



Building a Better Assessment Future

Blazing a Trail to Student Success!

KEYNOTE PRESENTERS

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



Matt Townsley has authored over 30 articles and books focused on grading including *Making Grades Matter: Standards-Based Grading in a Secondary PLC at Work*, *Using Grading to Support Student Learning*, and *A Parents' Guide to Grading and Reporting: Being Clear about What Matters*. As a former district administrator and teacher in the Solon Community School District (Solon, IA), he has firsthand experience implementing and leading lasting grading reform. Through conferences, professional development and workshops, Dr. Townsley has consulted with teachers, administrators, and parents across the globe on the topics of assessment and grading.

In recognition of his K-12 leadership, Matt was named Iowa's Central Office Administrator of the year and he was recognized as an ASCD Emerging Leader. He has been featured or quoted in the following media outlets: *The Christian Science Monitor*, CNN.com, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, California and Kansas public radio, the Center for Digital Education, *Education Week*, Khan Academy Ed Talks, as well as presented at national conferences such as the Learning Forward Annual Conference, National Conference on Education (AASA), and the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) Annual Conference. Matt's energetic approach to engaging audiences has earned him the moniker "The Sportscaster of Alternative Grading." Dr. Townsley is an associate professor of educational leadership at the University of Northern Iowa (Cedar Falls, IA).



Brandi Hinnant-Crawford, PhD, currently an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Clemson University, is a self-described motherscholar, critical pragmatist, and liberation theologian. Crawford's scholarship focuses on equity and inclusion for marginalized students across the P-20 pipeline as well as how research, particularly improvement science, can be leveraged as methodological tools to catalyze justice. Brandi's research uses quantitative and qualitative traditions to illuminate the experiences and opportunities of minoritized students. Her quantitative scholarship is informed by QuantCrit where she is careful to use a critical lens and not add to discourses that reify deficit narratives about marginalized populations.

In her 2020 book: *Improvement Science in Education A Primer*, she reconceptualizes improvement as a pursuit of justice. She asks scholars and scholar practitioners to consider equity not only as an outcome of improvement but to ensure equity in the process by continuously asking who is involved (who is defining the agenda, who is given decision making authority) and who is impacted (who benefits and who bears the burden of the work). From teaching in the rural south, to working in central office in the urban northeast, to conducting research across the county, she remains committed to providing equitable opportunities to learn for *all* children. Brandi seeks to do the work her God and her soul require, her ancestors approve, and her children deserve.

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Lee Ann Jung is founder of Lead Inclusion, Professor of Practice at San Diego State University, and a consultant to schools worldwide. A former special education teacher and administrator, Lee Ann now spends her time in schools, working shoulder-to-shoulder with teams in their efforts to improve systems and practice. She has consulted with schools in more than 30 countries and throughout the United States in the areas of universal design for learning, inclusion, intervention, and mastery assessment and grading. Lee Ann is the author of 9 books, numerous journal articles and book chapters on inclusion, universal design, and assessment. She serves on the advisory board for Mastery Transcript Consortium, as section editor of the Routledge Encyclopedia of Education, and on the editorial board member for several professional journals. In her community, Lee Ann is a board member for Life Adventure Center, a local nonprofit with a mission of healing for those who have experienced trauma.

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John Churchville is a Grammy Award-winning tabla player and two-time Grammy Music Educator award semi-finalist, he is a one-time winner and two-time nominee of a Detroit Music Award. He is the Coordinator of the Michigan Music Education Association's New Directions Committee which runs the State-Wide Young Composers of Michigan Premier Concert. John holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in World Music Performance from the California Institute of the Arts and a Masters of Music Education from the University of Michigan. Currently John is an elementary general music teacher for Ann Arbor Public Schools where he focuses on the teaching the creative music making process with his students. John has composed hundreds of songs and has released over 20 albums of student-created works in his 17 years as a classroom teacher.



Heather Vaughan-Southard, MFA, is the Director of MI Creative Potential, a collective impact initiative to advance equitable access to high quality arts education for all of Michigan's youth. She also serves as the Professional Learning Director for the Michigan Arts Education Instruction and Assessment (MAEIA) project which is embedded within MI Creative Potential. A former director of dance programs at K-12 and collegiate levels, Vaughan-Southard emphasizes the connections of authentic social-emotional learning in and through the arts and the value of applying nervous system regulation in instructional and assessment practices. On these topics, Vaughan-Southard has presented statewide, nationally, and internationally.



