

Michelle Velazquez, CNC, CNPC, Spotlights Influential Women, Champions Neurodiversity-Informed Support For Families

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-- Educational Consultant and Special Education Advocate Helps Families and Schools Build Stronger Support Systems by Understanding Student Needs, Removing Barriers, and Protecting Educational Access

Michelle Velazquez, a Special Education Advocate, Educational Consultant and Neurodiversity Coach based in Oscoda, Michigan, is making a meaningful impact in the lives of neurodivergent students and their families by helping bridge the communication and intervention gaps between homes, schools, and other support systems. Through Michelle's Special Education Advocacy, she works with parents, educators, therapists, and school districts to strengthen educational planning, identify barriers, protect student and parent rights, and develop individualized approaches that improve access, participation, and meaningful progress.



Michelle's expertise spans special education systems, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), educational evaluations, accommodations, behavior and regulation supports, executive functioning, sensory processing, neurodiversity-informed practices, and neuropsychology-informed educational support. Her work focuses particularly on autism, ADHD, cognitive and learning differences, and other neurodivergent needs, with an emphasis on understanding how a student's cognitive, regulatory, sensory, communication, and executive functioning patterns affect educational access, participation, and performance.

Her approach is grounded in a neurodiversity-informed understanding of the whole student.

Rather than viewing children primarily through academic performance, compliance, diagnosis, or challenging behavior, Michelle encourages families and educational teams to examine how neurological differences, environmental demands, communication, regulation, executive functioning, sensory processing, and individual learning patterns may affect a student's access and participation.

The goal is not to lower expectations or explain away difficulty. It is to identify barriers, understand how the student functions across settings, and determine what supports may allow the student to demonstrate their actual abilities more consistently.

One of the central principles guiding her work is the idea that behavior is communication. When a student is struggling with emotional regulation, sensory overload, executive functioning, communication, or other challenges, Michelle encourages adults to look beyond the observable behavior and consider what may be contributing to it.

"What's wrong with this student?" is not the question she wants teams to ask. Instead, she encourages them to ask, "What is this student experiencing, what may be getting in the way, and what support could help?"

That shift can create opportunities for stronger relationships, more individualized supports, clearer team communication, and more sustainable educational outcomes.

Michelle holds credentials as a Master IEP Coach®, Certified Neurodiversity Coach, and Certified Neuropsychology Coach. Together, these credentials strengthen the multidisciplinary perspective she brings to her work with students, families, educators, and school districts.

Her neuropsychology-informed work focuses on helping individuals and families better understand how patterns involving executive functioning, attention, memory, processing, regulation, sensory experiences, and other areas of cognitive functioning may connect to everyday challenges across educational, home, and community settings. Michelle helps individuals and families make practical connections between existing evaluation findings, observed patterns, and everyday functioning. Her work may include helping clients better understand assessment information, identifying patterns or gaps that warrant further exploration, developing questions for qualified providers or educational teams, and translating information into practical strategies and supports. This work is non-clinical and does not include diagnosis or replace psychological, neuropsychological, medical, or educational evaluation.

Combined with her neurodiversity-informed approach, this allows Michelle to consider both the individual and the environment around them. Rather than assuming that difficulty reflects a lack of ability, motivation, or effort, she looks at the interaction between a person's individual neurological and cognitive patterns, environmental demands, available supports, and the tasks they are being asked to perform.

Her professional methodology incorporates regulation-based strategies and an understanding of executive functioning and sensory processing, including the use of her Stimulation Profile System. This framework helps individuals, families, and educational teams identify patterns, environmental barriers, sensory needs, regulation challenges, and areas where additional support may improve access and participation.

In addition to individualized advocacy and coaching, Michelle provides professional development and consultation services for school districts. Through this work, she supports educators and administrators in developing more consistent, informed, and student-centered special education practices.

Her perspective is shaped not only by professional training and experience, but also by lived experience. As a former special education student and a parent of children with autism and cognitive differences, Michelle understands many of the challenges families can encounter while navigating educational systems and seeking appropriate support.

That combination of personal and professional experience has influenced her commitment to collaborative, “round table” problem-solving. Rather than beginning from the assumption that parents and schools must be adversaries, she works to create opportunities for families, educators, service providers, and other professionals to share information, identify barriers, and develop solutions around the individual needs of the student.

For Michelle, collaboration is particularly important because students are better positioned to receive appropriate support when the adults involved communicate clearly, understand their respective roles, and make decisions using complete and objective information. Effective advocacy is not about assigning blame, nor does collaboration mean overlooking concerns. It means identifying barriers, understanding individual needs, asking necessary questions, protecting student and parent rights, and determining what can be done differently to improve access and outcomes. She brings families, educators, service providers, and other professionals together to examine available information, identify barriers, ask necessary questions, and develop solutions based on the individual needs of the student.

