Safe, Supportive Conditions for Learning: Making Connections for Student Success

Speaker Bios

Kevin Dwyer, M.A., NCSP

Kevin P. Dwyer is an education and child mental health consultant who was awarded the National Association of School Psychologists Life Time Achievement Award.

For over 30 years, he practiced school psychology in public schools and held several local, state, and national leadership positions in the fields of mental health and education. Mr. Dwyer has been responsible for the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of programs and practices for improving school climate, safety, and well-being, for the education and mental health of children. He has helped school staff in many districts use data to inform decisions on improving caring and connectedness with students and professional peers. His work, publications, presentations, and practices have influenced public policy and the development of efficient, family-focused collaborative child service systems. He has worked directly with 10,000 children and their families and has trained more than 10,000 educators. As a practicing school psychologist he provided psychological services to children, including those with disabilities and those whose anxiety blocked learning and adjustment. He assisted teachers and staff in supporting a caring, inclusive school climate for all children. In 2007, the Maryland Coalition of Families awarded Mr. Dwyer for his work in making schools more family friendly. He served as president of the National Association of School Psychologists. In 2000, he received the Tipper Gore Advocacy Award for Improving the Lives and Mental Health of America's Children from the National Mental Health Association.

Athena S. Elliott

Ms. Athena Elliott is a single parent of two children, both with special needs. She has been an active advocate for her two children who have collectively been in the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system for over 24 years. She has a daughter, now 26, who is severely disabled, and received special education services in Montgomery County from age 2 to age 22. Her daughter attended six MCPS schools in the Fundamental Life Skills Program from 1987 to 2006. She also has a son who is a 14 year old high school freshman and has been in MCPS special education programs (Learning and Academic Disabilities) since 2000 at the age of 3. Ms. Elliott has volunteered and been asked to participate on MCPS policy advisory committees over the past 24 years as a parent advisor. She has advocated for maintaining individual rights of students, and collaborations between parents and school staff in all policy decisions, especially where targets and goals are used to identify problems and measure success. She has provided advice to the Associate Superintendent’s Office on the consideration of applicants for the position of Director of Special Education, and provided testimony to the Board of Education on successes that she has experienced with programs provided to her children. She works full time for a federal agency located in Montgomery County, but her views on any matters raised in the Congressional briefing are solely her personal views and do not represent the views or positions of her employer.
Susan Gorin, M.A., CAE
Susan Gorin is the Executive Director of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) in Bethesda, MD. NASP represents school psychology and supports school psychologists to enhance the learning and mental health of all children and youth. Prior to her NASP position in 1993, Susan served as Assistant Executive Director for Member and Unit Services and Coordinator of Student Leadership at the Council for Exceptional Children for over 18 years. Her B.S. and M.A. are in Education. Ms. Gorin is a Certified Association Executive and has been since earning it in 1991.

Alison L. Serino, M.A.
Alison L. Serino is the founding principal of A. Mario Loiederman Middle School for the Creative and Performing Arts in Silver Spring, MD. Previously Ms. Serino served as a school administrator and as a teacher of government, world history and anthropology. Ms. Serino has served as an adjunct lecturer at American University teaching social studies pedagogy, a director for Maryland Leadership Workshops and an intern at the Coalition of Essential Schools. She received her bachelor’s degree in History from Brown University and her master’s degree in School Administration from Johns Hopkins University. Ms. Serino is currently working on a doctoral degree in Educational Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland. She is investigating the role that cultural competence plays in school leadership.

Kelly Vaillancourt, M.A., CAS
Kelly is the Director of Government Relations for the National Association of School Psychologists, where she works collaboratively with public policy makers, educational and health professionals, and elected officials to advocate for the importance and value of school psychology, school psychologists and school psychological services. She also represents NASP on a number of coalitions working to advocate for public policies that support NASP’s mission. Prior to joining the NASP staff in 2011, Kelly spent seven years practicing as a school psychologist in Loudoun County Public Schools (VA). During her time in Loudoun County, Kelly served as a Central Based Crisis Team Leader, was a member of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports coordination team. Kelly has reviewed articles for CEC’s Exceptional Children, and the International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership and has delivered professional presentations, trainings, and in-services on PBIS, data collection and analysis, school violence, crisis intervention, and mental health awareness. Kelly earned her BA in Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her MA and Certificate of Advanced Study in School Psychology from Appalachian State University. Kelly is in the final phases of her doctoral dissertation for her PhD in Education Policy at George Mason University.

June Lucas Zillich, M.A.
June Lucas Zillich is a bilingual school psychologist with Montgomery County Public Schools in Rockville, Maryland, and teaches a class entitled RTI & ELL at Towson University. Ms. Zillich provides consultation and conducts evaluations for students throughout the district. She serves as the expert on Response to Intervention (RTI) for her district and is on the Disproportionality Steering Committee that addresses disproportionate data and action items that address Maryland’s Tiered Service Delivery Model. She has facilitated training nationally and locally in the areas of RTI, bilingual assessments and progress monitoring, and served as a writer for the RTI modules with the NEA/AFT/NASP RTI Academy. She is certified as a bilingual cross-cultural, linguistic, academic development specialist with over 20 years experience serving as an ESOL teacher, bilingual (English-Spanish) teacher, bilingual testing coordinator, and bilingual school psychologist.