



River Bend 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

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Spring 2022 - Lea Ripper

My field placement at River Bend Elementary School with school counselor Mrs. Kim Muraskin has been the single most influential, impactful and fun aspect of my undergraduate career. The mission of Rockingham County Public Schools at large is to “provide a safe, dynamic, nurturing, and innovative learning environment in which each child has the opportunity to reach his/her highest potential”. River Bend Elementary School serves grades preschool through fifth, and provides two Head Start classrooms, a Special Education PreK, a noncategorical PreK, and a mostly self-contained Autism Spectrum Disorder classroom. Applied Behavior Analysis, group counseling, individual counseling, and psychological services such as IEP (Individual Education Plan)/504 (disability) evaluations are also available.

Kim was incredibly helpful and compassionate from the first day I met her. The fact that she was so supportive of my present and future goals even after only having known me for a short period is a testament to her amazing ability as both a school counselor and as a mentor. When I started at River Bend, I was nervous and unsure about working in a school. I loved children, but I was hesitant and unconfident (my hands actually shook while simply reading a book to second graders). Being with her at the school for two days a week has drastically increased my confidence working in schools as well as my abilities to work with children and mental health. Kim clearly devotes herself to all of the children (and teachers) at River Bend and I have seen the massive impact she has had on the school’s overall mental health and wellbeing even in the short time I have been there. Her care for all of the students is evident to everyone.

The aspects of River Bend that I liked the most are getting to know Kim and other staff, the student-centered counseling with lots of toys for playing with students, the great teachers (many of whom have taught for years), the caring administration, and the material resources provided for students such as clothes and food. The welcoming atmosphere is great for any student considering working in schools who might be nervous: No one is ridiculed for mistakes and everyone is learning.

I was able to participate in the following over the semester: classroom observations, helping teach as well as occasional independent teaching of guidance lessons, observing student study meetings, observing and participating in individual and group counseling, participating in Applied Behavior Analysis groups, independent play-based mentoring, observing guardian ad litem meetings, and coaching Girls on the Run after school. Kim made it clear that I was free to shape my own experience in order to get the most out of my placement. One aspect of River Bend that may be important to disclose is that it is a Title 1 school (a school that receives special funding because a high proportion of students are in poverty). Many families lack financial and social resources, and therefore many students struggle with poverty-related Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) such as parental drug abuse, harsh corporal punishment, child abuse, child neglect/parent uninvolved, foster care placements, and custody disputes. I think that a field placement student considering River Bend should come in somewhat prepared to deal with heartbreaking and upsetting disclosures from students in a calm, professional manner. People who have experienced those events in their own childhoods may find some conversations with students upsetting or distressing if it reminds them of their own childhood; however, they may



also be better equipped to form relationships with and understand those students! Kim was helpful in teaching me how to deal with those difficult situations.

Through my field placement with Kim, I have learned many of the skills I will need to be an effective teacher in the fall: classroom management, behavior support, play-based mentoring, teaching engaging lessons, and being a nurturing role model to students through difficult times in their lives. I cannot overestimate how much Kim has helped me towards my goals and shaped the future school professional I aim to be. Halfway through the semester, I made a goal change from pursuing a master's degree to deciding to work full-time as an elementary school teacher in the fall. Getting a chance to see various school professionals work (principal, assistant principal, school counselor, school psychologist, teacher, instructional assistant, behavior support assistant, Board-Certified Behavior Analyst, and more) made me realize that school psychology may not be for me. Forming relationships and seeing many of the same students everyday through Kim's office made me realize that I want a more active, day-to-day role in children's learning and development.

Several components of the psychology major at James Madison University have prepared me for field placement. The Counseling Psychology (PSYC 325) course was helpful because I learned how to use Rogers' three conditions in talking with students: unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, and genuineness. Even when students misbehave (often), I try my hardest to retain an overall positive view of who they are inside and who they can become over time even if their current behavior disappoints me. I try to understand the world from their point of view. Learning those skills in Counseling Psychology has helped with field placement because a lot of your day is spent listening to children talk about their lives!

My contribution project, even though it did not end up coming to fruition, was planned around reducing child abuse and increasing parent-school communication at report card time. While some parents are involved at the school, River Bend has overall low parent participation; for example, routine parent-teacher conferences do not occur because no-shows were so prevalent in past years. Parent uninvolvement is upsetting because research clearly indicates that the number one variable most predictive of a child's school success is their parent's involvement in their education. My contribution project involved cards that would be attached to the outside of each report card envelope asking parents to stop what they are doing, look at the report card, and listen to what their child has to say. If they are unhappy with the report card, they are instructed to turn to the back where information on how to contact teachers and Kim is laid out so that parents know exactly what the next steps are. I believe that increasing parent involvement at the school (even if it only works for a few families) is a potential way that River Bend could increase student achievement and decrease student anxiety around report card time.

