

Great First Eight Curriculum

Kindergarten through Second Grade Curriculum Development Team



Co-Directors and Domain Leads

Co-Directors: Nell K. Duke, Marisha Humphries **Domain Leads:** Nell K. Duke, Anne-Lise Halvorsen, José Martínez Hinestroza, Marisha Humphries, Naomi Jessup, Debi Khasnabis, Eve Manz, Melanie McCormick, Michelle Salgado

The titles and bios listed represent roles held at the time of the release of Great First Eight K–2.



Nell K. Duke
Co-Director,
Infant–Grade 2;
English Language Arts
and Literacy Lead

Nell K. Duke, EdD, is the executive director of the Center for Early Literacy and Learning Success at Stand for Children as well as a professor of Education and Psychology at the University of Michigan. Duke's work focuses on early literacy development, with a focus on children living in economic poverty. She seeks to improve literacy education through work on curriculum, professional learning, and policy. She has served as Co-Principal Investigator of projects funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, the National Science Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, and the George Lucas Educational Foundation, among other organizations. She is a long-time advisor for the Public Broadcasting Service/Corporation for Public Broadcasting Ready to Learn initiative (PBSKIDS). Duke has been named one of the most influential education scholars in the U.S. in EdWeek. She has received a number of awards for her work including the International Literacy Association's William S. Gray Citation of Merit for outstanding contributions to research, theory, practice, and policy. Duke has been elected to the National Academy of Education and to the Reading Hall of Fame.



Marisha Humphries
Co-Director,
PreK–Grade 2;
Social and Emotional
Learning Lead,
PreK–Grade 2

Marisha L. Humphries is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Illinois Chicago and a licensed clinical psychologist who engages in developmental and prevention science research that takes an integrated approach to studying African American children's normative and prosocial development. Specifically, her work examines African American children's emotional and social competence, and the ways in which schools can support this development by facilitating equitable learning environments. This work has led to the development of professional learning for pre-service teachers and school principals in transformative social and emotional learning. She has also engaged with university faculty to facilitate their learning regarding the connection among social and emotional competence, diversity, and learning in university classrooms. Her research has been published in *Early Education & Development*, *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, *Children & Schools*, and the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.



Anne-Lise Halvorsen
Social Studies Lead,
K–2

Anne-Lise Halvorsen, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. Her research interests include elementary social studies education, historical inquiry, project-based learning, the history of education, the integration of social studies and literacy, and teacher preparation in the social studies. She is the co-author of *Reasoning with Democratic Values: Ethical Issues in American History* (Teachers College Press, 2018), co-author of *Powerful Social Studies for Elementary Students* (Cengage, 2018) and the author of *A History of Elementary Social Studies: Romance and Reality* (Peter Lang, 2013). Her work has been published in *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *Teachers College Record*, *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *Social Education*, and *Social Studies and the Young Learner*; and has been funded by the George Lucas Educational Foundation, the Michigan Department of Education, and the Spencer Foundation. Halvorsen was awarded the Michigan Council for the Social Studies College Educator of the Year in 2017. She is a former kindergarten teacher and a former curriculum writer for the State of Michigan.



José Martínez Hinestroza
Mathematics Lead,
Kindergarten

José Martínez Hinestroza, PhD, is an assistant professor in elementary mathematics education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas State University. A former kindergarten and elementary school teacher, Martínez's work focuses on bilingual mathematics education, including teaching and learning in language immersion classrooms and the preparation of preservice teachers to teach bilingual children. Through his participatory research, he has engaged in prolonged collaborations with bilingual, Latinx teachers. He has published both research and practitioner-oriented papers in peer-reviewed journals and edited books, and his current research is funded by The Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) program from the National Science Foundation.



