



Summit Speakers



Jenny Abamu

Education Reporter, WAMU 88.5

Jenny Abamu is the education reporter for WAMU, the D.C. region's NPR station where she has done multiple investigative stories on everything from discipline practices in K-12 schools to culture struggles in higher education. Before that, she worked as a national K-12 reporter at EdSurge, where she covered the intersection of technology and education. And before that, she worked as an assignment editor, field journalist, and producer at NY1, a local broadcast station in New York City.

Abamu studied International and Comparative Education at Columbia University. Her thesis was edited and published in the book, "The Future of Higher Education in the Middle East and Africa." Her chapter, "International Education Global Communication Trends," is about the media's role in education development around the world.



Kara Arundel

Journalist, LRP Publications

Kara Arundel is editor of LRP Publications' monthly Early Childhood Report newsletter and covers national special education issues, including breaking news from Congress and the U.S. Education Department as well as best practices on serving preschool through transition-age students with disabilities for LRP's Special Ed Connection® website.

Kara has also covered local and state education issues for newspapers in Virginia and Florida. In Florida, she wrote about one of the state's first charter schools. She also wrote articles about a district's desegregation order, a student uniform policy, a district-wide school choice program, and several proms at Walt Disney World.



Elizabeth Bailey

Senior Client Success Manager, Fiscal Note and CQ

Elizabeth Bailey is a Senior Client Success Manager at FiscalNote and CQ, one of the largest technology companies headquartered in Washington, DC. FiscalNote and CQ provide legislative tracking, issues management and advocacy solutions to a wide variety of public and private sector organizations. A graduate of University of Maryland, College Park, Elizabeth has been working in Client Success for the past five years. Elizabeth lives in Northwest Washington DC and enjoys traveling in her spare time.



Mary Lynn Boscardin

CEC President and Professor, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Mary Lynn Boscardin is a Professor in the College of Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she has served as a Department Chair and a Coordinator of Special Education. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Administration at the University of Illinois-Urbana with a focus on Special Education Leadership and Policy. She is widely respected for her work in special education leadership and administration. She is the President of the International Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) and a past President of the International Council of Administrators for Special Education (CASE). Currently, she serves as editor of the *CASE Journal of Special Education Leadership*. Dr. Boscardin has co-authored three books, the most recent being the second edition of the *Handbook of Leadership and Administration for Special Education* (2019), and several refereed publications. She has given both key-note addresses and presentations, internationally and nationally. Dr. Boscardin has been awarded four Leadership Preparation Personnel grants as Project Director and four Personnel Preparation grants in the area of Communication Disorders as Project Co-Director from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Dr. Boscardin's scholarly interests include special education policy and finance, program and systems evaluation, strategic approaches to leadership, and professional network mapping. Her scholarship, teaching, and service to the profession has been dedicated to developing policy and practice that supports the inclusion of all students with exceptionalities in public education. Her commitment to diversity has been amply demonstrated through her publications focused on multicultural education and social justice.



Brigid Bright

Director of Special Services, Harrison School District

Brigid Bright has worked in special education for 17 years and is the Director of Special Services for Harrison School District in Harrison, Arkansas. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary/Special Education from Henderson State University. Bright continued her education at the University of Central Arkansas by earning a Master of Science degree as a 4-12 Instructional Specialist as well as Curriculum/Program Leadership certification in special education. Bright is currently pursuing her doctorate in educational leadership through Lindenwood University.

Bright takes an active role in special education leadership at the state and national levels. Brigid Bright is the current president of the Arkansas Association of Special Education Administrators, Policy/Legislative Chair of Arkansas Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), and member of CASE’s National Policy/Legislative Committee. Mrs. Bright also served on the Arkansas Department of Education Paperwork Reduction Task Force.



Patricia A. Cole

Federal Policy Senior Director, ZERO TO THREE

Patricia Cole is Senior Director of Federal Policy within the ZERO TO THREE Policy Center. She leads ZERO TO THREE’s work in federal policy formulation, legislative strategies, and government relations in a range of areas affecting infants and toddlers, including early care and learning, early intervention, home visiting, child welfare, and infant-early childhood mental health. Patty has over thirty years of experience in policy at the federal and state levels. Prior to her current position, she was a consultant on children and family policy, working with ZERO TO THREE and the National AfterSchool Association. Previously she served as staff to Senator Chris Dodd, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families. She was instrumental in enactment and oversight of key legislation, including two reauthorizations of Head Start and the creation of Early Head Start; the Human Services Act; the Child Care and Development Block Grant; the Family and Medical Leave Act; the Children of Substance Abusers Act, which included a home visiting component; and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, including creating a Dodd initiative that became the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention program. Patty has authored or co-authored a number of articles and studies related to early care and learning policy and other issues related to children’s development. She holds a BA in History and Political Science as well as an MA in History from Duke University.



