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CLEARINGHOUSE**

- Lessons from the Field -

Kindergarten as a Sturdy Bridge: Transforming the Kindergarten Year

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 | 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET
SPEAKER BIOS

Swati Adarkar

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education



Ms. Swati Adarkar most recently served as the National Policy Director for Start Early. Prior to this, Ms. Adarkar was the Co-Founder and President & CEO of the Children’s Institute in Oregon for 15 years, an early childhood policy and advocacy organization. Ms. Adarkar served on statewide advisory committees on early childhood for three Oregon governors. She provided the vision and leadership to launch and sustain the Early Works initiative which aligns birth to five services and supports with elementary school. For more than thirty years she has been a strong advocate for meeting the comprehensive needs of low-income children and families in Oregon and California and has a passion for ensuring the health and early school success of young children. Ms. Adarkar has served on the Advisory Boards of Attendance Works and the National P-3 Center. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies from UCLA and a Master’s in Public Administration from Harvard Kennedy School.

Dr. Brenda Calderon

Senior Advisor, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education



Dr. Brenda Calderon is Senior Advisor in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education of the Biden- Harris administration at the U.S. Department of Education. She formerly served as the Senior Director for Policy at New Leaders. Prior to this role she was a Program Officer with the U.S. Department of Education where she oversaw millions of dollars in state grants to support schools with low income students, support services for English learners and improve teacher professional development. In 2020, she was appointed as a State Board Member for the Virginia Community College system by Governor Ralph Northam. She holds a BA in Political Science from UCLA, a M.A. in Education from Loyola Marymount University and a PhD in Education Policy from George Mason University.

Annie Corley-Hand

Principal, Mary Kay McMillin Early Childhood Center, Berkeley Heights Public Schools, NJ



Annie Corley-Hand is an accomplished educational leader with a strong background in early childhood education and educational leadership. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education and a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership. Annie's expertise lies in promoting developmentally appropriate practices in Preschool through Grade 3 classrooms, advocating for inclusion in schools, and finding pathways to personalized learning for students. She believes in creating an environment where all students can thrive and reach their full potential.

In 2021, Annie was named the Visionary Principal of the Year, Elementary Level, by the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and was recognized as a National Distinguished Principal by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. These honors highlight her exceptional leadership, dedication to students, and commitment to advancing best practice in early childhood education and inspiring positive change.

Annie is a speaker and presenter at state and national conferences, serves as Chair of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association's Early Childhood Committee, and as the NJPSA representative to the National Association of Elementary School Principal's National Committee in development of the publication *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice*.

Creating safe, supportive, and resilient schools has been a major emphasis of Dr. Hoover's research, education, and clinical work. She has worked for two decades, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Education, and the World Health Organization to train state and community education and behavioral health leaders and professionals in multi-tiered systems of support for mental health and psychological trauma. Since the onset of COVID-19, Dr. Hoover has worked with education and mental health leaders as they support educators, students, and their families with social, emotional, and academic needs amidst the global pandemic.

Michelle Pless-Joseph

Early Childhood Program Developer, Boston Public School, MA



Ms. Michelle Pless-Joseph earned her B.S. in Early Childhood Education from Norfolk State University in Virginia, and a certification in Young Children with Special Needs and a M.Ed. in Reading from Wheelock College in Boston. Ms. Pless-Joseph has worked for Boston Public Schools for 33 years. 30 of those years was as a kindergarten teacher and she is currently working as a Program Developer for the Early Childhood Department. She coaches teachers in the Early Focus Curriculum, mentors teachers preparing for NAEYC accreditation and provides professional development for the district. Ms. Pless-Joseph is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Inc. and lives in Boston with her husband and two children.

Todd Hamilton

Superintendent of Springfield Public Schools, OR



Mr. Todd Hamilton is the Superintendent for Springfield Public Schools in Oregon. Hamilton's passion for education dates back to 1995 when he started as an elementary teacher in eastern Oregon. Throughout his career, he has gained a deep understanding of the complexities, challenges, and joys of public education, having served in various educational roles, including classroom teacher, curriculum and instruction, and administration. As a 12-year superintendent in Oregon, Mr. Hamilton finds fulfillment in developing places where adults want to work, and every student is supported every day.

Dr. Shantel Meek

Professor of Practice, Founding Director, Children's Equity Project, Arizona State University



Dr. Shantel E. Meek is a professor of practice and the founding director of the Children's Equity Project (CEP) at Arizona State University. She manages strategic partnerships with CEP partners at 16 universities and non-profit organizations, policymakers, and national organizations, and sets the strategic direction of the CEP.

Dr. Meek previously served as a consultant in early childhood policy and strategy at the Bipartisan Policy Center in Washington D.C. where she advised senior staff on a range of federal and state equity and early childhood policy issues. Prior to founding the CEP, Dr. Meek served in the Obama Administration as a Senior Policy Advisor for Early Childhood Development at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and as a Senior Policy Advisor for Education in the Domestic Policy Council at the White House.

During her time in the Obama Administration, Dr. Meek advised senior officials at HHS and The White House on a wide array of policy issues including Head Start, childcare, public Pre-K expansion, and promoting equity and reducing disparities across the early care and education system. She also worked on drafting official guidance related to Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant and worked closely with states, communities, and stakeholders on implementation.