Naomi Jessup
Mathematics Lead,
Grades 1–2

Naomi Jessup, PhD, is an assistant professor of Mathematics Education in the Department of Early Childhood Elementary Education at Georgia State University. She coordinates a K–5 Mathematics Endorsement master's program and teaches mathematics content and methods courses for prospective teachers in the elementary education bachelor's degree program. Her research focuses on using sociocultural and critical theories that examine developing children's mathematical thinking, mathematics teaching practices, curriculum, and parental partnerships with prospective and in-service teachers. Specifically, Jessup's work focuses on impacts of mathematics teaching and learning for Black and other marginalized students and their communities. Her research and scholarly activities have been funded by the National Science Foundation, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators, and Foundation for Child Development. Jessup's work is published in peer-reviewed research and practitioner-based journals and edited chapters. She serves on national and local mathematics curriculum advisory boards, as well as the Family Math Research Consortium. Prior to her work at Georgia State University, Dr. Jessup was an elementary teacher, K–8 mathematics instructional coach, district administrator, and K–12 formative assessment coach and she draws on those experiences.



Debi Khasnabis
Family Engagement
Lead, K–2

Debi Khasnabis, PhD, is a clinical professor of Educational Studies at the University of Michigan. She teaches courses on multicultural and multilingual education and conducts research on pedagogies of teacher education that support culturally responsive teaching. Within this area, she focuses on supporting both preservice and inservice teachers to examine their own biases, to develop racial literacy, to develop family engagement efforts, and to address the trauma-related needs of students, all while attending to systemic inequality. She is a recipient of the Award for Diversity, Inclusion, Justice and Equity at the U-M School of Education. Dr. Khasnabis has served as Co-Principal Investigator on projects funded by the Spencer Foundation and U-M's Transforming Learning for the Third Century initiative, Ginsberg Center, and Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. She is a former leadership team member for the Mitchell Scarlett Teaching and Learning Collaborative, where she designed professional development for teachers and family engagement programs that aim to build connections between families and schools. Prior to her work at the University of Michigan, Dr. Khasnabis was an elementary bilingual teacher (Spanish and English) in southwest Detroit. She is orally fluent in Bengali and Spanish.



Eve Manz
Science Co-Lead,
Grades K–1;
Science Lead,
Grade 2

Eve Manz, PhD, is an associate professor of Science Education at the Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development. Her research focuses on understanding how to design and orchestrate learning environments that apprentice young students into science practices such as modeling, argumentation, and explanation. Manz works closely with elementary teachers and instructional leaders to develop new approaches to science teaching and learning that center student and teacher sense-making. She draws from her experience as an elementary school teacher and educational director of a science and engineering museum. Her work has been funded by the James S. McDonnell Foundation, the George Lucas Educational Foundation, and an early career research grant from the National Science Foundation. She has received a number of awards for research and served on the National Academies panel that wrote the consensus report on preschool through elementary science and engineering education.

Writers and Coordinators

Jennifer Banks, monét cooper, Genelle Diaz-Silveira, Julie Emra, Stephanie Englehaupt, Noncy Fields, Julia Karant, Carson Krome, Amber Lawson, Julia Lindsey, Megan Marsal, Melanie McCormick, Ceily Moore, Nia Nickerson, Andrea Pisani, Katie Revelle, Michelle Salgado, Betül Demiray Sandiraz, Alessandra Ward, Brittany White, Allie Whitford, Crystal Wise

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Jennifer Banks
Writer Specializing
in Mathematics, K–1;
Curriculum Reviewer,
Grade 1

Jennifer D. Banks, PhD, is the Mathematics and Science Coordinator for Washtenaw Intermediate School District. Dr. Banks has worked in the field of education for 18 years serving as a teacher and instructional leader at various levels. Over the past 10 years, she has intently worked to expand K–12 educators’ understanding of culturally responsive instruction, specifically in the area of mathematics. In her capacity at the WISD, Jennifer developed and launched the Responsive Teaching Institute, a professional development series that focuses on examining instruction from an equity perspective. She is also a participating member of the Michigan Early Mathematics Task Force, helping to develop a set of early mathematics essentials that are culturally responsive to students and their families. Her research has focused on the experiences of African American high school students in the mathematics classroom. Jennifer is passionate about empowering educators and learners, to ensure that all students have equitable access and opportunities to learn and engage in high-quality rigorous mathematics.



monét cooper
Writer Specializing
in Professional
Learning, K

monét cooper is a poet, teacher-educator, and doctoral candidate from Mvskoke land (Decatur, Georgia) in the University of Michigan’s Joint Program in English and Education. A former middle and high school English teacher, she received her bachelor’s in journalism from the University of Georgia and her master’s in African American Studies from Boston University. In her research, monét uses poetics of ethnography and interiority to study Black trans and queer girls’ and femmes’ literacies as the practice of freedom, contemplating how possibility emerges in their everyday. monét also co-hosts *Dancing on Desks*, a podcast that celebrates justice-full, liberatory, and abolitionist education. She always welcomes naps, porch sits, and night talks with her ancestors.



