the year and I helped in teaching three of them. These included citizenship, responsibility, and caring. I was also given the opportunity to mentor six students once a week for half an hour at a time throughout the year. This entailed using child-centered play therapy in order to help them improve on a specific, individualized goal throughout the year. In addition, I helped to facilitate three different focus groups. I facilitated a fourth grade divorce group, a first grade emotional skills group, and a fifth grade grief group. The purpose of these groups was to educate rather than to have a group discussion as you would with adults in a focus group. For children, just seeing that there are other children going through the same thing and then being given coping skills is what is most important.

One advantage of working at Elkton is that every day is different. There are some weeks in which we are teaching guidance and other weeks where we are working on preparing materials for guidance. The constant is that everyday you are there a certain amount of time is allotted to mentoring students, which is the most rewarding part. Seeing your students grow throughout the semester is remarkable. One student started out as shy and anxious about his parents divorce and being at a new school, but in the end was comfortable at school and with his new routine at home. Another advantage of working at Elkton is that Mrs. Hepner is very good at her job and has years of experience working with kids from which to draw from. The only disadvantage to working at Elkton is that it is slightly far away compared to other sites.

For my contribution paper I researched all the different ways that yoga can benefit students in addition to all the different populations that can benefit from practicing yoga on a regular basis. Some of the benefits include better emotion regulation, self-esteem, anger management, social skills, resilience, and sleep quality. In addition to the benefits yoga has for the general population of students, it can also help student with ADHD, Down Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and many others. I also found that the best way to structure a yoga program in a school setting is by making it voluntary and avoiding adding it to the physical education curriculum. It is also important to get teachers, parents, and students on board with enthusiasm for yoga in order to maximize the benefits. As part of my contribution project materials, I created a set of yoga cards in order to facilitate yoga during guidance class and later during yoga club meetings at Elkton. To make these I found images to represent each pose that Mrs. Hepner does on a regular basis and printed them out along with the name of each yoga pose. I then glued the image and name of the poses to cardstock paper and had each card laminated. I made them big enough so that Mrs. Hepner could hold them up for the kids to see from across the room. This way she could use them in her classroom and in the room yoga club is held in.

I learned a great deal from working at Elkton. I learned how to communicate with teachers about scheduling and about how students were doing in the classroom. In addition, I



learned how to work with children from all different populations. I worked with students who had Autism Spectrum Disorder and one who likely had ADHD. I also worked with specific groups of students who had lost a loved one or who were struggling with their parent's divorce. These students often need different attention than do the rest of the students and I learned that becoming familiar with the needs of each individual student takes time. This is why developing a rapport with the child you are working with is important. I also learned a great deal about the child protective services process. When calling from the school it is often taken more seriously because the school is usually an unbiased third party that gives reliable information. In addition, it is very rare that a child is taken from the home and this should not be expected after making a call. It is also likely that the parent or parents realize that the school called CPS on them and this infuriates them and causes them to be difficult to work with. Altogether, there is much more that goes into the CPS process than I previously realized. I was fairly unsure about what I wanted to do after graduation before I started, but after working at Elkton I have decided that being a school counselor at the elementary level is something I could see myself doing in the future.

### *Spring 2018 – Carly Glinowiecki*

This semester I had the privilege of being placed at Elkton Elementary School working closely with their school counselor. Elkton Elementary serves about 350 students from PreK to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, while also housing a Headstart program that is separate from the school itself. Their mission statement is “We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology and problem solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community.”

I worked with Cindy Hepner, the school counselor, who started working at Elkton in 2002. She is the only counselor at the school and is actively involved in the school. She has four overarching responsibilities: individual/group counseling, consultation/coordination, responsive services, and teacher and social work duties. She does lunch group counseling sessions for students who all could use counseling in a specific area. In my experience, I was able to observe a divorce and anxiety group. Once a month she teaches guidance lessons to all the grades based on 6 character pillars that the school follow. There are some grades that receive guidance classes every week or every other week. She has to constantly stay in contact with teachers and the administration to make sure everyone is on the same page about students. Under responsive services she is usually the one who makes all of the Child Protective Services (CPS) calls for the building. If a student is having a major breakdown, she usually is one of the staff members who will go down to help calm them down. She also does a Christmas program, along with others, to help get donations from churches so all students can receive presents. Ms. Hepner is involved in many staff meetings. One meeting called ASSIST happens once a month and every grade has this meeting. The meeting is to discuss students who are having academic or behavioral problems and whether or not they should be moved to student study.