A Mentor Who Believed in Her Potential

Michelle attributes much of her success to her mentor, who believed in her long before she believed in herself. During periods when she felt overwhelmed, questioned her abilities, or wondered whether she could continue, her mentor consistently reminded her of what she was capable of achieving.

His guidance, encouragement, and willingness to challenge her to grow have had a tremendous influence on both her professional and personal journey. Michelle acknowledges that she does not know if she would be where she is today without that support.

Her children have also been a powerful source of motivation. Watching them experience

challenges, advocating for their needs, and ultimately seeing them succeed gave Michelle a purpose larger than herself.

They were a significant reason she began this journey, and their continued growth reminds her why this work matters.

Turning Setbacks Into Opportunities for Growth

The career advice Michelle values most also came from her mentor. He taught her that she does not have to carry the weight of everyone else's reactions. While she cannot control what other people think, say, or do, she can control her preparation, effort, character, and response when circumstances do not go according to plan.

He also challenged her not to allow mistakes or setbacks to define her. Instead of becoming stuck on what went wrong, she learned to step back, examine what happened, identify what could be learned, and decide what she could do differently moving forward.

That shift changed the way Michelle approaches failure. Rather than seeing mistakes as evidence that she is incapable, she views them as opportunities to learn, adapt, and strengthen her approach. It is a lesson she now carries into her professional work and encourages others to embrace.

Encouraging the Next Generation of Women

For young women entering the special education and advocacy field, Michelle's message is straightforward: do not underestimate yourself.

She recognizes that there will be moments when women feel overwhelmed, question whether they belong, or encounter people who underestimate their abilities. She encourages them not to allow those experiences to determine what they believe they can accomplish.

Michelle also emphasizes the importance of recognizing small victories. Success does not have to wait for a major milestone. Growth can be found in lessons learned, difficult conversations navigated, new skills developed, and moments when you choose to keep moving forward.

She encourages young professionals to remain curious, accept that they will not always have the answer, and allow mistakes to become part of the learning process. Some of the most important lessons of her own career have come from circumstances that did not go according to plan.

Above all, Michelle encourages women entering the field to remain connected to their purpose. When the work becomes difficult, understanding why you began and who you hope to serve can help provide direction for what comes next.

An Opportunity to Rethink How Schools Understand Neurodivergent Students

Michelle believes one of the biggest challenges—and greatest opportunities—in education today

is moving beyond simply recognizing diagnoses such as autism and ADHD and toward understanding the students behind those labels.

Too often, students can be viewed through the narrow lenses of behavior, compliance, or academic performance. Michelle sees an opportunity for educators, administrators, and support teams to develop a deeper understanding of executive functioning, sensory processing, emotional regulation, communication differences, and individual learning and processing patterns.

Understanding these factors does not mean lowering expectations. Instead, Michelle believes the goal should be to remove unnecessary barriers so students can demonstrate what they are genuinely capable of achieving.

“We should never underestimate these kids’ full potential,” she emphasizes. “They’re capable of far more than we often realize.”

Her work reflects that belief by helping teams develop supports that are designed around the student rather than forcing every student into the same model of learning and behavior.

Perseverance, Mentorship, and Service at the Core

Perseverance, mentorship, and service are among the values that guide Michelle’s professional and personal life.

One of the most influential lessons she received came from her Nana, who taught her that success should be measured by how people benefit from a person’s efforts and how that person helps others, rather than by personal gain.

That philosophy continues to influence the way Michelle approaches advocacy.

She believes growth requires continuing forward even when the path becomes difficult, while also recognizing the importance of the people who provide encouragement and guidance along the way. The mentors and supporters who have invested in her have reinforced her belief that professionals have a responsibility to invest in others and help them recognize their own potential.

For the families and students she serves, that philosophy translates into a commitment to compassion, integrity, collaboration, and empowerment.

Whether she is working directly with a parent, supporting a young adult preparing for the next stage of life, consulting with educators, or providing professional development for a school district, Michelle strives to ensure that students and families feel seen, heard, and supported.

Outside of her professional work, family remains her greatest source of inspiration. Gardening,

sports, and hiking also provide opportunities for Michelle to stay grounded, maintain balance, and appreciate the simple moments that can often have the greatest meaning.

As her work continues to evolve, Michelle Velazquez remains focused on a clear purpose: helping families and educational teams understand neurodivergent students more fully, remove barriers, collaborate more effectively, and create environments where every student has an opportunity to thrive.

Her work represents a broader call for education systems to look beyond labels, challenge assumptions, listen to student experiences, and recognize the potential that can emerge when barriers are addressed with compassion and intention.

Learn More about Michelle Velazquez:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/michelle-velazquez-cnc-cnpc>

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