Genelle Diaz-Silveira
Writer Specializing
in Science, K–2

Genelle Diaz-Silveira is a PhD student in Educational Studies at Boston University. Her interests include designing learning environments that foster inquiry and exploring the effects of student-scientist collaborations on scientific literacy and civic engagement. She has 6 years of classroom teaching experience and holds an M.S. in Biology from New York University and a B.A. in Environmental Studies from Amherst College.



Julie Emra
Curriculum Designer
Specializing in Family
Engagement, K–2;
Curriculum Designer
Specializing in Literacy
& Social Studies,
Grades 1–2

Julie Emra is a curriculum writer, certified reading specialist, and a former elementary school teacher. She is a previous grant recipient of the 1619 Project Education Network’s inaugural cohort, who is committed to teaching, leading, and designing anti-bias and anti-racist curriculum. Through her teaching experience in grades K–5 in New York City, India, and Michigan, Julie has worked with diverse populations of students and designed curriculum where students see themselves represented. Julie received her BA in Elementary Education from the University of Michigan and an MA in Literacy Studies from Western Michigan University.



Stephanie Englehaupt
Writer Specializing
in Mathematics,
Grade 1

Stephanie Englehaupt is a mathematics curriculum consultant. Her work focuses on applied mathematics with children, building culturally responsive foundational skills through hands-on experiences. Currently, she is developing and implementing an applied mathematics curriculum for young gifted children. Stephanie earned her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, with a minor in mathematics, from the University of Illinois, and she holds a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership from National Louis University. She is honored to have been an elementary school teacher, where she worked with teams of children and educators as a mathematics specialist.



Nency Fields
Writer Specializing
in Mathematics, K-1

Nency Fields has taught first through fifth grades over the past 29 years. She serves as the Vice President of Elementary Education on the boards of the Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the Detroit Area Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Nency's accomplishments include receiving a curriculum writing grant awarded by the 1619 Project and the NYT Pulitzer Center. Her focus was on supporting students as they utilize critical thinking and historical analysis skills to build an understanding of American History that is honest, accurate, and honors all perspectives. Nency also co-authored the Identity Resource Screening Tool (IRST) which is designed to decrease curriculum violence by providing guidance on choosing developmentally-appropriate/culturally affirming teaching material when incorporating historical figures and movements into the elementary curriculum. Nency holds a BA in Elementary Education, Social Studies and Mathematics, from Michigan State University and a MA in Educational Psychology from Eastern Michigan University.



Julia Karant
Program Manager, K-2

Julia Karant is a graduate of the University of Michigan Masters in Educational Studies program, where she focused on design and technologies for learning across cultures and contexts. Prior to that, Julia was a 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade classroom teacher in Chicago Public Schools. She supports Great First Eight in a variety of ways, but is particularly passionate about creating opportunities within the curriculum for children to make interdisciplinary connections across content areas.



Carson Krome
Editorial Coordinator

Carson Krome started as an editor with Great First Eight while finishing her Bachelors of Elementary Education at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She has since supported the revision of thousands of lessons and contributed many custom illustrations that are used throughout the curriculum. Krome has previously worked with nonprofits in Detroit to develop STEAM influenced curriculum and spent many years providing academic interventions for students throughout Metro Detroit.



