

**School and Mental Health Commission Project  
Panelist and Presenter Biographies  
January 26, 2017**

**Tom Torlakson, MHSOAC Commissioner and State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

Tom Torlakson was re-elected to a second four-year term as California's 27th State Superintendent of Public Instruction on November 4, 2014. As chief of California's public school system and leader of the California Department of Education, Superintendent Torlakson applies his experience as a science teacher, high school coach, and state policymaker to fight for our students and improve our state's public education system. During Superintendent Torlakson's first term, he set out on a mission to provide a world-class education for all students from early childhood to adulthood. He directed the change to rigorous new California state standards in English, mathematics, and science. He advocated increasing investments in education, helping to pass Proposition 30 in 2012 and leading the effort to give local school districts more flexibility to make spending decisions. He promoted the idea of meeting the needs of the whole child by expanding pre-kindergarten and after-school and summer programs, increasing access to health care and mental health services, and promoting nutritious food and regular exercise. Under his leadership, the state's high school graduation rate rose to an all-time high of 80 percent, with a graduation rate hitting nearly 95 percent for those students in career-preparation programs.

Superintendent Torlakson's journey has led him from the classrooms of Contra Costa County's Mount Diablo Unified School District (where he remains a teacher-on-leave), to the Antioch City Council, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, and the California State Senate and State Assembly. During his tenure in the California State Legislature, Torlakson acted to protect education funding, improve student nutrition and physical education, and ensure school safety. He also championed legislation to increase funding for textbooks, computers, and other instructional materials, and promoted efforts to close the digital divide, eliminate the achievement gap, and reduce the dropout rate. As the chair and founder of the California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness, Torlakson has been a leader on banning junk food from our schools, providing healthier school meals, promoting student health and fitness, and combating diabetes and obesity among our children. Born in San Francisco, Torlakson served as a fireman in the United States Merchant Marine, earning the Vietnam Service Medal. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in History, a Life Secondary Teaching Credential, and a Master of Arts in Education from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Danielle Guarnizo, Mental Health Advocate – National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

Daniela Guarnizo was born in Bogotá, Colombia and immigrated with her family to the United States. Ms. Guarnizo works as a Lab Coordinator at UC Davis and is an Advocacy and Public Policy intern for the Office of Rusty Selix. She is also a NAMI Sacramento volunteer. Due to her experience with mental illness, she feels an obligation to advocate for comprehensive mental health care reform, especially in the area of school based prevention programs. She is also interested in doing research that has a direct impact on policy, with a focus on reducing inequalities in access to mental health services for low-income and minority youth and families.

**Sean Rodgers, Mental Health Advocate – National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

Sean Rodgers is a California native from the Bay Area. Mr. Rodgers holds a bachelor's degree of science in kinesiology from the California State University, Hayward. He has been a mental health advocate with NAMI for seven years and has done advocacy work in both Idaho and California. He has served as a NAMI board member both at the affiliate and state level, and has led peer/family support groups. Mr. Rodgers is a public speaker, regularly making presentations to groups regarding mental health and wellness. He is also a talented writer and a published author of horror fiction short stories.

**Liza Morris, Parent Advocate**

Liza Morris has more than 30 years of administrative experience across such industries as banking, construction and non-profit professional development organizations. She currently works for the Association of California School Administrators, the largest umbrella organization for school leaders in the United States, serving more than 17,000 California educators. Her other career is as single parent of two children, now young adults (ages 23 and 24). Her youngest child was first hospitalized and diagnosed with a mental illness at the tender age of 7. The years leading up to this traumatic event were riddled with violent outbursts and unusual behavior causing Liza to seek professional help for her son by the age of 4. She was able to advocate for her son to receive special education services beginning in second grade through high school. In order to learn about his illness, she sought help from a number of organizations including the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation (CABF, now known as A Balanced Mind Foundation), Bring Change 2 Mind and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). The online support groups of these organizations were invaluable through her family's challenges. In appreciation for the support she received early on, and believing that such trials are placed on a person for a reason, Liza has worked on and off over the years to assist in anti-stigma campaigns and raising awareness about mental illness. She has assisted other parents in similar situations through volunteering as a parent resource for CABF and Bring Change 2 Mind, helped neighbors to draft assessment request letters to their school districts and served as team Captain for Bring Change 2 Mind in a NAMI walk. Working with educators through her employment has also provided her with additional opportunities to assist parents of children suffering from a mental illness. Ms. Morris looks forward to continuing her advocacy efforts in the years to come.