Maggie Garrett

Legislative Director, Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Maggie Garrett has worked on church-state separation issues for over a decade. Her work in the public policy arena precedes a career that once involved working as a civil liberties litigator. For the past eleven years, Maggie has lectured and presented on church-state issues for both television and radio appearances, public presentations, as well as been quoted in numerous major newspapers.

Currently, she represents Americans United before the US Congress and present Administration. Maggie's additional roles include oversight of the state legislative program, leading the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE), the national coalition that opposes school voucher legislation, and chairing the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination (CARD), which is the national coalition that advocates to repeal the Bush Faith-Based Initiative.

Maggie graduated from Hamilton College, cum laude before graduating with honors from the George Washington Law School. At George Washington University she was the Production Editor of the George Washington Law Review. In 2000, Maggie became the first Madison Fellow in the Legal Department of Americans United. Afterwards, she moved south to the ACLU of Alabama and then to the ACLU of Georgia. At the ACLU of Georgia, she litigated high-profile cases on issues including the separation of church and state, free speech, reproductive rights, and voting rights. While there, Maggie also served as the Legislative Director, lobbying the Georgia General Assembly on all ACLU issues, before returning to Americans United.



Alex Garvey

Communications Manager, Council for Exceptional Children

Alex Garvey is the Communications Manager at the Council for Exceptional Children. She Alex is responsible for coordinating and developing all CEC communications efforts, including web content, social media, digital strategy, online engagement, media outreach, emails, newsletters, and other written materials related to CEC's branding, policies, and messaging. Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, she has a B.A. in English from Hamilton College and currently lives in Washington, D.C. Alex came to CEC in March from the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and looks forward to working with CEC's members and stakeholders to empower special educators through community, resources, and support for advancing the success of children and youth with exceptionalities.



Stephanie Giesecke

Director of Budget and Appropriations, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Stephanie is responsible for representing NAICU on budget and appropriations issues with Congress, the administration, and the higher education community. Before joining NAICU in 1999, Giesecke was a legislative assistant for the Association of Community Trustees (ACCT), where she coordinated the association's legislative advocacy network, and served as liaison to Congress on budget and appropriations matters. Prior to joining ACCT in 1992, Giesecke was a legislative assistant for Rep. Bill Alexander (D-Ark.). In addition, she has been an active member of the Committee for Education Funding and currently serves at its president. She earned a bachelor's degree from Washington University, and a master's degree from George Washington University.



Alex Graham

Executive Director, Council for Exceptional Children

Alex Graham has 27 years of association management experience. Prior to joining CEC in October 2013, Alex served as the executive director of the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell). Through advocacy, education, research and financial aid, AG Bell helps families, health care providers and education professionals understand childhood hearing loss and the importance of early diagnosis and intervention. In addition to earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, Virginia, Alex has earned a Master's of Science degree in organizational effectiveness and a Masters of Business Administration degree from Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia.

Alex is the father of two young adults with learning disabilities and he knows firsthand the critical role that special education professionals play in students with special needs being able to reach their potential. Alex's wife Melissa is an Advanced Academics Specialist with Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia.



Deborah Koolbeck

Senior Director, Government Relation for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

Deborah Koolbeck is the Senior Director, Government Relation for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) where she leads the advocacy efforts of the association. With a focus on the Congress, the White House and the executive branch, Koolbeck engages on advocacy campaigns as well as developing and maintaining key advocacy relationships.

Prior to AACTE, Deborah was a Vice President at the Council on Competitiveness where her primary focus was on outreach to and communication. Koolbeck brings a rich mix of experience in science, education, and policy. Initially serving in Congress as an Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow working as a Legislative Assistant, her career spanned six-plus years in the U.S. House of Representatives. Prior to her work on the Hill, Koolbeck was an educator at Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry. She has also taught at Chicago School of the Arts and the University of Arizona. An Ohio native, Koolbeck earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Physics and Astronomy at the University of Arizona in Tucson and her Master of Arts degree with Honors in Education at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois.