Amber Lawson
Writer Specializing in
Literacy Foundational
Skills, 1-2

Amber D. Lawson is a PhD candidate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education specializing in Language and Literacy and Urban Education at Michigan State University. Her research interest is in making foundational literacy culturally responsive for children of Color in K-2 by incorporating children's identities, home languages, and lived experiences as assets throughout their learning. With two years of teaching kindergarten and four years of teaching first grade in the Detroit Public Schools Community District, Lawson's experiences as an early elementary teacher play a vital role in her research and teaching.



Julia Lindsey
Writer Specializing in
Literacy Foundational
Skills, K-1

Dr. Julia Lindsey is a literacy consultant and foundational skills expert. Her research and work focuses on foundational literacy instruction, primarily by creating, implementing, and evaluating research-based, practical, and culturally responsive foundational skills curricula and texts. At present, she is working with various districts, non-profits, teachers, publishers, and other curriculum developers to find innovative solutions to improve early literacy instruction. Julia earned a BS from Davidson College, an MAT from Relay Graduate School of Education, and a PhD from the University of Michigan's School of Education. She is a proud former elementary teacher.



Megan Marsal
Writer Specializing in
Literacy Foundational
Skills, K-2

Megan Marsal is a foundation director based in New York City in addition to her work on Great First Eight. She received a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and social studies from the University of Michigan and a Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Education from Oakland University where she focused on the benefits of art participation on social emotional and English language arts development. She taught kindergarten and second grade in New York City and Ann Arbor Public Schools.



Melanie McCormick
Social Studies Co-Lead,
Grade 2; Curriculum
Designer Specializing in
Social Studies & Literacy;
Piloting Coordinator,
PreK-2; Implementation
Support Manager

Melanie M. McCormick, PhD, is the Implementation Support Manager and a Curriculum Designer in the Center for Early Literacy and Learning Success at Stand for Children. Her work spans from the PreK-3 & PreK-4/TK through grade two Great First Eight Teams. Her research focuses on interdisciplinary social studies and literacy for early childhood and early elementary students. She consults for school districts and schools across the nation to support early literacy and interdisciplinary learning. Dr. McCormick's work is published in peer-reviewed research and practitioner-based journals and edited chapters. She is a former early childhood educator in Ann Arbor Public Schools. While working in Ann Arbor, she led the district's social studies curriculum team, led district-wide professional development, started an after school foundational literacy skills program, and led a kindergarten readiness summer program that supported the social-emotional needs of children prior to starting school. She received her PhD in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education at Michigan State University, Masters of Arts in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.



Ceily Moore
Writer Specializing in
Social and Emotional
Learning, K-2

Ceily Moore is a doctoral student in Educational Psychology at the University of Illinois Chicago. Her work focuses on the importance of youth-adult relationships and the development of social and emotional learning competencies for youth and adults. As a former second and fourth grade teacher in Chicago, IL, Ceily is passionate about supporting teachers in providing exceptional classroom experiences to Black students. Currently, Ceily works as a Research and Evaluation consultant, where she supports schools and community-based organizations in measuring the outcomes that matter most to their organizations and demonstrating their full impact. Ceily earned a B.S. in Health Sciences from Howard University and MEd in Youth Development from the University of Illinois Chicago.



Nia Nickerson
Writer Specializing in
Professional Learning
and Language Diversity,
K-1

Nia Nickerson, PhD, is a postdoctoral fellow in the School of Education at the University of California, Irvine. She holds a doctorate from the Combined Program in Education and Psychology at the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on brain, language, and literacy development, with an emphasis on the bidialectal and bilingual experiences of Black and Latino children. She also investigates bias in neuroscience and explores solutions for inclusion. In addition to her work as a scholar and educator, she is a multifaceted creative with a passion for painting and dancing.



Andrea Pisani

Writer Specializing in Professional Learning and Mathematics, K-1; Writer Specializing in Professional Learning and Science, Grade 2

Andrea Pisani is the president and co-founder of The Variis Institute, an educational nonprofit serving Southeast Michigan, and co-director of uniteSTEM, an integrated STEM education center in Ypsilanti, Michigan. With over 20 years of experience as an educator, Pisani has worked with K-12 learners, preservice teachers, and practicing educators. She has designed course content and high-impact professional learning to help teachers employ research-based best practices in their classrooms. Her professionalism, and her passion for her role as an anti-racist teacher and instructional leader, along with her commitment to deepening her understanding of issues of equity and access as it relates to mathematics and student learning, fuel her commitment to supporting educators in creating equitable learning opportunities for all students.



