



# Building a Better Assessment Future

*Time to Lead: Innovation to Implementation*

**August 6–7, 2026**

Kellogg Center, East Lansing, MI

## **BBAF 2026 Keynote and Breakout Session Presenters**

*All presenters are listed in order of appearance on [schedule](#)*

### **Keynote Presenters**



**Lillian Pace** is the Vice President of Policy and Strategic Advancement at KnowledgeWorks. During her time at KnowledgeWorks, Lillian has served as a national thought leader on education innovation with an emphasis on the development of student-centered assessment and accountability systems. Lillian directs the organization's policy and advocacy strategy, engaging leaders at all levels of the education system to design and implement policy conditions that enable student-centered learning. She also shapes the organization's partnerships strategy, facilitating strategic collaborations that help KnowledgeWorks and its network of national and state change-makers accelerate systems transformation. She spent nearly a decade on Capitol Hill advising policymakers on K-12 and higher education policy. Lillian received her Master of Public Policy degree from George Washington University and her Bachelor of Arts degree from Washington and Lee University.



**Steven Snead** serves as the Supervisor of Curriculum & Assessment at Oakland Schools. His team is responsible for providing educators across dozens of districts and charter schools with professional learning, resource development, and consultation to support deep learning for all students. He is also a member of the Board of Directors for the Michigan Assessment Consortium, helping to promote assessment literacy across the state of Michigan. He's given numerous local, statewide, and national presentations on assessment focused practices, including district assessment design, formative assessment, MTSS, and equitable assessment practices. Steven is a proud graduate of Cass Technical High School in Detroit. He holds a B.A. in Secondary Education from the University of Michigan and a M.Ed. from Wayne State University. He completed his doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis at the University of Missouri. The focus of his research explored how teachers use interim benchmark data in instructional decision-making.



**Jill Willis** is a Professor of Education at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane Australia. She researches the social structures of classroom assessment and learning spaces to make recommendations for improving teacher and student agency. Her research investigates how learners navigate performance expectations in assessment systems, so learners of all ages can be supported to experience greater success and agency. This interest has led her to teach about assessment for learning, leadership of change, learning spaces and middle leadership. Jill particularly enjoys working with

teachers and school leaders who undertake higher degree learning and research. Jill is proud to have led research on accessibility in assessment, and student evaluations of vertical schools. She is a founding member of the Centre for Inclusive Education.

## **BLOCK A — Breakout Session Presenters**



### **A1 • Classroom strand**

**Ron Studley** is a graduate of the University of Michigan with a master's degree from Wayne State University. He is employed at Anchor Bay Schools, and is currently an elementary instructional coach. He is married to Andrea, a first-grade teacher, with a 13-year-old son, Declan.



### **A1 • Classroom strand**

**Kristy Walters** is an experienced educator and instructional coach at Corunna Public Schools, where she has supported teams across PK–12 grade levels and content areas. She is a FAME Lead and a Thinking Collaborative Trainer for Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools. She has spent years building the capacity of educators to strengthen teaching and learning through intentional practice. Kristy believes that effective assessment and instructional practices can be true game-changers for both teachers and students. She has seen that when educators focus on using evidence of student learning, gathered during the formative assessment process, to guide their decisions, they are able to work more efficiently and have a greater impact.



### **A2 • Leadership strand**

**Caroline Wylie** is a senior associate at the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. She has focused her research and development work on formative assessment, the role it plays within balanced assessment systems, and the learning supports that teachers need to engage in these practices with their students. She has received multiple funding awards from the Institute of Education Sciences and the National Science Foundation. She regularly works with states and districts to support their work related to these issues, and is the co-facilitator of the CCSSO Balanced Assessment Systems Collaborative. Caroline has published dozens of chapters and peer-reviewed articles, three co-authored books, and she regularly presents her work at the national conferences of the American Educational Research Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Most recently she published *Fair And Justice-Oriented Assessment: Developing Teachers' Knowledge and Skills* with Margaret Heritage.



### **A3 • Systems strand**

**Kathy Dewsbury-White** is the CEO of the Michigan Assessment Consortium and oversees the portfolio of resources, programs and services the organization develops. With the MAC Board of Directors, she identified the Components of an Equitable Assessment System, she served as one principal author for sections of the CEAS Brief (2024), and has directed the portion of this initiative that resulted in development of the CEAS Surveys. Kathy is a former curriculum director, professional learning director, program administrator, and teacher. She is delighted to focus her energy and attention on ensuring equity in assessment to better serve K–12 students.