My main priority at Elkton was mentoring 6 students. I met with each student once a week for 30 minutes. Mentoring students consists of playing games with them, setting a goal for them, and working towards that goal. I made genuine connections with each student and looked forward to seeing them every week. I also was able to assist a kindergarten teacher once a week with her class. I would hang up artwork, file papers, read stories to the class, and help supervise the whole class as well. In that kindergarten class I worked more closely with two boys, who both had behavioral issues. I really enjoyed being in the kindergarten class because it gave me a different perspective and I was able to observe students in the classroom. I also observed most of the guidance lessons that my supervisor taught, and assisted in any way that I could. There is also an opportunity to teach a lesson yourself, if you decide that interests you. Towards the end of the semester I became more involved in the lessons and would answer student's questions or help them with worksheets. I even got to observe some of the students that I mentored in the guidance classes and it was helpful to see them in a different setting.

Each of her guidance lessons relate to one of the character pillars from a program called "Character Counts!" The 6 pillars are fairness, trustworthiness, respect, caring, citizenship, and responsibility. Along with those pillars, a bulletin board is up in the hallway that reflects one of those pillars. I would create the board, put it up, and take it down. The board consists of pictures of students who have been nominated by their teachers who possess one of those character traits. As in any schools there are school duties that you do such as making copies, getting lessons ready, and preparing the classroom for lessons.

The staff at Elkton is very friendly and made me feel welcomed every day. Ms. Hepner was also very helpful and around if I had any questions about what to do. However, I did have a lot of independence at my site. In the mornings Ms. Hepner would give me a list of tasks to do for the day. I learned how to manage and prioritize my time but you have to be comfortable with being independent and working alone at times. Ms. Hepner is usually very busy and some days I didn't see her very often. The school is on the smaller side, so it makes it easier to form connections with students and other staff members. The population at Elkton is not very diverse but many of the students are underprivileged and have tough family lives. The school is predominately white, but about half of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, which means their family has an income below at least \$21,000. As I said earlier, the school is not very diverse in race or ethnicity which could be seen as a downside. However, the students are diverse in their family backgrounds and the different experiences they have been through. Being at Elkton elementary really opened my eyes up to what families can go through and how a student's family life can really affect them. I learned a lot about different student's background which helped to give me perspective about the area and the population.

I did my field placement in a school because I was interested in becoming a school counselor and wanted to get experience in a school setting. While being in a school I saw how important it is for all the staff in the school to communicate with each other about the students. I got exposed to many different aspects of school counseling, which gave me a better understanding of what it entails. I also learned about different jobs within the school system and what each consists of. I really enjoyed being at Elkton elementary and had a great experience! After my placement I am still interested in pursuing a career in school counseling.



### *Fall 2017 – Hope Dormire*

During the past semester, I completed my field placement experience at Elkton Elementary School with the school counselor. Over the course of about fourteen weeks, I formed important relationships and participated in unique experiences. Elkton is a small school where each child seems genuinely cared for by the staff. They serve grades pre-kindergarten through fifth, and they also have a Head Start program. The mission statement of EES is “We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology and problem solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community.”

I worked mainly with the head of the guidance department, Cindy Hepner, who has been the counselor at Elkton for fifteen years. Her responsibilities are extensive, and categorized into four main components. Most of her time is spent on “responsive services”, which includes individual and group counseling, referrals to outside counseling and services, and running the mentorship program. Group counseling is categorized by grade level and topics like grief, anxiety, divorce, and more. The mentor program consists of adults in the school and community pairing with a child experiencing an issue, and Ms. Hepner organizes all of this. The second component of Ms. Hepner’s job is consultation. She has to keep constant communication with other faculty members, parents, and sometimes outside resources for students in need of help. The third part of Ms. Hepner’s role in the school is coordination. Along with leading the mentor program, Ms. Hepner runs a student “caring club”, serves on a variety of school committees, and participates in the school ASSIST program which is an intervention prior to putting children in Student Study. The fourth part and one of the more time-consuming roles that Ms. Hepner plays is being the guidance teacher. She teaches the Character Counts curriculum to grades Kindergarten through fifth, and teaches a more introductory guidance curriculum to the Pre-Kindergarten classes.