Katie Revelle

Writer Specializing in Professional Learning, K; Writer Specializing in Literacy, Grade 1

Katie Z. Revelle, PhD, is the director of Community Collaboration in the Department of Education at the University of Vermont. In this role, she aims to foster equitable and long-term partnerships that create enriching educational experiences for UVM students and communities throughout Vermont. Katie's research has explored how to support elementary school teachers' integration of literacy and social studies instruction in ways that provide equitable, engaging, and humanizing learning opportunities to all students. She has taught undergraduate and master's level methods courses in elementary literacy and social studies at the University of Michigan and the University of Vermont, and she has supported several school districts in their development of project-based curricula. In her teaching, research, and curriculum development work, she draws on her experience as an elementary school teacher in Vermont and North Carolina and on her university-community partnership work at the University of Pennsylvania.



Michelle Salgado

Co-Domain Lead, Science, K-1; Writer Specializing in Science, K-2

Michelle Salgado has a PhD in education from the University of Washington and is a National Board-Certified Teacher. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan and currently serves as a Senior Science Educator at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. Michelle's research focuses on designing K-3 science education curriculum, cultivating knowledge building communities in classrooms, and documenting the learning experiences of young children engaged in collaborative science learning.



Betül Demiray Sandıraz

Writer Specializing in Social Studies, K-1

Betül Demiray Sandıraz is a doctoral candidate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education at Michigan State University. She is a two-time graduate of the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, Turkey, earning a Bachelor of Science in early childhood education, including a minor in psychology, and a Master of Science in curriculum and instruction. She is a former graduate assistant at METU and Fulbrighter. Her research focuses broadly on social studies education for young children, with a specific interest in civic engagement and civic identity development during early childhood and elementary school years.



Alessandra Ward

Project Coordinator, K; Writer Specializing in Social and Emotional Learning, K; Writer Specializing in Science and Literacy, K-2

Alessandra Ward, EdD, is an assistant professor of Education at Wheaton College, Massachusetts. Her work focuses on supporting new teachers to provide engaging, culturally responsive, and sustaining education in the domains of literacy and social and emotional learning. On the Great First Eight team, Alessandra wrote the social and emotional learning portions of the Kindergarten curriculum, as well as the literacy portions of the curriculum within science-led projects in grades K-2. Prior to coming to Wheaton, she was a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Michigan. She is also a former classroom teacher, reading specialist, and literacy coach.



Brittany White
Writer Specializing
in Mathematics,
Grade 1

Brittany White is a former elementary school teacher. She now serves as the PROPEL Project's Professional Learning Community (PLC) and Induction Coordinator at Georgia State University. She is committed to preparing teachers empowered to effectively educate diverse students in urban schools. Brittany is also a PhD student studying early childhood and elementary education at Georgia State University.



Allie Whitford
Writer Specializing
in Social Studies, 1–2

Dr. Alyssa Whitford is a former elementary teacher and current assistant professor at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Her areas of expertise are literacy and social studies, and she is currently researching how critical literacy pedagogy can be used to teach social issues, particularly issues of gender, in elementary classrooms. Her work is especially focused on how students perceive the social world and the power of literacy to elicit, challenge, and expand student thinking. Alyssa earned a PhD in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education from Michigan State University and is passionate about working with preservice teachers to create powerful, engaging experiences for elementary students.



Crystal Wise
Writer Specializing
in Literacy and Social
Studies, K–2

Crystal N. Wise, PhD, is an assistant professor of literacy education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. Her work focuses on early literacy development. Her current research interests include vocabulary instruction and assessment for children in the primary grades and historical and contemporary language and literacy practices of African Americans. She has published her work in peer-reviewed research and practitioner journals and edited books. She is a former kindergarten and second-grade teacher.