Karen Cárdenas is Director of Student Learning at Phoenix Union High School District. Karen Cardenas is a dedicated educator and leader with over 20 years of experience in K-12 education. She began her career as an elementary school teacher and later served as an instructional coach and assistant principal. At the high school level, she excelled as an Assistant Principal for Instruction and as a Principal at Alhambra High School in Phoenix, AZ. Currently, as the Director of Student Learning for the Phoenix Union High School District, Karen oversees key initiatives, including curriculum and instruction, the English Language Acquisition Program, dual enrollment, and the Native American Education Program. Karen earned her undergraduate degree at the University of Southern California and her master's degree at Arizona State University. A first-generation college student and a language learner herself, she brings a deep personal understanding of the challenges and triumphs faced by diverse learners. Beyond her professional achievements, she is a proud mom of two amazing young men and a passionate advocate for student success and equity in education.

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Samantha Middagh is a dynamic educational leader with over 25 years of experience across Arizona schools. Currently serving as the Director of Assessment and Accountability at Phoenix Union High School District, she brings a wealth of expertise from teaching 7th to 12th-grade subjects to district-level administration. With a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and a diverse background spanning classroom teaching, coaching, and administrative roles, Samantha is committed to creating inclusive, innovative learning environments. Her approach focuses on curriculum development, community partnerships, and empowering students to reach their full potential. A passionate educator and mother of three, she understands the transformative power of education. Dr. Middagh's leadership is marked by her ability to develop comprehensive assessment systems, lead community outreach, and create initiatives that support student success and engagement.



Matt Vriesman was named the 2023 National History Teacher of the Year by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. Vriesman teaches AP US History, AP World History, and AP African American Studies at East Kentwood High School, the 4th most diverse district in the United States. Vriesman has been teaching for 18 years, including four years teaching abroad in South Korea and Kuwait. He devolved Empowering Histories at AntiracistAPUSH.com based on his graduate research in American history, citing the unacceptable gap between leading historical scholarship and standard high school history texts, specifically in the portrayals of Black histories. Vriesman believes that culturally responsive history education can empower all students to realize their own agency and therefore elevate their voices and strengthen our democratic institutions. Vriesman is a board member of the Michigan Council for History Education and has partnered with the Grand Rapids Public Museum, Immigration History Initiative, and the Zinn Education Project to create relevant local history lessons to boost student engagement and encourage all students to realize their own power as stakeholders in our community.



Aneesha Badrinarayan supports state and district leaders, assessment developers, and policymakers in building coherent systems of teaching, learning, and assessment. Aneesha brings decades of experience in assessment design and policy, STEM education and product development to her work helping organizations, leaders, and developers create and implement instructionally-relevant assessment systems. At Education First, Aneesha leads projects focused on innovative assessment and accountability system design and implementation, equitable assessment design, strategic planning, and artificial intelligence. She works alongside districts, state education agencies, nonprofits, foundations, and product developers, including Chicago Public Schools, the Hawaii and Montana Departments of Education, the Gates Foundation, Educational Testing Service, and Digital Promise. Prior to Education First, she served as the Director of Assessment at the Learning Policy Institute, where her team led the design and implementation of statewide innovative learning-oriented assessment strategies for over 15 states. During her time at LPI, Aneesha led the development of the 2028 NAEP Science Framework, led a national panel of experts in designing criteria for high-quality instructionally-relevant state assessment systems, advised on federal legislation and regulations to support learning-first assessment system innovations, and supported states and vendors in codesigning new assessment solutions directly with teachers and students. A behavioral neuroscientist by training, Aneesha holds degrees in biology and neuroscience from Cornell University and the University of Michigan. She lives in the DMV with her husband and toddler, and can usually be found anywhere good food can be found—restaurants, food trucks, or in the kitchen with her impressive cookbook collection.



SESSION PRESENTERS — BLOCK A



Julianna Charles Brown is Senior Director of Systems Transformation at KnowledgeWorks. Charlie helps state leaders design a strategy for systems transformation that is responsive to local stakeholders. With a background in history, philosophy, facilitation and anti-oppressive education, Charlie is able to craft and implement dynamic solutions that drive equity. Charlie is passionate about connecting the worlds of policy and practice with a critical lens to create more meaningful, responsive, equitable and lasting systems for every learner. Charlie's career began at the New York City Department of Education in policy, working with schools on programming and providing guidance on working within state regulations. Charlie also worked on the Quality Performance Assessment Team at the Center for Collaborative Education, helping teachers and schools implement equitable performance assessment systems. Additionally, Charlie co-founded the NYC Mastery Collaborative, supporting schools in their implementation of competency-based education practices and advocating for the work to grow across NYC. Charlie earned a bachelors in American History from McGill University and a masters in Education Policy from Columbia University. Outside of KnowledgeWorks, Charlie can be found riding motorcycles, hiking and enjoying electronic music.