Dr. Meek also played a key role in President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Initiative, leading the early childhood policy component of the initiative. She has published pieces in the New York Times and the Washington Post. Dr. Meek serves on the boards of Child Trends and the Pyramid Model Consortium and is a member of the Ideal Learning Roundtable. Dr. Meek holds a B.A. in Psychology and an M.S. and Ph.D. in Family and Human Development from Arizona State University.

She is the granddaughter of Mexican immigrants and her personal experiences as a Latina and first-generation college graduate from a small border town inform her work and contribute to her drive to improve the learning conditions of children from historically marginalized communities. Today, she lives in Phoenix with her husband and two babies, both of whom are growing up bilingual.

Connie Hall

Kindergarten Teacher, Diedrichsen Elementary School, Washoe County School District, Nevada
Teacher of the Year, Sparks, NV



Ms. Connie Hall is a Kindergarten teacher at Lloyd Diedrichsen Elementary School in Sparks, Nevada. She is enthusiastic about teaching, helping other teachers and families, and supporting her community.

Ms. Hall's primary goal is to build meaningful relationships with all in her sphere of influence. This helps her teach students, fellow teachers, and parents and includes the community in supporting education.

Ms. Hall began her teaching career in 1994 and has taught children from Nursery to third grade. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, as well as a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a Minor in Common Core State Standards from Concordia University-Portland in Portland, Oregon.

In addition to teaching, Ms. Hall serves on the school Leadership Team. She is the Director of Comprehensive Children's Activities: Global Coordination & Early Childhood Interest for Messages of Hope International Ministries, serves on the Nevada State Superintendent's Teacher Advisor Cabinet, Nevada Kindergarten Think Tank member, and Washoe County Early Childhood Advisory Council member. Hall has done presentations throughout the continental United States, Hawaii, and internationally on varied topics both in the educational realm and for children's, youth, women's, and family programs. Hall was named the 2023 Nevada State Teacher of the Year and the 2019 Certified Employee of the Year for Washoe County School District. She has received two Certificates of Commendation from United States (Nevada) Senator Catherine Cortez Masto. Her classroom was filmed and featured in articles for several district and national projects. One project demonstrated her culturally responsive classroom for teacher training in her district. She and her students were one of five classrooms chosen nationally to be featured in The New Teacher Project Room to Run project, "showing what kids can do with challenging, inspiring schoolwork."

In June, Ms. Hall will be celebrating her 30th Wedding Anniversary with her husband David. They have one adult son and daughter-in-law, and one adorable granddaughter.

Dr. Ryan Lee-James

Chief Academic Officer, Atlanta Speech School, Director, Rollins Center for Language and Literacy and Its Cox Campus, GA



Dr. Ryan Lee-James is a speech-language pathologist and researcher with expertise in language and literacy acquisition, language disorders and reading disabilities. She currently serves as the Chief Academic Officer and Director of the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School.

Amy Boles

Assistant Superintendent, Oak Grove School District, Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL), CA



Ms. Amy L. Boles is an educator with 27 years of experience and is currently the Assistant Superintendent of Oak Grove School District. For the past 25 years, she has served the Oak Grove School District, where, in addition to her current role, she has worked as a classroom teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, principal, and Director of Curriculum and Instruction. As the principal at Parkview Elementary School, Ms. Boles successfully implemented the SEAL model in all grades TK-3 and has continued to support the model district-wide in her roles in Educational Services. She was the Project Director of the Bilingual Teacher Professional Development Project (BTPDP), which organized a consortium of 10 districts providing stewardship to \$650,000 to grow a bilingual teacher pipeline in California.

Throughout her educational career, Ms. Boles has recognized the importance of establishing and cultivating relationships with school community members. Her educational experiences have allowed her to collaborate with a diverse group toward increasing student achievement and well-being. She is committed to pursuing growth-minded, nurturing public education for all students where race, income, language, religious belief, or citizenship are not limiting factors in achievement.

Dr. Jason Sachs

Executive Director of Early Childhood, Boston Public Schools, MA



Dr. Jason Sachs joined Boston Public Schools (BPS) as Director of Early Childhood in 2005 to oversee the expansion of Kindergarten 1 (K1) classes and coordinate kindergarten and pre-school programs for three, four, and five-year-olds. In 2017 he was promoted to Executive Director of the Preschool to 2nd grade office. Since the inception of Early Childhood Department, Dr. Sachs has led an effort to deliver a universal high-quality system of early childhood programs for BPS including the successful implementation of the PreK-2nd grade curriculum, professional development system for teachers and principals, expansion of NAEYC accredited classrooms in Boston which all helps prepares students for successful transition into the elementary grades, and a comprehensive evaluation system of both classroom quality and child outcomes.

Previously, Dr. Sachs has worked in the Massachusetts Department of Education's Early Learning Services division for six years as a research and policy consultant and was a former board member of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). He graduated from the Los Angeles Unified School District and received his Master's in Applied Child Development from Tufts University and obtained his doctorate from the Harvard School of Education. Dr. Sachs currently lives in Somerville with his wife Elif and co-owns Moe Fencing in Somerville, where they have successfully coached national and High State Champions.