I was fortunate enough to experience almost all the services that the Elkton counseling department has to offer. My main role was my participation in the mentor program where I had weekly 30 minute meetings with six individual students. I got to know the students by helping them with schoolwork, playing games, and doing art activities. I was able to form meaningful relationships and set small goals with each of my mentees and I left my fieldwork experience glad to have met them. Another one of my responsibilities was creating the school bulletin board that went along with each of the Character Counts units. I designed each of them based on the month and put pictures of students that were nominated by their teachers to represent the character trait. One of the most valuable experiences I had was participation in classroom guidance lessons and the small group counseling sessions. Since these activities are so much of what a guidance counselor does, it was important for me to take part in them. I got to see how Ms. Hepner designed curricula from the same topic for different grade levels to meet each



student at their current stage of development and cognition. The group counseling was very interesting to watch, because there were so many similarities and differences between the different grade levels and genders in participation. The group I worked with for the majority of the semester was a fourth grade “anger management” group consisting of both boys and girls who either had trouble with anger at school or home. Another group I worked with was a girls’ “friendship” group which mainly focused on bullying behaviors between girls. After observing and helping with these groups, it was easy to see why interventions such as these are needed in elementary schools. One of my smaller roles was sitting in on ASSIST meetings with each grade level’s faculty and administration to discuss students having issues. I did not previously know how much went into getting students the individual help that they need in school, and it was very inspiring to be a part of.

I loved my experience at Elkton because it kept me on my toes. With a fluctuating school calendar and unexpected issues popping up all the time, no two days were alike. Ms. Hepner is very organized and gave me a detailed calendar of when I would have my mentees or when groups or classes were, so although the schedule changed a lot I always knew where I was supposed to be. Besides being organized, Ms. Hepner is also a wonderful person to work with. She clearly cares for each student in the school and she is also willing to answer any questions you may have. The school itself is small but still busy, and an advantage of the size means that you get to know the students fairly easily over one semester. One of the disadvantages of the school being in such a small town is that there is not much diversity, so Elkton Elementary might not experience some of the issues related to diversity that other elementary schools may. Other than this drawback, the school was a wonderful place to learn and the students made the 30 minute commute very worth it.

### ***Spring 2017 – Morgan Grant***

For the spring 2017 semester, I completed my field placement experience at Elkton Elementary School in the school counseling program. The mission of the school is to give children the tools to successfully prepare them to pass their SOLs and to create outstanding citizens. Elkton Elementary’s school’s mission statement is “We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology and problem solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community.” The school hosts grades Pre-K to 5<sup>th</sup> and also provides a Headstart program. The school provides library, art, music, computer, P. E. and guidance as specialty programs. Additional resources the school provides include special education, reading, speech, and a gifted education program (aka as Challenge).

My experience involved working under the supervision of the school counselor, Cindy Hepner. A majority of my duties included mentoring students, assisting with the guidance class, observing lunch group and TDT meetings. My main responsibility was mentoring eight children on a weekly basis varying from grades K-4<sup>th</sup> grade. I met with each of my mentees for thirty



minutes and got to know them by playing with table top games, making arts and crafts and assisting them with academic help. The purpose of the mentorship was to have them reach a goal and to provide positive companionship. Goals for each child ranged from boosting self-esteem to increasing pro-social behavior. As the semester progressed I was able to see improvement in many of my mentees and was able to develop a relationship with them. During guidance class I assisted my supervisor by helping to manage the class and to help students with their worksheets. I was able to witness the differing developmental abilities across the various grade levels. I was able to see many of my mentees in guidance class so it was neat that I got to see how they behave and interact in a group setting. I also learned about the curriculum used as well as the media supplies and academic resources that was used to teach these lessons. For the semester I was able to observe the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade anger management lunch group. This was an interesting opportunity because I was able to witness how my supervisor guided the discussions and encouraged confidentiality. I was also able to see how these children differed compared to their peers with their emotional regulation. Lastly, I was given the opportunity to watch TDT meetings where student behaviors were discussed. These meetings helped me to understand some of the problems that were going on with a student as well as the steps the faculty were attempting to implement to correct the issue.

An advantage with working at Elkton is that there are various things to do and no day looks exactly the same. Another advantage is that because I was the only intern in the school counseling department on my designated days, I got to experience a variety of different opportunities. I was also able to get individualized time to ask my supervisor questions regarding Elkton and my contribution project or advice regarding the behaviors of particular students. I was able to observe TDT meetings where the TDT counselors, my supervisor and administration talked about behavioral problems and potential ways to change them. One disadvantage of working at Elkton is that it is further away compared to some of the other field placement sites located near JMU. The commute is not too long as it is 30 minutes away, but weather, traffic and class scheduling could potentially become a minor problem. A limitation at Elkton is that the student population is not racially/ethnically diverse compared to some of the other schools in the Harrisonburg area. Another limitation is that mentees may end up moving unexpectedly and sometimes you may not get to say goodbye. What I really liked about the site was the small population and the sense of community as one could tell that the faculty and staff cared for the students. I liked observing the lunch group as I found the concept very interesting. It was encouraged to see the kids learn to discuss their problems and brainstorm efficient ways to solve or handle them.