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Susan Bell has two decades of experience working in public school systems. Susie supports Mastery Transcript Consortium's (MTC) network of member schools as well as state and large district cohorts as they work to implement a Mastery Transcript, MTC Learning Record, and the MTC Progress Tracker. Susie previously served as the superintendent of the Windsor Locks Public Schools. She also served Windsor Locks High School in a variety of other roles, including principal and director of guidance. Highlights of her accomplishments include working with colleagues and community members to raise academic expectations by eliminating course levels that held students to low expectations, and working with her team and the Board of Education to develop the vision and systemic changes needed to make personalized and mastery-based learning a reality for all children in Windsor Locks. MTC recently joined the ETS family, and in that new organizational structure, Susie is supporting the Skills for the Future effort with five states as they pilot a new skills record that captures evidence of and provides embedded, authentic assessments for durable skills.



Hilary Johannes has 25 years of experience as a classroom teacher and provides professional learning support to other educators. She currently teaches Honors English 9 at Hamilton High School in the Chandler Unified School District in Chandler, Arizona. She also provides professional learning to other educators on the formative assessment process and Portrait of a Learner. Johannes has been focusing on formative assessment and student agency in her classroom and has had the pleasure of presenting this work at professional learning conferences. Her work has also been featured in two publications: *Self-Regulation in Learning—The Role of Language and Formative Assessment* by Alison L. Bailey and Margaret Heritage and *Formative Assessment in the Disciplines—Framing a Continuum of Professional Learning* by Margaret Heritage and E. Caroline Wylie. She is continually learning with and from her students as she refines her craft.

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Tara Kintz is a Research Associate for the MAC where she conducts research and develops resources for the FAME program. She has been involved with FAME since 2010. She enjoys seeing what the FAME work makes possible for teachers and students across Michigan as they implement formative assessment processes in their classrooms. “FAME helps teachers to empower and support learners to become self-directed and meaningfully engaged in achieving their learning goals,” Tara says. She enjoys learning and about and sharing the exceptional work of the FAME Coaches and Learning Teams. “I really appreciate the opportunity to develop materials to meet the needs of the FAME program participants. It is great to hear feedback and then take steps to support their work.”



Amy B. Colton, Ph.D., is the Center for Collaborative Inquiry director and an expert in adult learning, cultural proficiency, student voice, social and emotional learning (SEL), and student mental health. With over 15 years of experience as a special education teacher from second grade through high school, she has dedicated her career to fostering reflective teaching, informed decision-making, and effective professional learning. As an accomplished researcher and author, Dr. Colton has written extensively on collaborative inquiry and its role in professional development. As executive director of Learning Forward Michigan, she led professional learning initiatives on cultural proficiency, teacher leadership, and collaborative inquiry to support diverse student populations. Dr. Colton has contributed to key education initiatives in her consulting roles, including the Learning School Designation assessment process, Kentucky’s professional learning system, and Michigan’s efforts to address disproportionate special education identification. She also supported the Michigan Department of Education in creating adult SEL modules and developing a statewide school-based mental health system. Currently chair of the Learning Forward Foundation, Dr. Colton helps fund grants and scholarships, empowering educators to design high-quality teaching practices that drive student success. A published author with Learning Forward and ASCD, she continues to advance the field of education through her work.



Steven Snead has over 23 years of experience in K12 Education, including roles as classroom teacher, school/district assessment coordinator, assessment consultant, and ISD administrator. He holds a B.A. in Secondary Education from the University of Michigan, a M.Ed. from Wayne State University, and a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Missouri.

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Melissa Spadin is the Director of System of Supports in the Student Services and Programs division at the San Diego County Office of Education. In this role, she supports the Whole Child initiatives of Transformative SEL, MTSS, Restorative Justice Practices, Trauma Informed PBIS, and Social Work Services to ensure every student’s well-being and holistic development. Prior to this role, she has been a Coordinator of Assessment, Accountability and Evaluation at the San Diego County Office of Education, the Maryland NAEP State Coordinator, and Assessment Program Specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education. She began her career in education as a high school English and theatre teacher, forensics coach, and Theatre Director at Gaithersburg High School in Montgomery County. She is currently a member of the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) Classroom Assessment Committee, was selected as an inaugural CASEL Fellow, and served on the ISTE Assessment Culture Advisory group, National Task Force for Assessment Education and The CCSSO FAST SCASS. She mentors new CASEL Fellows and current education policy students at her alma mater, University of Maryland.

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John Spiegel has more than 25 years of experience as an educator with a passion for science teaching and learning. Since 2013, he has worked closely with teachers, schools, and districts as they implement the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). This work has him working side-by-side with educators as they plan instruction and assessment experiences that meets the needs of diverse learners. Most recently, John has been a lead designer and co-author of the CA NGSS Toolkit for Student-Centered Assessment, which includes tools, processes, and professional learning to support educators making shifts in curriculum-anchored assessment practices aligned to the NGSS. He is a district advisor and a member of the science team in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the San Diego County Office of Education. John has a bachelor's degree in physics and master's degree in educational leadership. When not working directly with educators, he enjoys being in nature and exploring phenomena around him.