Overall, I will miss River Bend Elementary and Kim as soon as I leave for the last time this May! While working in schools is difficult, being with a supportive supervisor and mentor like Kim makes all of the difference and has made me genuinely excited and confident about my future work with children. Thank you River Bend and Kim for everything!



Fall 2021 - Erica King

Going into field placement I knew that I wanted to work with children, whether that be in elementary schools or one of the private counseling options. I ended up being placed at River Bend Elementary, where I got to intern under the school counselor and experience life in that career weekly. The mission at River Bend is to create a safe learning environment for all, respect our peers, be engaged while in school, and strive for success. As the school counseling intern, I was able to observe and experience how each of those statements were achieved. I was able to build positive relationships with several of the students and show them that I was someone who is trustworthy and that speaking with me was a safe space. I had the opportunity to meet with a specific group of fifth-grade girls once a week, and we spent time growing as a team and learning to respect all of our differences. Not only is it strongly encouraged for the students to engage in the school environment, but also for the teachers and staff. Being placed in an elementary school meant working with children of all ages, and one of the most valuable lessons that I was taught was how important it is to engage with the younger students. I was taught that you are essentially putting on a performance. In other words, I learned how to make your normal speaking voice more energetic and engage in conversation with the younger students in a very exciting way like it is the best thing you've ever heard. The same standard was also expected for the last piece of the mission statement - striving for success. Every day that I attended the school, I would want to try my best and give it my all. Through doing that, I ended up falling in love with the program and would be disappointed every time I was unable to attend.

I am quite sad that this experience has come to an end. I built a great relationship with my supervisor. Receiving constructive criticism did not offend me and I felt more motivated to learn about things that I did not necessarily know going into this program. I learned so much about interactions with children in grades K-5, and I think that this knowledge will help me in more than just the professional area of my life.

My favorite memory overall was my fifth-grade lunches. I had the same six girls from one class once a week in the counseling office where I was able to get to know the girls. Before each lunch, I would often prepare a little lesson or talking points that went along with the theme of growing as a community and respecting one another as young ladies. I think that my more receptive lessons from the girls were about bullying. Unfortunately, it seems like everyone experiences a form of bullying at some point, cyber or traditional. I wanted to send the message that under no circumstances is it acceptable and go over the ways that we as individuals and a community can prevent it. We addressed different forms of bullying and went over various scenarios and solutions, such as speaking up about experiencing or witnessing it.

I have three little sisters and was a nanny for several years, which helped me have an idea of child behavior before starting this program. It genuinely prepared me for the number of students that you see in one day. I learned to be patient with children a long time ago, so I was able to use this skill by staying very level-headed during all conversations with students of all different temperaments.

One thing that I did struggle with was being aware of the different situations that the children experience and the home lives that they come from. My time at River Bend could be



considered a culture shock due to the fact I have never been in a school where everyone received free or reduced lunches, even if it is not needed for everyone. I also saw the various types of trauma that children may experience as toddlers and the effects that the trauma takes on them as they age and develop. When I was in elementary school, I never really saw the school counselor, which caused me to have no idea how massively important they are to the proper functioning of the school system.

As I touched on earlier, I was unaware of the level of enthusiasm needed to effectively engage with the younger students. I consider myself to have been very mellow and level-headed while engaging with the students, and my supervisor saw that in me as well. I think not learning that about myself earlier on, limited my ability to create stronger bonds with younger students. However, I am very thankful for the bonds that I created with several of the older students - 3rd through 5th grade. Overall, I enjoyed my experience there daily. At first, it took a while to get used to being the adult referred to as "Ms. King" instead of being the student. However, I got used to hearing it with time and have grown to love it.

Prior to this experience, I was aware that I wanted to have a profession in some sort of counseling, but now I know I am set on wanting to be a school counselor, and then maybe down the road look into doing private family counseling. I am currently applying to graduate programs to get my masters in either School Counseling, Clinical Psychology, Counseling. Receiving a Master's in Counseling would allow me to understand the mental health of students in a more in-depth way and potentially be more effective in that area. I am also contemplating becoming an LPC, which would allow me to provide counsel, and keeping up with those requirements would allow me to feel more confident in transferring to private counseling if I chose to do that.

All in all, I had a great experience, and I would recommend an elementary school placement with anyone thinking about working with children or to someone who already enjoys working with children.