Throughout my experience I have further developed my experience working with children of various grade levels and working with at-risk students. I have realized building relationships with at-risk kids may take more time than children who are not at-risk. I have learned how the same theme or topic in a school counseling class can be applied to students of different ages. For example for the theme "respect", the Pre-K class would learn about facial emotional recognition in oneself and others while in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class the focus would be on bullying and harassment. I was also able to perform independent work and to ask appropriate questions regarding the side assignments I was allocated with. Overall, I was able to sharpen



many skills and to learn to think quickly on my feet to help solve unexpected problems. I was also able to learn more about CPS reporting procedures and was able to witness a few calls.

This site definitely allowed me to see a good portion of the everyday tasks and responsibilities of an elementary school counselor. I had lots of hands on experience and interaction with children and staff on a daily basis. I was able to see the rewards and obstacles of working as a school counselor and it helped me to rethink what the job entails. Nevertheless, I am still passionate about becoming a school counselor. I recommend this site to any field placement student who would like to become a school counselor or would like to work with children in the future.

### ***Fall 2016 - Sarah Leiserson***

This semester, I completed my field placement experience at Elkton Elementary School. The mission statement at Elkton Elementary School (EES) is “We believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology and problem solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe effective education is best achieved through a safe environment and an active partnership of school, home and community.” At EES, there are students of all grade levels from Head Start to fifth grade. As outlined by the mission statement, the main goal at EES is to prepare students for success by teaching them the skills necessary to do well on SOL tests and then become positive members of society.

My field placement experience was centered on working with the school counselor, Cindy Hepner. My supervisor’s responsibilities include working with students individually, facilitating group counseling sessions, and teaching guidance class. As a field placement student, my main responsibility at EES was mentoring seven at-risk children from various grade levels. I met with each child for a thirty-minute session each week, created an individualized goal for them, and then worked to help each student achieve this goal. For example, I worked with one student on developing better sportsmanship skills. In doing so, while we played games during our mentoring sessions I placed less emphasis on winning, and focused more on having fun. By the end of the semester, this student did not think about keeping score while playing games, but instead was happy just to play. Over the course of the semester, I was able to see gradual changes in each student and work with them to achieve their goals. This aspect of my role at EES allowed me to improve my mentoring skills and learn how to best interact with students at various developmental levels. Mentoring these students made it possible for me to help foster their personal growth and strengthen my leadership skills.



Additionally, I was able to improve my classroom management skills and observe while my supervisor taught guidance classes for various grade levels. During guidance class, I helped students with worksheets and activities. By observing the lessons taught on the same topic to different grade levels, I was able to assess the similarities and differences in lesson plans, which I found interesting. Another unique opportunity that I had at EES was observing ASSIST and Student Study meetings in which teachers from each grade level, administrators, and my supervisor discussed whether or not children should be tested to be placed in the Special Education program. Observing these meetings allowed me to see how a school counselor collaborates with other teachers and administrators at the school in order to do what is best for the student.

Throughout the semester, I worked on various projects and helped with small tasks whenever I had a free moment. For example, some smaller tasks that I worked on regularly include making copies, sharpening pencils, preparing the classroom for students, etc. On the other hand, a larger project that I worked on was helping create two character pillar bulletin boards. After my supervisor helped me create the first bulletin board, I was able to create the second one on my own. I enjoyed this project because it gave me a lot of independence, allowed me to be creative when coming up with an original idea for the bulletin board, and work at my own pace.

One of my favorite opportunities that I had at EES was sitting in on group therapy sessions on various topics (divorce, grief, stress management, etc.). This allowed me to observe how my supervisor facilitated lunch groups to help students cope with these difficult issues. I compiled workbooks for the students to use during these sessions and was able to observe while my supervisor read many books about the topic of each group, facilitated discussions with the students, and guided students in completing pages from the workbooks.

