

Dr. Arelis Tapia-Vargas

Social Worker and Field Supervisor

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SUMMARY

Dr. Arelis Tapia-Vargas is a bilingual social worker, educator, and program leader with expertise in school-based mental health, field education, and trauma-informed legal advocacy. She currently directs a district-wide MSW intern program, overseeing 21 graduate-level interns and developing culturally responsive, SEL-based training for adult learners. Her interdisciplinary background spans school-based counseling, crisis intervention, and immigrant justice work rooted in ethical, community-centered practice. Now seeking to transition into higher education, she brings a justice-centered, interdisciplinary lens to teaching and is committed to preparing MSW students to lead in diverse, child-serving systems.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Social Work (DSW)

Teaching, Leadership, Advanced Clinical Practice, Simmons University - School of Social Work, Boston MA May 2025

Master of Social Work (MSW)

Clinical Practice, New York University - Silver School of Social Work, New York NY May 2019

Bachelor of Arts (BA)

Psychology, Bloomfield College, Bloomfield NJ May 2013

EXPERIENCE

South Orange Maplewood School District, Maplewood, New Jersey

District Social Worker/ Field Supervisor, September 2024 – Current

Field Supervision and Higher Education Collaboration

- Serve as lead of the district's Elementary Social Work Intern Program, supervising 21 graduate interns (20 MSW, 1 BSW) annually across 7 elementary schools.
- Facilitate weekly group and individual supervision sessions grounded in NASW competencies, intersectionality, and culturally responsive social-emotional learning.
- Collaborate with MSW field departments at Rutgers, NYU, Fordham, and Montclair State to align field instruction with university curriculum, evaluation processes, and SIFI standards.

Training and Adult Learning Facilitation

- Design and deliver onboarding, field training, and professional development for interns and staff, including modules on trauma-informed care, SEL, crisis response, and field documentation.

- Created structured learning contracts, training manuals, and compliance tools used across the district to ensure consistency and quality of intern learning experiences.

Program Management and Evaluation

- Oversee 300+ student referrals per year by assigning cases, auditing progress notes, and ensuring ethical, FERPA-compliant documentation practices.
- Lead quality assurance processes across multiple school sites, using data-informed supervision models to evaluate student outcomes and intern performance.

Systems-Level Engagement and Policy Implementation

- Conduct Title IX investigations and HIB casework as needed, using trauma-informed protocols, and ensuring compliance with state and federal mandates.
- Contribute to district-wide safety planning and intervention through ongoing participation in crisis debriefs and BTAM team operations.

Culturally Responsive Practice and Equity Advocacy

- Center intersectionality and cultural humility in all programming and supervision, using a strengths-based approach to support diverse student populations and emerging practitioners.
- Promote inclusive pedagogy in training modules and supervisees' clinical work for all students.

School Social Work (Non-Child Study Team), August 2019 – June 2024

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Practice

- Provided direct counseling services to over 90+ student caseload through weekly individual and group sessions, using trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate interventions.
- Supported students with social-emotional and behavioral needs using evidence-based practices aligned with SEL frameworks.
- Delivered culturally responsive, school-wide programming for social skill development, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation.

IEP and Special Education Collaboration

- Participated in IEP meetings to provide social-emotional goals, write PLAAFP statements, and support behavioral intervention plans. Served as the primary social work liaison for students with 504 plans, ensuring that accommodations were implemented effectively.

School Climate and Safety Leadership

- Served as the Anti-Bullying Specialist (ABS) and Chair of the School Climate Committee, leading over 30 HIB investigations annually, and writing comprehensive HIB reports aligned with NJDOE mandates.
- Facilitated school-wide professional development and staff consultation to support a positive school climate and anti-bullying compliance.

Crisis Response and Threat Assessment

- Conducted over 20 risk assessments and 10 behavioral threat screenings annually, in collaboration with school leadership and local law enforcement.
- Participated in the district's Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) and HIB response teams to assess and address student safety concerns.

Family and Community Engagement

- Maintained strong partnerships with families and caregivers, serving as a bilingual (Spanish-English) liaison to ensure culturally responsive communication and service access.

- Coordinated the distribution of essential student resources (e.g., winter gear, backpacks, hygiene items) for over 100 families each year.

Program Director, The Parenting Center, February 2021 – September 2022

Community Programming

- Led and participated in cross-sector collaboration meetings with stakeholders, including the South Orange Police Department, Maplewood Police Department, SOMA Health Departments, local non-profits, and school leadership, to strengthen program integration, enhance community engagement, and increase access to family-centered supports and events.

District-wide Initiatives

- Spearheaded efforts to address food insecurity by conducting monthly needs assessments and coordinating district-wide food distributions in partnership with local organizations, health departments, and volunteer-run restaurants, ensuring reliable food access for over 200 families.

School Social Worker Intern, September 2018 – June 2019

- Completed a school social work field placement with the SOMSD, providing individual and group counseling using evidence-based interventions, conducting biopsychosocial assessments, and supporting district-wide initiatives including anti-bullying programs and community outreach.

New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), New York, New York

Immigration Paralegal, February 2015 – August 2017

On-site Assistance at Family Justice Centers

- Provided legal assistance to immigrant clients, managing 90+ caseloads, and conducting risk assessments to ensure client safety and well-being.

Collaboration and Support Services

- Collaborated with external agencies to coordinate support services, and advocate for client needs.

Engagement with External Agencies

- Participated in advocate meetings with external agencies, including the New York City Police Department (NYPD), District Attorney's Office of New York (DANY), Kings County District Attorney's Office (KCDA), and Administration of Children's Services (ACS), to bolster coordination and collaboration with law enforcement and legal entities.

TEACHING INTERESTS

- Child and Adolescent Well-Being
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) through a DEIPAR Lens
- Trauma-Informed Practice in K–12 Systems
- Intersectionality and Cultural Humility in Mental Health
- Supervision and Field Education

SCHOLARLY INTERESTS

- Culturally Responsive and Intersectional SEL Implementation
- K–5 Mental Health Programming through a Trauma-Informed Lens
- Adaptive Leadership in Child-Serving Systems
- Equity-Centered Field Education Models
- School-Based Threat Assessment and Crisis Response
- First-Generation and Bilingual Educator Advocacy in Higher Education

SELECTED TRAININGS & INITIATIVES

- **Capstone Project:** *Empowering Educators: Facilitating Culturally Responsive and Intersectional SEL for K–5 Educators (2025)*
- Created 5-day adult learning curriculum for teachers, school staff, and service providers.
- Developed program evaluation tools to assess educator growth in SEL and DEI competencies.
- Facilitated district-level PDs and field supervision seminars for MSW interns on implementing SEL in IEP, general education, and crisis contexts.

LANGUAGE & TECHNICAL SKILLS

- **Languages:** Fluent in Spanish (bilingual)
- **Tools:** Google Suite, PowerPoint, Canva, Tevera, SIS/IEP platforms, Columbia Suicide Risk Protocol, NJHibster