Lessons from the Field -

Promoting Staff Wellness in the Wake of COVID-19 and Beyond

Wednesday, May 18, 2022 | 3:00 – 4:00 PM ET

SPEAKER BIOS

Ruth Ryder, M.Ed.
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Policy and Programs, U.S. Department of Education

Ms. Ruth Ryder is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Policy and Programs – Formula Grants in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) at the U.S. Department of Education. In this role, Ms. Ryder oversees a broad range of management, policy, and program functions related to formula and discretionary grant programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA). Ms. Ryder was previously the deputy director of the Office of Special Education Programs in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, which she joined in 1988. Prior to joining the Department, Ms. Ryder was a program administrator in a Washington state school district. There she had responsibility for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title I and Title II programs, state-remediation, gifted education, outcome-based education, and state- and district-wide testing programs. Ms. Ryder has a bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Elementary Education and a master’s degree in Special Education.
Melissa Fahrenbruch, M.Ed.
Lead Health Education Specialist, CDC’s National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health

Ms. Melissa Fahrenbruch is the Program and Professional Development Team Lead in the Division of Population Health’s Healthy Schools Branch, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Ms. Fahrenbruch earned a BS in Education from the University of Nebraska, and a master’s in educational leadership. She has over 25 years of experience in the education field as a teacher, coach, high school principal and currently at CDC as a lead health education specialist. Ms. Fahrenbruch currently oversees two school health cooperative agreements for states and national organizations and is the lead for internal and external professional development events for CDC staff and funded partners. She was also deployed on the CDC’s COVID-19 response from July-December 2020 focusing on monitoring and evaluating school mitigation strategies.

Kristin Scardamalia, Ph.D.
NCSSLE Technical Assistant Specialist and Assistant Professor, National Center for School Mental Health, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Maryland School of Medicine

Dr. Kris Scardamalia has extensive experience working with high needs youth and their families as a school psychologist in both the public schools and juvenile services. Her research focuses on the intersection of the education, juvenile justice, and mental health systems and their contribution to the disproportionate number of minorities impacted by the school to prison pipeline. Dr. Scardamalia’s research addresses universal prevention and intervention through her work on the development of a classroom based, modularized social emotional learning curriculum and through her research on district-wide strategies to reduce exclusionary discipline practices.

Greg Hickey, M.S.
Mental Health Specialist, Region 15 Education Service Center, TX

Mr. Greg Hickey obtained both his Bachelor of Science in Psychology (2008) and his Master of Science in Counseling Psychology (2011) degrees from Angelo State University. He is licensed through the State of Texas as a Licensed Professional Counselor. He has thirteen years’ experience in the coordination of local mental health services, primarily in the provision of crisis services, case management, suicide prevention/postvention and education, services for underserved and
forensic populations, and continuity of care for individuals diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illness. He has extensive knowledge and training in evidence-based therapeutic interventions for depression, suicidal thinking, anxiety, trauma, and psychosis.

Currently, Mr. Hickey serves as the Mental Health Specialist at Region 15 ESC, consulting and educating 45 school districts on matters of mental health in their schools.

Omowale Crowder, M.S.
Social-Emotional Support Specialist, Columbus City Schools, OH

Mr. Omowale Crowder is a licensed school counselor and Social Emotional Support Specialist working within the Columbus City School District. Currently, Mr. Crowder coaches educators on self-care, culturally responsive pedagogy, trauma informed practices and restorative justice. Mr. Crowder is also a spoken word artist and coach who utilizes journaling and writing as therapeutic tools for self-management and self-care with teachers and students. Lastly, Mr. Crowder is an advocate for non-violence and an activist for equity within the education system and our communities. Mr. Crowder has over 20 years’ experience in the prevention and education field.

Julie May, M.Ed.
Intervention Specialist, Lakewood City Schools, OH

Ms. Julie May is an Intervention Specialist for Lakewood City Schools in Lakewood, Ohio, who specializes in reading intervention. Previous to her teaching career, Ms. May was a mental health case manager and drug and alcohol counselor for male juveniles. In her current position, Ms. May is a member of a team of educators and mental health practitioners who hold weekly meetings to support staff mental health and wellness. She also facilitates an alternative to discipline program for students daily during the school day and weekly after school. Ms. May is a member of a committee of educators and administrators who seek to increase and improve Restorative Justice practices at Lakewood High School. Additionally, Ms. May has facilitated multiple professional development opportunities for staff to learn and expand mindfulness practices both personally and in the classroom. She believes that staff and student wellness are directly interconnected and an imperative focus for a healthy school community.
Ms. Azalea Tang (she/her), LISW, is a school social worker/mental health specialist with Westerville City Schools. Ms. Tang is also a certified yoga instructor and completed a 200-hour teacher training in 2020. She uses movement, mindfulness, and relaxation skills often in her work with students and staff. Her interests include educational equity, somatics, and trauma-informed care.