Spring 2020 – Julia Lohman

Summary of Experience

Although this field experience was cut short due to the pandemic, I really felt that I grew as a person when concerning my skills and overall knowledge when working within a school system. From working at this site, I felt confident when applying for graduate programs focused in school counseling. I am officially enrolled at George Washington University's School Counseling program and feel that working at River Bend gave me more of a clear understanding of what responsibilities are expected of a school counselor. Although River Bend Elementary does not have an official mission statement, they teach their RCPS students about following the "5 C's" where learners grow as: citizens, collaborators, communicators, critical thinkers, and creators. Working within a school system, faculty want all students to have academic success, however, they also want them to pursue having skills related to being good and productive people within our society. Through teaching them certain skills at a fairly young age, they will be better prepared as being members of the workforce as well as become advocates for implementing change within the world around them. River Bend Elementary is home to



approximately 400 students, 22 teachers ranging from pre-k to fifth grade, 15 speciality and resource teachers, 17 instructional students, and finally 7 administrators and office staff. They all work together in a horizontal organization pattern, being collaborative and creative when serving these students coming from diverse populations.

I greatly enjoyed my time working within the school system at River Bend. I was able to participate in teaching SEL, was involved in planning a “Kindness” unit, mentored specific students, passed out “snack packs” or gave donated clothing to students, set up the library for weekly teaching, was involved in weekly meetings pertaining to at risk students, and was able to shadow individual or group counseling sessions. My supervisor was very easy to talk to, exposed me to many aspects of the job, and allowed me to be hands on when working with the students and facilitating lesson plans. I felt that I had independence once I had more of an understanding of the teachers and students within the school. At first, it was really intimidating walking into an environment I was not familiar with. I also noticed how loved and respected my supervisor was to the students and wanted to achieve the same goal. This took some time, however, up until leaving JMU I felt that I finally made a connection with the students/faculty where they saw me as a part of the school. One limitation that I had was not being able to participate as much when concerning individual or group counseling sessions. I understand that I need to receive higher education in order to be qualified to do this, but I wish there was some way for me to feel more involved within this process. I felt that it may have assisted in making the students that walked in feel more comfortable with my presence being a field placement student. Another limitation I had was I had some difficulty when regulating the classroom environment. There is such a fine line of being assertive versus being seen as dismissive when working with younger students. I want them to see me as someone they can relate to and want to confide in, so I am fearful of raising my voice or making them feel guilty for acting out. However, from watching my supervisor work with students I feel that I have more of a knowledge of how to make the students feel as though they are being heard while also regulating unwanted behaviors that may disrupt the rest of the class.

One huge lesson that I learned at River Bend is the importance of creating a genuine connection with the students you are working with. Through mentoring, I noticed significant differences in the children through showing an actual interest when utilizing play therapy. I was told by teachers that because I was focused on their progress, they showed more confidence in and out of the classroom environment. In elementary school, I never had personal contact with the school counselor. Maybe it was due to not displaying unwanted behaviors or the potential limitations the school counselor had when being able to meet with every student. Looking back, I wish that I was able to meet with them as a way of feeling that I had one adult who was genuinely interested in my progress as a student. I hope as a school counselor one day, I am able to build a connection with every student while also not ignoring those “squeaky wheel” children in the process.

My contribution project focuses on the implementation of both SEL and career development programs within every school system. River bend has been teaching career development for years, but only recently added SEL/First-Step programs to their curriculum.



These programs are designed and specialized for diverse populations of students throughout the country and are heavily focused on preparing students to possess skills related to socialization and career readiness practices. These programs have shown effectiveness in student's academic achievement, attitudes, and school behaviors. There have been less problem behaviors related to substance abuse/misconduct for students economically under-resourced through using SEL and Career development by increasing a student's self-concept and social skills for prosocial interactions. For career development, implementing this program has shown improvements in career awareness and skillful planning behaviors. Career development allows for students to gain more knowledge about a range of careers whether that be careers that require higher education or careers that require specific licensure. When researching potential limitations, I was interested in gender differences for teaching these programs. For career development, research suggested that male students showed more stereotypical ways of thinking when concerning the types of careers males and females can have. In addition, there are gender differences when teaching SEL where emotional understanding played less of an important role in predicting externalizing behavior for boys than girls. A reason for this could be the influence of social norms. Emotional understanding is seen as less important to learn for boys than for girls, which may create more of an emphasis for girls to understand and identify feelings than for boys to. Since both of these programs are already being implemented within River Bend Elementary, I thought that also implementing a classroom activity related to gender stereotypes and equality could be useful. This way, students will not go into these programs feeling as if there are limitations for them due to their gender while also enhancing student's self-concept. It is critical for faculty to bring awareness to these traditional ways of thinking while additionally participating in measures to change these ideas within their students.