### A3 • Systems strand

**John Lane** works as a Research Associate at the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC). He began working with the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) program as a graduate student at Michigan State University, and has since worked on a variety of projects with the MAC, including working on survey development for the Components of an Equitable Assessment (CEAS) project. John also conducts qualitative research studies outside of his time with the MAC. His research interests include policy and reform implementation. He has recently published in the *American Educational Research Journal*, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *Teachers College Record*, *The Journal of Educational Change*, and the *Elementary School Journal*.



### A3 • Systems strand

**Joe Orban, M.Ed.**, is the Director of Assessment and Data Analysis for the Wayne-Westland Community Schools. Joe has served in this role for the past 16 years and has been instrumental in assisting the district as they develop a comprehensive, balanced assessment system, using the results of a District Assessment Inventory as a catalyst for change within the district. Much of that change has come about through the development and organization of numerous professional learning opportunities for faculty and staff regarding the formative assessment process and quality classroom assessment development. Joe has a particular interest in the ethical use of data, ensuring the district has quality data and assessment tools to enhance student learning and educator knowledge around assessment literacy. Joe has forty-two years of service in public education including twenty-one years as High School/Alternative High School principal in two different districts and five as a High School Mathematics teacher. He is a member of several statewide assessment organizations including the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) where he serves as a board member, MI Educational Research Associations (MERA), and MI Assessment Literacy Facilitators Association (MALFA).



### A4 • Classroom strand

**Deven Parrish** is an AP English Language and Composition and AP Psychology teacher at Howell High School in Michigan. Over the past two years, he has developed and refined practical strategies for integrating AI into formative assessment, creating dozens of “training prompts” that provide students with personalized, on-demand feedback while maintaining academic rigor. Beyond the classroom, Deven serves as Chief Negotiator for the Howell Education Association, holds statewide SNAP Bargainer certification, and sits on the MESSA Board of Trustees and MPSERS board. His work bridges educational innovation with practical implementation, demonstrating how teachers can use AI to enhance learning without sacrificing the human elements that make teaching meaningful.

## BLOCK B — Breakout Session Presenters



### B1 • Leadership strand

**Shirin Mathew** is the Founder of Bloom Learning and an educator-turned AI strategist with over a decade of experience teaching, coaching, and leading in K–12 schools. She partners with educators, school leaders, and organizations to move from AI curiosity to building AI-ready systems that support purposeful, confident, and responsible use of emerging technologies. Shirin works with districts across the country on AI literacy, assessment redesign in the age of AI, responsible use and policy, and STEM

and project-based learning integration. She is deeply committed to helping educators design assessment practices that center deep learning, authenticity, and student agency.



### **B2 • Classroom strand**

**Nicole Kalmbach** currently serves as a Coordinator of Educator Supports, Data & Assessment at Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency. Since 2016, Nicole has provided professional learning, consulting, and instructional coaching to county districts focused on literacy, data, and assessment. She is a FAME Lead, MSTC Planning Committee Member, Learning Facilitator for the Michigan Assessment Consortium's ABCA program, and county lead for Renaissance DnA. Nicole has presented at multiple state conferences, the Rtl Innovations National Conference, and the NCME National Conference. Nicole's educational career began in 2002 as an elementary classroom teacher in a rural, southwestern Michigan city. After several years teaching second and third grade, Nicole took on the role of instructional specialist and MTSS coordinator for the district. Throughout her career, Nicole chaired and lead school improvement efforts, participated in grade level curriculum development and alignment, mentored new teachers, and was an M-STEP question developer. Nicole is a member of the Kalamazoo Optimist Club and co-developer of the Kalamazoo Book Gardens.



### **B3 • Systems strand**

**Phil Jankowski** is the Superintendent of the Anchor Bay School District. He served previously as Assistant Superintendent for the Armada Area Schools, Armada High School Principal, and was the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principal's High School Principal of the Year in 2013. He began his career at Fitzgerald High School in Warren, Michigan, where he served as assistant high school principal and teacher and earned distinction as both district and Macomb County Teacher of the Year in 2004. He holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts degree from Wayne State University, and an Education Specialist degree from Oakland University.