National Advisory Board

Kate Brohl, Malcolm Butler, Sonia Cabell, Jill Cowart, Jen Curry, Maisie Gholson, Beth Gonzalez, Wendy Lewis Jackson, Robert J. Jagers, Heidi Anne Mesmer, Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, Carla Thompson Payton, Alison Williams, Camille Wilson

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Kate Brohl
Organizational Partner
District

Kate Brohl serves as the Executive Director of PK–5 Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment for Wayne-Westland Community Schools. In this role, she supports the work of curriculum implementation across all PK–5 schools and provides direct support to principals while serving as their coach. Throughout her career, she has been a classroom teacher, a reading recovery teacher, an intervention specialist, a principal, and a National Writing Project consultant (Eastern Michigan Writing Project 2007). Throughout her career in these many roles, her goal has always been to have a positive impact on students. She earned a Bachelor’s in Elementary Education from Bowling Green State University, a Master’s in the Art of Teaching from Marygrove College, and an Administrative Certification through the University of Michigan, Dearborn. In all that she does, both personally and professionally, Kate has a mission to stay balanced, be inspired, and grow.



Malcolm Butler
Science Education

Dr. Malcolm B. Butler is professor and dean of the Cato College of Education at UNC Charlotte. Butler was born in Lafayette, Louisiana. He spent his childhood in south Louisiana with his eight siblings and loving mother, Adlean F. Butler, and father, the late Lee Butler, Jr. Butler earned a B.S. in Physics from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He also completed an MEd and PhD in Curriculum and Instruction (Science Education) at the University of Florida. Butler has taught and learned mathematics, science and life from elementary, middle, and high school students, as well as college students. He has been affiliated with several institutions of higher education, including the College of William and Mary, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, the University of Georgia, the University of South Florida, and the University of Central Florida. Some of his research interests include writing to learn in science, physics teacher education, and equity and diversity in science. Dr. Butler has secured over eight million dollars in funding to support his research and scholarly initiatives. He has presented his research findings and conducted workshops across the United States, as well as Canada, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Cyprus, South Africa and Botswana. He co-authored and co-edited three books and numerous book chapters and journal articles. He has served in leadership capacities in his profession, including board member of NARST (a global organization for improving science education through research) and Nap Ford Community Schools, Inc. (Orlando, Florida), chair of the board for the Council of Scientific Society Presidents, and president of the Association for Science Teacher Education. He is married to Rev. Dr. Vikki Gaskin-Butler, and they have one son, Malcolm Lee Butler.



Sonia Cabell
Oral Language
Development

Sonia Cabell, PhD, is an associate professor in the School of Teacher Education and the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University. Before receiving her Ph.D. at the University of Virginia, she worked as a second grade teacher and literacy coach in Oklahoma and Virginia. Dr. Cabell’s research focuses on early language and literacy instruction, with a particular interest in preventing reading difficulties in young children. She has authored over 70 publications, including peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, and early childhood language and literacy curricula. She is the lead editor of the *Handbook on the Science of Early Literacy* from Guilford Press, and co-author of *Literacy Learning for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers: Key Practices for Educators from the National Association for the Education of Young Children*. In 2021, Dr. Cabell, along with her colleague Dr. Tricia Zucker, was awarded the Diane Lapp & James Flood Professional Collaborator Award from the International Literacy Association. Dr. Cabell has served as Principal Investigator or co-Principal Investigator on federally funded research projects totaling approximately \$10 million dollars. She has been an advisor or consultant for a variety of national organizations and state departments of education.



Jill Cowart
Mathematics and
Science Education*

Jill Cowart served as the Assistant Superintendent of Academic Content for the Louisiana Department of Education, helping to ensure Louisiana's academic vision was executed in classrooms daily. In this role, Jill led the development and implementation of content standards, primarily focusing on helping educators create coherent systems with high quality curricula, limited yet informative assessments, and aligned professional development. Jill worked on a number of innovative projects such as implementing STEM pathways for high school students, partnering with local and national organizations to develop quality curricula, and implementing curriculum-aligned remediation tools for struggling students. With three kids of her own in the public school system, Jill understands the importance of a quality public school education and worked to help make that a reality for every student in Louisiana. As a teacher, school administrator, and state-level leader, Jill has spent her career working with Louisiana students and educators. She earned a BA in Education from Southeastern Louisiana University and an MA in Curriculum and Instruction from Louisiana State University.

