



**BEST PRACTICES
CLEARINGHOUSE**

- Lessons from the Field -

Transforming Youth Together: Understanding the Connection between Substance Use, Mental Health, and Student Learning

Part 1: What the Data Tells Us

Wednesday, August 24, 2022 | 3:00 – 4:15 PM ET
SPEAKER BIOS

Ruben Baler

National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH/NIDA)



Dr. Ruben Baler received his Ph.D. in Microbiology and Molecular Biology from the University of Miami in 1993. He carried out his postdoctoral training at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development where he specialized in Molecular Studies of the Biological Clock. He then moved to the National Institute of Mental Health, where he conducted basic research on the regulation of circadian gene expression in vertebrates. In October 2004 he joined the Science Policy Branch in the Office of Science Policy and Communications at the National Institute on Drug Abuse as a Health Scientist. His early publications were focused on the temporal regulation of gene expression in the brain's clock. Since joining NIDA, he has written and lectured about the Neurobiology of Drug Abuse and Addiction. Dr. Baler has gathered critical insight from diverse disciplines, which he combines to advance NIDA's scientific mission. These include cellular and molecular biology, genetics, bioinformatics, neuroscience, and neuroethics.

Martha Okafor

Senior Advisor, Office of Early Childhood Development, Office of Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF)



Dr. Okafor is a Senior Advisor with the Office of Early Childhood Development in Administration for Children and Families. She was detailed to the Office of Assistant Secretary of Health (OASH) from February 2021 – December 2021 to function as the Executive Director of POTUS COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. She led and directed the operations of the Task Force to accomplish the mission of Presidential Executive Order 13995. The Task Force issued monthly recommendations to the White House to inform the White House actions aimed at equitable response and recovery from 2019 COVID pandemic and the nations’ preparedness for future pandemics.

As a Senior Advisor to the Office of Early Childhood Development, she led, developed and wrote the “Joint Resource Guide to strengthen and expand child care facilities in rural communities” released in 2021. Dr. Okafor also led the national effort and development of the “Blueprint for Action on Tribal Child Care”. Prior to serving as Senior Advisor, she served as the Regional Administrator for ACF, Region 3. Prior to joining federal government in November 2018, Dr. Okafor served in key executive leadership positions. In Georgia, she was GA State Deputy Health Officer, as the #2 at the state public health agency; and the Deputy, #2 at Division of Families and Children Services overseeing child welfare, family economic sufficiency and other social services programs. She served as the Director of Division of Behavioral Health at the Satcher Health Leadership Institute of Morehouse School of Medicine. In Connecticut, at the state level, she served at leadership levels at Public Health; Medicaid, Managed Care and Social Services agencies. She also served as a deputy to the Mayor of the City of New Haven, as the Community Services Administrator, and oversaw all city’s health and human services’ agencies. Dr. Okafor has authored many published scientific peer-reviewed articles and text book chapters; and was a faculty member at Morehouse School of Medicine, Quinnipiac University, and Yale University.

Dr. Kathleen Ethier

Director, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Dr. Kathleen Ethier is Director of CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health in the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention.

Prior to her appointment as Director of DASH, she served in a variety of capacities across the agency, including as the Director of the Program, Performance and Evaluation Office in the CDC Office of the Director (2010-2016), Associate Director for Public Health Practice in the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2009-2010), and Adolescent Health Goal Team Leader for the agency (2007-2009). Her work in these positions has focused on developing strategic direction for agency priorities, best practices for using data for decision-making and improving program evaluation. Dr. Ethier first came to CDC in 1999 and joined the Division of Sexually Transmitted Disease Prevention to lead the development and evaluation of interventions to prevent HIV, STDs and pregnancy among adolescents. Prior to joining CDC, she spent six years on the research faculty at Yale University studying HIV, STD and unplanned pregnancy prevention among women and adolescents.

Dr. Ethier's research has included psychosocial, behavioral, organizational and clinical factors related to women's health, maternal health, and adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Her special focus has been the development of social context level interventions for adolescents and the role of parents, schools, health care providers and communities in promoting adolescent health. Her work has been published widely in peer-review publications, including the American Journal of Public Health, Health Psychology, Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the Journal of Adolescent Health, and Sexually Transmitted Infections, among others. She has co-authored chapters in edited books, including Women and AIDS: Coping and Care, the Handbook of Health Psychology and Behavioral Interventions for Prevention and Control of STDs.

Dr. Ethier earned her PhD in social psychology from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY), where her dissertation examined identity acquisition and change among women during and following their first pregnancy.

Robert Vincent

Associate Administrator, Alcohol Prevention and Treatment Policy, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)



Mr. Rob Vincent serves as the Associate Administrator for Alcohol Prevention and Treatment Policy for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Division of Systems Development. Prior to coming to SAMHSA Rob served as the Administrator for True North-Student Assistance & Treatment Services at the Educational Service District 113's Department of Educational Support in Olympia, Washington. He was responsible for the development, implementation, and management of a (45) forty-five school district consortium addressing School Safety and Substance Abuse Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment programs within the five-county region.

Mr. Vincent has worked in the area of substance abuse prevention, intervention, and Treatment for more than 34 years, as a nationally certified clinician, and has served as the Director for Counseling and Assistance Programs for the U.S. Navy during Desert Storm. Mr. Vincent served as the principal investigator of the Olympia Effective Adolescent Grant, and as a consultant specializing in the implementation of schools-based prevention and treatment programs for several states. He received his Master of Science in Education Degree from Southern Illinois University.

Denise Delorie

Program Director Mid-Maine Substance Use Prevention Coalition, Drug Free Communities Program Coordinator, Healthy Northern Kennebec, ME



Ms. Denise Delorie is the Program Director for the Mid-Maine Substance Use Prevention Coalition. She is a Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Program grant award recipient and will be beginning Year 7 of her grant award in September.

Mid-Maine Substance Use Prevention Coalition (MMSUPC) builds resiliency in our local schools and communities through substance use prevention and education, mental and physical wellness with evidence based support programs such as Social Emotion Learning (SEL) Sources of Strength and Ripple Effect. We have 2 Student Action Teams that have successfully maintained in house substance prevention programming throughout the COVID pandemic reaching over 500 plus local students. While our SEL program has trained over 100 staff in the Second Step SEL program with over 3000 student benefiting.