

Identifying and Supporting Children With Diverse Learning Needs

March 5, 2024

Moderator and Presenter Bios

MODERATOR

Michelle Knapik

President

Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation



Michelle Knapik is the president of the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation (EHTF). EHTF funds innovative projects that advance solutions to basic and enduring problems in the fields of arts, environment, and learning differences. Key initiatives include Artists Thr!ve, Sustainable CT, and EHTF's Early Learning Ecosystem. In the education space, EHTF has been supporting place-based, systems changing literacy champions in Indian River County, FL (via The Learning Alliance), and in Philadelphia, PA (via Read by 4th, AIM Institute for Learning & Research, and the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association). EHTF also focuses on early identification of reading challenges, plus teacher professional development and teacher preparation related to structured literacy. Michelle has 19 years of leadership in the philanthropic sector. Prior to EHTF, Michelle served as the Director of the Sustainable Environments Program at the Surdna Foundation where she developed grant making and program related investment strategies to advance Next Generation Infrastructure. She was also Program Director at the Geraldine R Dodge Foundation.

PRESENTERS

Sue Bonaiuto, Ed.D.

Strategic Initiatives

EarlyBird Education



Sue is the Director of Strategic Initiatives for EarlyBird and has been with the project since its incubation and validation at Boston Children's Hospital. Sue then joined the EarlyBird founding team in 2020 to develop strategic partnerships with schools, content partners, and funders to grow the product, and set up EarlyBird to scale quickly and efficiently. She brings experience in state government, school district leadership, non-profit leadership, consulting to schools, strategic planning, and fundraising to the role. She has an EdD in Educational Leadership from Boston College and an MBA in Arts Administration from University of Wisconsin.

Rafel Hart

Executive Director

Educare of Omaha Inc.



Rafel O. Hart is the Executive Director of Educare of Omaha, Inc., joining the team in December 2017. Since 1992, Rafel has worked, continuously, in the field of early childhood education as a teacher, professional development facilitator and administrator. For 28 of his 30+ year early childhood education career, Rafel has administered comprehensive, high-quality programs in Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia, D.C., Washington, Tennessee and Nebraska providing programmatic oversight and strategic thought leadership for both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. Rafel’s experience with the Educare Learning Network began in 2009 where he was the founding School Director of Educare Seattle before moving on to become the founding School Director of Educare New Orleans. Rafel strongly supports, believes in, and works to carry out the Educare Learning Network’s mission and practice of caring for and educating young children, engaging and supporting families, continuously preparing teachers/staff for professional success and informing early childhood education practice and policy. Rafel received his undergraduate degree, a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Southern University and A & M College and his graduate degree, a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education, from Erikson Institute in Chicago, IL.

Nicole Ormandy, M.Ed.
Senior Director of Content Development
AIM Institute for Learning and Research



Nicole Ormandy is the Senior Director of Content Development at AIM Institute for Learning and Research. In this role, Nicole is responsible for the design and development of the AIM Pathways product solutions. Nicole consults regularly with researchers and literacy experts across the nation to synthesize and disseminate practical information and evidence-based strategies through presentations and online course content. Nicole was previously an Elementary and Special Education teacher, where she wrote curriculum and mentored colleagues and student teachers. She received a Master’s of Science in Special Education and a CERI Structured Literacy Classroom Teacher certificate.

Robai N. Werunga, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Special Education
University of Massachusetts, Lowell



Robai Werunga, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Special Education in the department of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Lowell. Her research focus is in early academic and behavioral interventions through multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Werunga’s target population is students with or at-risk for Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD) and/or Learning

Disabilities with a focus on culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners. In addition, Werunga does research on strategies that foster and promote meaningful family and school relations as well as family engagement.

Werunga has a keen interest in cultural responsiveness in teaching and explores this topic within her teaching and scholarship. Currently, Werunga teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in the School of Education. Werunga has over 20 years' experience working with individuals with disabilities; sixteen of those years were spent working directly with students with disabilities within grade school. She is a member of the council for exceptional children (CEC) with active membership on several divisions, including Division of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners (DDEL- Secretary), Division of International Special Education and Service (DISES- MAL), and the Teacher Education Division (TED).

Glenna Wright-Gallo
Assistant Secretary
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S. Department of Education



Glenna Wright-Gallo is the assistant secretary in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services at the United States Department of Education. In this capacity, she serves as advisor to the U.S. secretary of education on matters related to the education of children and youth with disabilities, as well as employment and community living for youth and adults with disabilities. The mission of her office is to improve early childhood, educational, and employment outcomes, and to raise expectations for all people with disabilities, their families, their communities, and the nation.

Wright-Gallo has more than 25 years of experience supporting students and adults with disabilities. She served as the assistant superintendent of special education in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in Washington from 2017–2022 and previously as the state director of special education for the Utah State Board of Education for seven years. In her state-level education leadership roles, Wright-Gallo provided expertise in the improvement planning, data analysis, and monitoring of public pre-K through 12th grade+ special education programs. Before her state-level education leadership roles, Wright-Gallo worked as a classroom teacher and administrator.