### **B3 • Systems strand**

**Emily McEvoy** is the Director of Data and Assessment at Anchor Bay School District. She currently serves on the MERA Board as Vice President, MAC Board, and MSTC Executive Committee. Emily brings over 20 years of educational experience with a focus in the areas of data and assessment in a K-12 setting. She has taught high school math/stem classes, been a K-12 data coach, county-wide consultant, and a director. She received her B.S. in Mathematics along with a teaching certificate from Michigan State University. She also received a M. ED. in Educational Evaluation and Research at Wayne State University. One of Emily's professional lifelong goals is to always present data in a meaningful and purposeful way for all stakeholders.



### **B4 • Classroom strand**

**Ryleigh Scott Weeks** is a high school English teacher at Grand Ledge High School. In her classroom, she focuses on student-centered instruction and assessment to improve engagement and growth. She has also worked with the Michigan Assessment Consortium for several years as a project assistant, supporting professional learning around assessment, feedback, and grading practices. Ryleigh brings a classroom-based perspective and is passionate about implementing learning experiences that are rigorous, supportive, and meaningful for students.



#### **B4 • Classroom strand**

**Ellen Vorenkamp** is a seasoned expert in balanced assessment systems, the formative assessment process, student engagement, developing high-quality summative assessments, and the implementation of a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Her extensive experience includes over 25 years of consulting, focused on helping educators build assessment literacy and implement practices that support equitable student learning. Her work also includes developing professional learning resources, such as facilitation guides, learning tools and articles. As a leader with the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC), Ellen has coordinated the numerous learning opportunities and programs that guide educators in integrating balanced assessment practices into everyday instruction. With her experience presenting at state and national conferences and her role as a Lead Coach for the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) initiative, Ellen is well regarded for her practical insights and commitment to advancing assessment literacy. Her dedication to balanced and thoughtful assessment practices makes her an asset to any advisory group focused on improving educational outcomes for all students.

### **BLOCK C — Breakout Session Presenters**



#### **C1 • Systems strand**

**Heather Vaughan-Southard**, MFA, has spent her career chasing interesting questions through the arts, functional movement, education, and clinical mental health. Vaughan-Southard directs MI Creative Potential a collective impact initiative to advance equitable access to quality arts education through arts education policy, data collection, strategic partnerships, school and community arts partnerships, and high-quality arts instruction and assessment resources.



#### **C2 • Systems strand**

**Julie Wakefield** is an experienced instructional leader entering her ninth year as an Instructional Coach in the Wayne-Westland Community School District. She supports teachers in grades 9–12 across four buildings, with a focus on building instructional capacity and delivering high-quality professional learning for both individuals and teams. Her most recent work is rooted in developing high quality summative assessments as a part of strengthening her district's balanced assessment system. Julie also serves as a Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) Team Coach and FAME Regional Lead. Prior to instructional coaching, Julie taught ELA courses for 18 years. During that time she mentored new educators, as well as preservice teachers, and served as ELA Department Chair. Julie holds a B.A. in English with a concentration in Secondary Education from Western Michigan University and a Master of the Art of Teaching from Marygrove College. She is currently pursuing her Teacher Leader Assessment Specialist Certification through the Michigan Assessment Consortium.



#### **C3 • Leadership strand**

**Mackenzie Sheahan** is a dedicated educator and leader, currently serving as the Director of Curriculum and Professional Development at Portage Public Schools. Her career has been marked by a passion for instructional excellence and commitment to student success. Earning her doctorate in Educational Leadership and Special Education Administration solidified her expertise in leadership, curriculum, and

education management. During her time at Portage Public Schools, she has held roles including an elementary principal, curriculum support specialist, and district MTSS coordinator. These diverse experiences have positioned her as an advocate for student achievement and instructional innovation.



### **C3 • Leadership strand**

**Jessica Winstanley** is an Instructional Coach and Professional Learning Specialist for Portage Public Schools and a FAME Lead. With a background as an elementary classroom teacher and K–12 technology integration specialist, she brings a systems-level perspective to strengthening instructional and assessment practices. Passionate about learning, Jessica partners with district leaders and educators to build systems and practices that support continuous improvement and meaningful growth for both teachers and students.



### **C4 • Classroom strand**

**Jeffrey Austin**, since 2006, has been a middle school and high school classroom teacher, an instructional coach, a building-level and district-level department chair, a secondary school writing center director, a county-wide literacy consultant, and a leader of professional learning for teachers locally and nationally. His writing, advocacy, coaching, and teaching practice focus on building humanized, student-centered spaces through culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, fair and equitable grading practices, hospitable writing assessment, and equity-based disciplinary literacies through project, problem, and place-based learning.

**Register**

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