**Kimber Rice, Parent Advocate & Liaison**

Kimber Rice is the mother of two children. Shortly after her oldest child was diagnosed with disabilities, she joined the SCOE Infant Development Program as a Parent Representative. After two years, she transitioned over to WarmLine Family Resource Center as a Community Parent, supporting families at community outreach activities for another two years. Ms. Rice currently work for San Juan Unified School District's Family and Community Engagement Department as a Parent Liaison at Cameron Ranch Elementary School. Her daughter has been diagnosed with pervasive developmental Disorder (PDD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), generalized anxiety disorder, specific phobias and an intellectual disability. She is now 10 years old and has been unable to access mental health supports through private insurance or at school. Ms. Rice hopes to see positive changes that would allow for better access and collaboration between professionals across organizations.

**Zenaida Agramonte, School Social Worker - Bell Avenue Elementary School**

Zenaida Agramonte is a Master's level School Social Worker at Bell Avenue School in the Robla School District in Sacramento, CA. She came to the Social Work profession after pursuing a career in arts administration and arts education when she recognized that the children and families she served often had suffered serious life stressors, including trauma and needed help with both the healing process and navigating the systems of care. She is a trained mental health professional with experience in nearly all areas of social work, including in schools, law enforcement, medical, domestic violence and human trafficking, public mental health, Medi-Cal insurance, and with the homeless population. She has worked as a therapist, an intensive case manager, and crisis intervention specialist in all of these areas. Ms. Agramonte also has professional experience with program development. Her unique experiences have helped her to understand the barriers that families face when gaining access to resources. She is also a strong advocate in promoting Mental Wellness through Prevention and Early Intervention, which is why she is committed to serving children and families in schools. It is through the work at her school site she is able to make authentic connections with all parties involved in the care of the children she serves with the ultimate goal of facilitating resiliency and wellness. While she is trained in multiple therapy modalities, she is a huge fan of somatic-focused therapies for healing trauma and calming the nervous system. Additionally she is also currently a Registered Associate Clinical Social Worker with the goal of attaining clinical licensure in 2018. She holds a BA in Art History from UC Davis and has completed all coursework for a Master's in Liberal Arts with a focus on American Studies and Popular Culture.

**David Nelson, Principal - Valley Oaks Elementary School**

David Nelson grew up in Sonoma County, California and attended Santa Rosa Junior College, Sonoma State University, Sacramento State, and University of La Verne. David followed his wife, Heather, into the education field and they moved to Galt in 2000 to teach and start their family. They have four wonderful children in all levels - high school, middle school, and elementary school. David began teaching at Washington Elementary in Sacramento and then taught in Galt at Fairsite Elementary in 3rd grade, 6th grade, and as English Learner Specialist. He was a Vice Principal at Valley Oaks and Marengo Ranch Elementary for two (2) years before working six (6) years as a Principal at Bates Elementary, Mokelumne High (Continuation), and River Delta Community Day School in the River Delta Unified School District. For the past two years, David is back in the Galt Elementary School District, as Principal at Valley Oaks Elementary School. David loves baseball and enjoys spending his free time coaching baseball and attending his children's many different school and sporting events.

**Margaret Jones, Licensed Educational Psychologist**

Margaret Jones is a Licensed Educational Psychologist (LEP) with over 35 years of experience in the Profession of Education in fields of School Counseling, School Psychology and Administration in Special Education Programming. Ms. Jones has provided direct service in counseling and assessment with General Education students K-12, as well as Special Education students eligible for services in the categories of Emotionally Disturbed, Autism and Intellectual Deficit. Margaret has experience as an Administrator overseeing Foster Youth and SETA programs for students. She provides Individual Transition Planning Assessments for Transition Age Youth, 16-22 years as well as supportive services with a multidisciplinary team of educators. Ms. Jones has training in Multi-tiered levels of support for behavior intervention as well as mental health services and is currently working with students providing Educationally Related Mental Health Services in group, classroom and individual programming. She is trained in the Incredible Years Parent Training Model and has provided the parent education series in the school setting.

**Ken Berrick, CEO – Seneca Family of Agencies**

Ken Berrick is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Seneca Family of Agencies, a nonprofit agency dedicated to providing Unconditional Care to children and families through comprehensive mental health, education, placement and permanency services. Since its founding in 1985, Seneca has developed innovative programs ranging from Wraparound and Intensive Treatment Foster Care, to integrated mental health services in schools, and a crisis continuum of care for youth and their families. Mr. Berrick is a Governor's Appointee on the California Child Welfare Council and a two-time former President of the California Alliance of Child and Family Services. He serves on the Board of the California Council for Community Behavioral Health Agencies and on the CEO Council for the national Alliance for Strong Families and Communities. He is an elected member and Past-President of the Alameda County Board of Education, and Past-President of the California County Boards of Education. In 2014, he was recognized by California Mental Health Advocates for Children and Youth as Advocate of the Year. He is co-author of the book, *Unconditional Care: Relationship-Based, Behavioral Intervention with Vulnerable Children and Families*, and serves on numerous policy planning groups in California at both the county and state-level.