*2019–2020 academic year



Jen Curry
Organizational Partner
District

Jennifer Curry is currently the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment in the Wayne-Westland Community School District. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science, an Early Childhood Endorsement, a Master of Arts in Literacy with a Reading Specialist Endorsement, and an Administrator's Certificate. She has taught kindergarten, 6th grade, been a middle school math coordinator, and served as an Elementary Principal, all with Wayne-Westland Community Schools. Her work focuses on improving collective teaching practices and ensuring that every classroom is a place of valuable and rich learning for all students.



Maisie Gholson
Mathematics Education

Maisie L. Gholson, PhD, is an associate professor in Educational Studies at the University of Michigan. Within a Black feminist framework, Gholson's research seeks to understand how Black children and adolescents' identity and social development mediate participation patterns and educational achievement, particularly in mathematics at various ecological scales. Her current projects examine how social networks (i.e., relational ties) among young Black youth create different sources of support and power, including physical, racial, gendered, and social, and provide different learning trajectories in secondary contexts. She has received a prestigious Early CAREER grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and serves as a principal investigator on multiple NSF grants. Gholson currently serves as a committee member for the American Institute of Research for a practice and evidence guide for the What Works Clearinghouse and the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine Committee on *Equity in PreK–12 STEM Education*. She also serves as editorial board member for the international journal in mathematics education, *Educational Studies in Mathematics*. Her service is also local to the state of Michigan, where she serves on the Early Mathematics Task Force. She is the mother of an autistic child and advocate for children with disabilities. Gholson is a former high school mathematics teacher and prior to that a patent writer in her hometown of Houston, Texas. She received her PhD in curriculum and instruction in 2016 from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). She received her BS in electrical engineering from Duke University.



Beth Gonzalez
Curriculum Alignment

Beth Gonzalez currently serves as Deputy Superintendent of Educational Services for the Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, the largest Intermediate School District (ISD) in the State of Michigan. In this current role, Beth oversees a diverse portfolio of critical areas, including Assessment & Evaluation, Early Childhood, Special Education, Continuous Improvement, Safe & Healthy Schools, CTE/Adult Education, ELA/Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Instructional Technology including Computer Science, Leadership Development, Multilingual Learner Education, and Culture & Climate. Wayne RESA supports over 260,000 students from 33 school districts and 99 public school academies in Wayne County, Michigan, including the City of Detroit.

Previously, she served as assistant superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction for Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), the largest district in Michigan. Beth and her team have made nationally-recognized contributions to the high-quality curriculum landscape by spearheading the modEL Detroit Project. Prior to joining DPSCD, Beth served as the assistant superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction at Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, FL, the 20th largest district in the nation with 130,000 students. In her four years there, the district's graduation rate improved from 67% to 78.8%; the district's accountability grade improved from a C+ to a B; and academic achievement continued to increase. After the Spring 2017 administration of NAEP TUDA, Duval County scored first in the nation for the following groups: all students in fourth-grade math; African American students in fourth-grade math and eighth-grade reading; students with disabilities in fourth-grade math; and eighth-grade math.

Prior to serving as assistant superintendent, Beth led K–12 Mathematics as executive director. Beth also previously served as both a data captain for the Bureau of School Improvement and Student Achievement and as a school improvement specialist and data coach at the Florida Department of Education. Beth began her career as a district instructional coach and classroom teacher, which were roles she loved and still holds in high regard.



Wendy Lewis Jackson
Community Development
Early Childhood Education

Wendy Lewis Jackson is managing director for the Detroit Program. She leads The Kresge Foundation's efforts to revitalize Detroit and to strengthen its social and economic fabric. Her work supports organizations providing economic opportunity for low-income people and addresses the needs of vulnerable children and families.

Prior to joining Kresge in 2008, Wendy was a program director for Children and Family Initiatives and executive director for education initiatives at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation in Grand Rapids, Mich. She taught at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Mich., and has co-authored and assisted in the publication of several reports and publications that address community needs and problem-solving.