Skills

- Developed skills keeping children's attention during guidance lessons through observing the guidance counselor weekly-- read to classes, regulated the students independently, and walk around to each table to give guidance
- Attended weekly/monthly meetings with faculty when concerning high risk students-- able to observe, analyze/review incentive assessments, and give input when creating a plan of action for each student
- Organized materials in preparation for daily classroom lesson plans/activities-- created poster boards, made copies of coloring/writing activities, set up stations
- Shadowed individual and group counseling sessions-- worked with groups of students during their lunch periods, listened and maintained confidentiality during individual counseling, and observed phone calls to CPS
- Mentored 2-3 students-- gained skills/research related to play therapy: have a variety of objects, allow the student to have control over the play, ask questions, interpret the meaning

Fall 2018 – Ocianna Gregg



The mission within my site is project based learning, safety, mental health and consistency within the school to help the traumatic kids within this placement site. Services within the school deal with supporting students and families as they navigate through Pre-K to fifth grade on helpful problem solutions in regards to their attendance, physical mental health, and ensuring they feel safe within the school system here at River Bend Elementary School. We ensure we meet with small groups of children who have similar concerns. When students hear others talk about feelings or handling problems, they get ideas that they can use for themselves and that is very important for self-regulation. Group topics include making friends, adjusting to new school settings, study skills, stress management and safety skills. We follow a cardinal creed of the school which states “we are safe, we are kind, we are responsible” because not only do we need to take responsibility for our actions but to ensure the kids learn from each other on better live and school skills as well. As I see it, it’s better safe than sorry when teaching important information to students. This month we presented a program on safety for each grade. In kindergarten and first grade we watched a “stop, get away, get an adult” video in regards to teach kids strategies on dealing with strangers, drugs, guns, and knife safety. As well as what to do when you are home alone and when to ask for help. Mrs. Muraskin also meets with teachers and parents to plan for students, and discuss helpful strategies for problems, and to review progress for students who have red flags presented within classrooms.

What I have been able to do at this site is sit in on sessions with kids who have issues within the school and watch how Mrs. Muraskin deals with the situations accordingly. I have been able to sit in and help with lesson plans, where we teach children in the library on important lessons for each week. I have been able to see three SPED students every visit I have at River Bend. I sit with the SPED kids and help them with word plays, spelling, and reading within the 45 min meetings they have with SPED teacher Ms. Jenkins. I also have been able to participate inside Kindergarten classrooms and spend some time with kids in the classroom and their activities. Lastly, I have been able to see three students early in the mornings with a speech teacher, and we go over how to communicate efficiently with our friends and family on a daily basis. The only downside I have experienced is realizing my comfortability with actually teaching lesson plans on my own. I was not ready to do that type of experience within this being my first time experiencing a counseling placement. I did teach at least three times and finally realized I needed to speak with my supervisor about what would be best for me in order to feel more comfortable with helping at River Bend. Mrs. Muraskin is extremely open-minded and considerate, therefore, she was open to giving me other experiences that I could enjoy. I liked being able to have smaller classroom settings with students in a manner where I am able to spend more individual time with them. It is much easier for me to give attention to three students than to a whole classroom since I have not had prior experience to working in an elementary school.

Impressions with being at this placement are good. I enjoy kids, so if you are someone who looks forward to being in a school setting, surrounded with kids and all that comes with that you will surely enjoy coming to River Bend. I liked being able to do things everyday with Mrs. Muraskin, whether it be lessons, sessions with kids, activities or sitting in on important matters. Getting any experience I can to shadow and learn what it is about being a school counselor in an elementary school setting is perfect to me. Advantages are that you are able to provide mental



health and educational support services to help students throughout their school time. You are able to help kids with personal problems hands on and assisting parents/staff with understanding on the resolving issues. It is a meaningful job for sure. You help students overcome obstacles to learning and assisting them developmentally, socially and meaningfully. You build relationships with student's everyday while in this setting. You are able to help kids reach their full potential and in doing so you get to watch them succeed throughout your time with them.

Disadvantages for school counseling would be that it can sometimes be overwhelming. You have to deal with an erratic schedule. While most counselors offer services on a regular hourly schedule, you will have to be able to handle emergency instances and when schedules change due to field trips, child behavior and other teaching that may go on during the time you have something planned. You also may experience emotional tolls as well within this setting. I know that with being new to this whole experience, sitting in on sessions with kids, I would leave the school feeling emotional and very empathetic for children who deal with very hard home lives or mental health issues. You are required to listen to people's emotional problems day in and day out, the work may take a toll on your own mental state.

What I have been able to learn at this site is just about human interaction, and how important it is to really focus on your own mental health so that you are able to productively help others in need. I also learned that in part of being a school counselor you are able to teach lessons to students and give you more interaction with classroom settings. Being in this setting has really helped me on figuring out my career path. I have realized I may not be the best at school counseling in an elementary school setting but possibly open my opportunities to be with college or high school. I have learned more about myself by being able to participate with children and Mrs. Muraskin on how I deal with issues in my own life and how I am able to help students through their issues as well.