Stephanie Niedermeyer is a sixth year Instructional Coach for the Wayne Westland School District. She serves teachers of grades 9-12 across two comprehensive high schools, the career technical center, and the alternative high. Besides providing professional development and building teachers instructional capacity, Stephanie is a Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) Coach of three teams. She is also a mentor to new teachers and student council advisor. Prior to becoming an instructional coach, she taught Biology, Chemistry, and Forensic Science courses, at the secondary level in WWCS D for 21 years as well as served as the Science Department Chair. She holds a B.A. in Biology with a minor in chemistry and a Masters in the Art of Teaching from the University of Michigan.



John Ross is an assistant principal at Wayne Memorial High School, with over 19 years of experience in education. His teaching experience includes math, ELA, and coding. For the past 3 years he has served as an instructional coach for the Wayne Westland School District, responsible for professional development and building teacher instructional capacity. During his time as an instructional coach, John was a Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) Coach of three teams. John earned his bachelor's degree from Michigan State University, and his master's degrees from Michigan State and Eastern Michigan Universities.



Julie Wakefield is entering her eighth year as an Instructional Coach serving teachers of grades 9-12 across two comprehensive high schools, the career technical center, and the alternative high school in the Wayne-Westland Community School District (WWCS D). Her role focuses on building teachers' instructional capacity and providing both individual and large group professional development. She is also a Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) Coach of two teams. Prior to this, she taught English Language Arts courses, ranging from remedial to Advanced Placement, at the secondary level in WWCS D for 18 years. During this time, she mentored new teachers and served as the ELA Department Chair. She holds a B.A. in English with a focus on Secondary Education from Western Michigan University, and a Masters in the Art of Teaching from Marygrove College. Julie is currently working toward her Teacher Leader Assessment Specialist certification through the Michigan Assessment Consortium.

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Amy Hodgson joined the MAC Board in 2022 and serves on MAC's Professional Learning Committee. She retired after serving for the last 12 years of her career as superintendent, curriculum director, and special education coordinator for Dansville Schools. Assessment has been her passion for many years and is at the heart of the work she's engaged in with Dansville staff, who made tremendous progress in developing systems and tools to make their work effective and sustainable, including publishing of K-12 standards-based report cards. She didn't stay retired long, as she is currently serving as the Assistant Superintendent at Stockbridge Community Schools, where she is guiding the staff on a brand new assessment journey. She also publishes a newsletter with a beloved mentor called Bridges and Hope, supports school leaders as a coach/thought partner, and is deeply in love with her two grandchildren, James and Lucy.



Leah Braman has been teaching English and social studies at Dansville since 2008; she holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master of Arts in Teaching and Curriculum, and she is constantly learning more and working to effectively help her students grow. Assessment work, in particular, has been a passion for many years, and she deeply enjoys not only implementing quality assessment practices in her own classroom, but also helping other teachers do the same. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family, writing poetry, reading, and training and competing her horses.



Bré Bartels is the Executive Director for Secondary Education, supporting principal leadership, curriculum, and instruction in grades 6-12 in Kentwood Public Schools. Originally from Portland, Oregon, Bré has taught high school in Oregon, and also served as a middle and high school teacher, assistant principal, and principal with the West Ottawa Public Schools in Holland, Michigan. The son of a first generation college graduate, Bré is committed to increasing opportunities for all students in Kentwood.



Sunil Joy is the Executive Director for Strategy and Innovation at Kentwood Public Schools, where he plays an instrumental role in guiding the district's strategic plan. Before this, he held positions with Kent ISD and the Education Trust-Midwest. Passionate about educational equity, Sunil firmly believes in ensuring every child's access to quality education. He is a proud alumnus of the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor, with both undergraduate and graduate degrees.



Veronica Lake currently serves as the Executive Director of Student Services in Kentwood Public Schools, where she continues to champion a well-rounded educational experience for every child. With over 30 years dedicated to education, she's contributed to both special and general education in Fayetteville and Fort Bragg, NC. As a former principal of Harrison Park Elementary in Grand Rapids, MI, she fostered community collaboration in education. Her experience also includes sharing her insights in leadership roles in Michigan and Illinois, and as a consultant for Pearson Learning. Veronica's focus on holistic approaches reflects her lifelong commitment to inclusive education.



Carrie Tellerico is an experienced educator who has been dedicated to the field since 1998. She currently serves as Executive Director of Elementary Education in Kentwood Public Schools. Previous to this role, Carrie served in Grand Rapids Public Schools as a teacher and principal, and in Kentwood Public Schools as a principal. With her extensive experience and leadership skills, Carrie is dedicated to making a positive impact on students' lives and promoting excellence in elementary education.