Jennifer Lesh

Program Coordinator, Lynn University

Jennifer Lesh received her Ph.D. from Barry University in Leadership with an emphasis in Special Education. Jennifer is currently the Exceptional Student Education Master’s Program Coordinator at Lynn University; also, she teaches the research methodology in the Ed.D. program and several undergraduate special education courses. Prior to joining Lynn, she worked for the School District of Palm Beach County where she has held several positions within the Exceptional Student Education field. She has over 20 years of special

education practical experience ranging from classroom teacher and specialist to dean of students at the high school level. She has vast experience with cross-cultural teaching as she has taught for Barry University in their Caribbean/Bahamas Cohorts as well as in urban K-12 settings in Florida, New Jersey, and Chicago. Lesh has presented topics within the special education realm extensively at conferences and professional development workshops at the local, state, national, and international level.

While a doctoral student, Jennifer was a recipient of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Teacher Education Division's Scholarship to CEC's Children and Youth

Action Network Institute. Since that introduction to the Special Education Legislative Summit, she has attended five Summits. Jennifer is very active in CEC at the local, state, and now the national level where she is currently President-Elect.



Erin Maguire

Director of Student Support Services, Essex Westford School District

Erin Maguire is a 18-year veteran of the CASE organization. Currently, Erin serves in dual capacities as a local special education director in Essex, Vermont and as the President Elect for CASE. Erin has served in a variety of functions for CASE including, CASE Unit's legislative chair, president and board member as well as a member of the CASE Policy and Legislative Committee. National leadership regarding policy and legislation has been an active aspect of Erin's focus throughout her time as a director. In one of her most recent honors, Erin was named the Vermont Special Education Administrator of the Year in 2017.

Erin earned her Master's Degree in Special Education from Castleton University and completed her Certificate in Advanced Education Leadership from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is completing her Doctorate in Education with a focus on education policy and leadership at the University of Vermont. Erin has been an educator for 20 years in many roles including special education administrator, special educator, middle school science teacher and paraeducator. Her advocacy has included a focus on high quality supports for through Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Equity is of great importance to her as an educator and this focus guides her as an active member of her local, state and national communities. Erin is a strong proponent of proactive and preventative supports and interventions in our nation's public education system.



Myrna Mandlawitz

President, MRM Associates, LLC and Legislative Consultant to the Council of Administrators of Special Education

Myrna Mandlawitz serves as legislative consultant to the Council of Administrators of Special Education and four other national organizations. She has worked in Washington for over 21 years as a consultant/lobbyist on special and general education policy and legislation. Ms. Mandlawitz is a former president of the Committee for Education Funding, a coalition of 113 national organizations supporting increased federal

investment in education. In addition, she served for 12 years as co-chair of the National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel. Previously, she held the position of Director of Government Relations for the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

Ms. Mandlawitz's publications include, among others, *Special Education After 40 Years: What Lies Ahead* (ASCD, 2016), *What Every Teacher Should Know about IDEA 2004 Law and Regulations* (Pearson, 2007), *Special Education Law* (Co-author, Pearson, 2008), and *A Tale of 3 Cities: Urban Perspectives on Special Education* (Center on Education Policy, 2003). She is also a contributing author to *Social Policy for Children and Families: A Risk and Resilience Perspective, Third Edition* (SAGE Publications, 2015) and the *Handbook of Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders-3rd Edition* (Wiley, 2005).

A native of Virginia, Ms. Mandlawitz spent fourteen years as a classroom teacher and assisted in the development of Virginia's program for infants and toddlers with disabilities. She holds a master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Boston University and a law degree from Temple University.



Shane Pruitt

Consultant, Gallup

Shane Pruitt guides leaders at educational entities seeking to empower the individuals they serve to create more meaningful lives. Leveraging Gallup's world-renowned research on critical elements of well-being, engagement, and strengths-based development, Pruitt partners with institutions to collect meaningful data on strategic priorities and plans, clarify driving insights to generate buy-in with key stakeholders, and align best practices fostering effective, holistic changes.

Shane is a former higher education practitioner who has overseen all facets of the student lifecycle – admissions, student affairs, and advancement. He received a bachelor's degree in microbiology from the University of Oklahoma and earned a master's degree from the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education where he focused his studies on educational access and student leadership development. He received his Doctorate of Education at the University of Memphis after completing a dissertation on alumni outcomes and engagement entitled *The Importance of Ritual According to Alumni* at a Southern Liberal Arts University.