An advantage of working at EES is that I had the opportunity to work with students one-on-one and watch as they developed and achieved the goals that I set for them. Another benefit of working at EES is that it is a small school, so I was able to get to know many students and teachers through the various guidance classes, lunch groups, and the children that I mentor. I was also able to see many different aspects of what an elementary school counselor does, such as teaching guidance class, facilitating lunch groups, attending ASSIST and Student Study meetings, etc. Moreover, I always had a variety of projects to work on that were engaging and meaningful, so I always felt like I was being productive and contributing something to my site. One limitation of this site is that the student population is not as ethnically diverse as some other schools in the area. However, the student population at EES is unique in a different way because many students come from a low socioeconomic status. Another disadvantage is that EES is



located farther from JMU than some other school sites that are offered, so this may be an issue for students in the spring because snow days may affect scheduling.

The most important skill that I developed while working at EES was learning how to be a good mentor to students. Developing rapport with some students was difficult at first, but learning how each student is unique made it challenging and fun to create ways to keep students engaged during the mentoring sessions. Going along with that, I learned how to relate to students of various ages because each mentee was at a different level developmentally, socially, and academically. Learning how to be a good mentor influenced my career goal of becoming a school counselor because it gave me a preview of how I could find innovative ways to keep children engaged while having a counseling session with them and find activities for children to do in class that are appropriate for their developmental level.

Overall, my experience at EES has taught me a lot about the role of an elementary school counselor. I have really enjoyed learning various skills and was able to gain a lot of hands-on experience working with students individually, in small groups, and in a classroom setting. I was able to consider the differences between what elementary school counselors do compared to middle or high school counselors. For example, one of the main responsibilities of an elementary school counselor is to teach guidance class, which school counselors at the other levels do not do. This experience as a whole has been beneficial and I feel that I have learned a lot not only about what a school counselor does, but also more general skills such as being a good mentor, which can translate to many careers. I would highly recommend this site to future field placement students.

### ***Spring 2016 – Olivia McCormick***

This semester I worked at Elkton Elementary in the school counseling department. The faculty there works hard to provide a safe environment for the students to learn. The school wants to provide their students with a strong foundation of technology and problem solving skills. By giving them a safe environment with faculty who are eager to teach, the students will be able to pass their SOL tests and become valuable members of society.

I'm very happy to say that I was able to have a variety of different experiences at Elkton. My main job was to mentor six students individually, on a weekly basis. During our 30-minute meetings we would play with some toys and talk. I let them pick whatever toy or game they wanted. Then we would sit down and play together or side-by-side and talk. During the first few meetings, I would ask them questions about their family, their pets, and what they like to do for fun, just to get to know them better. After a few weeks, I got to know each one of my students very well. Eventually, I would ask how their mom was doing, or if they were doing better in math. Because we met on a weekly basis, I was able to keep up with their life and their performance in school.



Another one of my jobs at Elkton was to help facilitate the lunch groups and help with classroom management during guidance lessons. Once a week my supervisor held a lunch group for a small group of students on topics like anger management or anxiety. During this time, the students would complete worksheets, share their stories, and reflect on other students' experiences. This gave the students an opportunity to feel comfortable enough to express their feelings, as well as help out their peers. I also helped my supervisor manage the classroom during her guidance lessons. My job was to pass out and collect materials, as well as walking around to facilitate during group work.

Finally, I was able to observe and participate in ASSIST and Student Study meetings. These interdisciplinary meetings were held for certain students who needed extra help or attention. Multiple different people would gather to meet, including the principal, school psychologist, teachers, parents and special education department. Usually my job was to just observe, but sometimes I would have the opportunity to speak about one of my students.

I loved getting to know my students throughout the semester and seeing them grow. I really did have fun with them and I looked forward to meeting with them. I also really liked observing the lunch groups because I felt like I could hear from students that wouldn't normally participate in a bigger classroom setting. One of my favorite parts about my time at Elkton was observing the ASSIST and Student Study meetings. I liked seeing the "behind the scenes" aspect of what goes into helping the students. During these meetings I was able to see not only how much work the faculty do to help the students, but also how much they care. I also really like interdisciplinary careers, because I think it's important for professionals hear from many different perspectives, especially when it comes to getting a child the help they need. Another thing I liked about my field placement was the school itself. Elkton Elementary is a really great school, with wonderful students and great teachers. I felt very welcome there by the faculty. Eventually, I would walk throughout the halls and say hi to the principal, teachers, and some students that I got to know.