Luann Purcell

Executive Director, International Council of Administrators of Special Education

Luann Purcell is the Chief Executive Officer of an international professional organization of school administrators whose primary responsibility is in leadership of special education programs for children. Dr. Purcell's major job responsibilities include: consulting and advising administrators on best practices for leadership and development of quality programs for students with disabilities; assisting members in developing networking systems through state, provincial, and country units in order to provide better services to members; advocating at the governmental level to assure appropriate legislation to facilitate the development and maintenance of quality programs for students with disabilities; and providing Keynote/breakout sessions/etc. at state/provincial and regional conferences on leadership, legislative/policy updates, attitude adjustment, the passion in compassion, and other current education issues. In the last 16 years, she has keynoted and led sessions in over 45 states and 3 other countries on IDEA, NCLB and the development of proactive leadership skills in times of change.

Luann has had a variety of experiences throughout her 47 years in public education including general education teacher at the high school and middle school levels, teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, coordinator at a regional educational service center, and assistant superintendent for pupil services in a local district of 25,000+ students. This July marks the completion of 17 years as Executive Director of CASE.



Jacqueline Rodriguez

Assistant Vice President for Programs and Professional Learning, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

Jacqueline Rodriguez is the AACTE assistant vice president for programs and professional learning. Jacqueline is an experienced teacher, teacher leader, and professor. Prior to joining AACTE, Rodriguez served the College of William & Mary as a faculty member in the School of Education. She continues to mentor students and participates on dissertation committees for doctoral students in special education and counselor education. Rodriguez is a Holmes Scholars alumna and coordinated the W&M Holmes Scholars Program during her tenure at the university. She also co-directed the W&M Social Justice Graduate Research Fellowship.

Rodriguez is active in state, national, and international professional organizations where she supports increased access for students with exceptionalities and student veterans to institutes of higher education, high-quality teacher preparation, and meaningful policies to support diverse and exceptional learners. Currently, Rodriguez is the policy and advocacy chair for the Teacher Education Division (TED) of CEC. She also serves as the secretary to the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE), and is a former board member of the Division for International Special Needs Education and Services (DISES).



Kevin Rubenstein

Special Education Director, Lake Bluff District

Kevin Rubenstein has served as the Director of Student Services, Technology, and Assessment in Lake Bluff Elementary School District 65 (IL) since the summer of 2013. In this role, he oversees all aspects of the District's student services program including services for students with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 along with those supports for students who are learning English (ELL) and other students receiving tiered supports through the District's Multi-tiered Systems of Support/ Response to Intervention Program. He also supervises the areas of technology and assessment and administers the McKinney Vento Homeless Education Program and the activities associated with Titles I, II, III, and IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

He holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership from Loyola University in Chicago, and three other graduate level degrees from Northern Illinois University, National Louis University, and the University of Southern Maine. His undergraduate degree is in Political Science from Illinois State University. He is currently the President of the Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education (IAASE) and Policy and Legislative Chair for the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) and served as a member of Illinois Governor JB Pritzker's Education Transition Team in 2018.



Christina Samuels

Associate Editor, Education Week

Christina Samuels covers educational equity for *Education Week*. She explores how schools and districts meet their mandate to serve the needs of all students and establish fairness in opportunity regardless of a student’s racial or ethnic background, disability, or English learner status. She started working at *Education Week* in 2004, after stints at the *Miami Herald* and *The Washington Post*. She has covered special education, early-childhood education, and district policy.



Paul Sindelar

Professor, University of Florida

Paul Sindelar is a Professor of Special Education at the University of Florida. His recent research concentrates on the special education labor market and its implications for policymakers and educators. He has written extensively on teacher certification, especially alternative routes to certification. He is currently working with colleagues at Penn, Johns Hopkins, UF, and the Bureau of Economic and Business Research to identify and quantify variables that have contributed to the reduction in employment numbers for special education teachers in the past 3 years.



Stacy Skalski

Director, Professional Policy and Practice, National Association of School Psychologist

Stacy Skalski is the Director of Professional Policy and Practice for the National Association of School Psychologists. In this capacity, she works collaboratively with national and state leaders, education and mental health professionals, and public officials to advocate for the alignment of research, policy and practice at the state and federal level. Her primary focus is on promoting high quality educational practices and student services, and comprehensive coordinated school-based mental health services. Skalski has over 25 years of professional experience in the field of school psychology having previously served as

the Coordinator of Mental Health Services for the Douglas County Schools, as an Assistant Research Professor at the University of Colorado-Denver, and as a school psychologist practitioner for the Douglas County and Cherry Creek Schools of Colorado.



Sharon Walsh

Governmental Relations Consultant, Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

Sharon Walsh has provided consultation on the implementation of IDEA for over 30 years. Currently, she is the Governmental Relations Consultant for the Division for Early Childhood of CEC (DEC) and the IDEA Infant and Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA). Sharon also is a consultant on the federally funded Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) and the Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems (DaSy). Previously, she has worked in a large suburban school district, for LRP Publications, and for the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE).



Jane West

Governmental Relations Consultant, Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children

Jane West is a former teacher and education administrator and is a visiting professor at the University of Maryland and Virginia Commonwealth University and the policy advisor to several national education organizations, including the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education and the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children. For 8 years she led AACTE's advocacy and policy work as Senior Vice President. In the mid 1980's she worked as senior education advisor on the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions where she led the national effort to craft multiple federal education statutes.

Jane's work focuses on teacher quality and building a bridge for professional educators to engage with policy makers. Toward this end she has created a doctoral course in education policy and politics that brings students to directly engage with policy makers and develop their analytical, communication and advocacy skills. Her

policy work focuses on the Higher Education Act, IDEA, ESSA and appropriations. She was a founder of the Coalition for Teaching Quality.

West holds a BA from the University of California at Santa Barbara, an MA from Teachers College, Columbia University and a Ph.D. in special education from the University of Maryland.



Phyllis Wolfram

Executive Director, Missouri Council of Administrators of Special Education

Phyllis Wolfram is the Executive Director for MO-CASE and resides in Springfield, Missouri. She has worked in the field of education for 36 years. Phyllis' administrative experience spans 30 years in the field of special education administration at the local level. She has been a local special education director in three different districts ranging in size from a small rural district to the largest urban district in the state of Missouri. In addition, she has experience in the area of gifted education, Section 504, ELL and early childhood.

Phyllis is currently the President of CASE. Prior to this position she served as the chair of the CASE Policy and Legislative committee for three years. She has also chaired the CASE Ad Hoc Committee on IDEA Reauthorization in 2010, and served as a member of the CASE Task Force, Design for the Future, 2005. In her home state of Missouri, Phyllis serves on the Governor's Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders and has served on various state level committees including Early Childhood Special Education, Electronic IEP Development, Missouri's RTI initiative, Transition from School to Work and the Elementary English Language Arts Advisory Committee. Phyllis has also served on the Board of Directors for the Council for Exceptional Children and the CEC IDEA Reauthorization Workgroup.



Mitchell Yell

Professor, University of South Carolina

Mitchell L. Yell is the Fred and Francis Lester Palmetto Chair in Teacher Education and a Professor in Special Education at the University of South Carolina. He earned his Ph.D. in special education from the University of Minnesota. His professional interests include special education law, progress monitoring, positive behavior support, IEP development, and parent involvement in special education. Dr. Yell has published 124 journal articles, 5 textbooks, 26 book chapters, and has conducted numerous workshops on various aspects of special education law, classroom management, and progress monitoring. His textbook, *Special Education and the Law*, is in its 5th edition. He is also the lead author of the textbook *Evidence-Based Interventions for Educating Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*. He also serves as a State-level due process review officer in South Carolina. Prior to working in higher education, Dr. Yell was a special education teacher in Minnesota for 16 years.



Deborah Ziegler

Director, Policy and Advocacy, Council for Exceptional Children

Deborah A. Ziegler is the Director for Policy and Advocacy at the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), one of the world's premier education organizations. She has broad public policy experience at the international, national, state and local levels. Ziegler works to further the overall goals of CEC through improving policies affecting children and youth with exceptionalities and the professionals who work on their behalf, at all levels of government. In her position, she is responsible for providing leadership and direction for the association's public policy agenda, including policy development, implementation, and analysis; information collection and dissemination; and maintaining a grassroots network of Children and Youth Action Network (CAN) Coordinators. She works closely with the White House, the United States Congress, and Federal Agencies including the U.S. Department of Education to advocate for policies that guarantee a free appropriate public education and early intervention services for children and youth with disabilities and gifts and talents.

Ziegler has worked as a special education teacher, special education and early intervention administrator and faculty at the university level. She has consulted widely and written extensively in the policy arena.