I think Elkton is a great place for students to be if they are considering being an elementary school counselor. My supervisor was great because she gave me plenty of instructions for what I need to do, but also plenty of room to figure things out on my own. Because I was able to experience the many different aspects of being an elementary school counselor and see what it's like for them on a day-to-day basis, I have validated my decision to become a school counselor. At first, I wasn't sure if I would like working in an elementary school. But now after being at Elkton, I am more open to being an elementary school counselor.

### ***Fall 2015 – Sarah Sweatman***

The mission of Elkton Elementary School is as follows, "we believe that all children can succeed. It is our goal to provide the children of Elkton Elementary with a strong foundation of basic skills, basic technology, and problem solving skills. Armed with these skills, the students can pass the SOL tests for their grade level, and work towards becoming positive and productive members of society. We believe that effective education is best achieved through a safe



environment and an active partnership of school, home, and community.” In addition to Elkton’s mission, they offer a variety of services to children to facilitate the promotion of a healthy learning environment. One of which being counseling services provided by my supervisor and the school counselor, Cindy Hepner.

During my time spent at Elkton, I was able to complete a variety of tasks that exposed me to the profession of school counseling. For a while now, I have had an interest in school counseling and needed this experience to reassure me that I am in the right field. My supervisor has been a school counselor for fourteen years now, thirteen of those being at Elkton. Although she has a lot on her plate, she is more than willing to help out and answer any questions you have. One of my favorite aspects of this placement is that she gives you a lot of independence. In the beginning, this is a little nerve racking because you are still trying to find your place at the school. Once you get into the swing of things, however, it is nice to complete tasks on your own and have flexibility in managing your time. Specifically in the morning she will give you a list of tasks to complete, in which you can work at your own pace throughout the day. However, it is important to keep track of everything you have to do because sometimes it is difficult to find down time.

A day at Elkton is usually very jammed packed with responsibilities all throughout the day, sometimes even from minute to minute. In a job like this, you need to be able to work at a fast pace while maintaining efficiency. Some of the responsibilities I have as an intern include mentoring my children every week. Mrs. Hepner stresses that regardless of what you do, make sure to see your kids! This semester, she assigned me eight at-risk students who I mentor once a week for thirty minutes. During this time, we will usually play board games, with arts and crafts, and sometimes work on homework or reading. At first, you might not think that you are making a difference, but if you are not at school for whatever reason they will make a point to ask Mrs. Hepner where you were. They will also ask you when you return, and usually say that they missed you! Next to mentoring, another large part of the job is to assist in classroom management during guidance lessons. She usually teaches two to three guidance lessons a day and likes if you are in the room helping her when she needs it. This could be anything from passing pencils and other materials out, making sure kids are staying on track, and intervening when a child is being distracting to others. I also assist in the facilitation of group counseling lunch groups. These lunch groups last about six weeks, and might include topics such as divorce/family change, friendship skills, anxiety, grief, impulse control, anger management, and study skills. Going along with that, I participate in some clerical work such as creating and preparing the small group booklets used during the lunch group. Some other clerical tasks I do are making copies, running errands, and creating bulletin boards. Lastly, I was able to participate in some scheduled opportunities such as a field trip to the Massanutten Tech Center with the fifth graders, multiple assemblies, and observe student study meetings for the kids I am mentoring.

There are plenty of advantages, one being that everyone is very sweet and friendly. At first, it might be a little overwhelming learning where everything is in the school, meeting all the teachers, and getting to know the kids you are mentoring. It gets much easier a couple weeks in, and now, it just feels like home. Teachers and students will always smile and say hello. Mrs.



Hepner will ask you what you want out of this placement, and if you feel like you have not gotten to experience this, then she will do what she can in order for you to be able to. Communication is important, because she may never know if there is something you would like to do. As far as disadvantages, I would say that this site is a little bit further location wise compared to the other sites. Since it is about a half an hour away, I have heard in the past that there are a lot of issues with cancellations due to the weather. Luckily, I have not run into this issue during my fall semester, but just a precaution to the future spring interns.

I would say that my favorite part of this placement was the feeling I got every time I left EES. I would leave with a very rewarding feeling, knowing that I have done something to better someone else's life. Being around these kids makes it very easy for you to fall in love with them, and they make it obvious that they enjoy spending time with you too. Being an intern and feeling this way every time I leave the building, I can only imagine how rewarding it will be once I am actually a counselor. Although, I am aware that this is not always the case and there will definitely be difficult times. This brings me to the negative aspect of the job, because many of these kids are dealing with situations that they should definitely not have to at this age. It is important to note that these setbacks just make you want to serve as a constant support system to them, as well as an advocate to fight for them and ensure their well being.