Wendy is an American Marshall Memorial Fellow of the German Marshall Fund of the United States; the Association of Black Foundation Executives named her an Emerging Leader in 2008. In 2018, she received the Dr. Gerald K. Smith Award for Philanthropy by the Michigan Forum for African-Americans in Philanthropy, an affinity group of the Council of Michigan Foundations.

Wendy's board directorships include the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, the Marygrove Conservancy and the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy. She also serves on the executive board of the Live6 Alliance.

Wendy earned a bachelor's degree in political science and communications from the University of Michigan. She also holds a master's degree in social work from U-M, with a concentration in community organization and social policy and planning.



Robert J. Jagers
Social and Emotional Learning

Robert J. Jagers, PhD, is the Vice President of Research at the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Among his various CASEL duties, Dr. Jagers is leading work with partnering districts to explore how social and emotional learning can be leveraged to promote equitable learning environments and equitable developmental outcomes, especially for students from under-served groups. He has a particular interest in transformative approaches to SEL and their implications for the civic development of children and youth. Prior to joining CASEL, he was a faculty member in the Combined Program in Education and Psychology at the University of Michigan, a Co-PI of the Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context (CSBYC), and the founding director of Wolverine Pathways, a university-sponsored diversity pipeline program for qualified secondary school students. Dr. Jagers earned his PhD in Developmental Psychology at Howard University.



Heidi Anne Mesmer
Foundational Literacy Skills Education

Heidi Anne E. Mesmer, PhD, is a professor in Literacy in the School of Education at Virginia Tech. She has studied beginning reading materials, text difficulty, and struggling readers since 1999. Her research has appeared in *Reading Research Quarterly*, *The Educational Researcher*, *Elementary School Journal*, and *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. She has written and directed eight grants aimed at improving reading instruction in K–5 classrooms. Dr. Mesmer is the recent author of *There’s Research for That: K–5 Literacy Questions Answered* (2025) and *Big Words for Young Readers: Teaching to Decode—and Understand—Words with Multiple Syllables and Morphemes* (2024) as well as *Teaching Skills for Complex Text: Deepening Reading in the Classroom* (Teachers College Press, 2016). Her research has been supported by a National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship, and an American Educational Research Association/Institute of Education Sciences grant. Her Twitter handle is @haemesmer



Noreen Naseem Rodríguez
Social Studies Education

Noreen Naseem Rodríguez is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education and Educational Justice in the Department of Teacher Education and core faculty in the Asian Pacific American Studies and Muslim Studies Programs at Michigan State University. Her current research, funded by the Spencer Foundation, examines the implementation of Asian American Studies in K–12 classrooms across the U.S. She has published over forty peer-reviewed book chapters and articles in scholarly and practitioner journals such as *Harvard Educational Review*, *Curriculum Inquiry*, and *Journal of Children’s Literature*, and is co-author of *Social Studies for a Better World: An Anti-Oppressive Approach for Elementary Educators* with Katy Swalwell and *Teaching Asian America in Elementary Classrooms* with Sohyun An and Esther Kim. Before becoming a teacher educator, Noreen was a bilingual elementary teacher in Austin, Texas for nine years.



Carla Thompson Payton
Early Childhood Education

Carla Thompson Payton is chief strategist & impact officer for program strategy for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan. In this role, she supports the foundation’s efforts to promote thriving children, working families and equitable communities.

Carla Thompson Payton is one of the country’s foremost philanthropic leaders creating systemic change for children and families, promoting a more just economy and advancing racial equity. As the chief strategist and impact officer for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, she leads the creative and strategic direction of the organization’s multi-billion dollar programming from design through implementation and evaluation. As a member of the executive team, she is also responsible for the overall strategic direction and leadership of the foundation.

Prior to joining the foundation in 2012, Thompson Payton served for over a decade in local, state, and federal public service, ultimately as the deputy director of the Office of Child Care at the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. There, she was responsible for developing national early childhood education policy, managing the \$5 billion annual budget of the Child Care Development Fund and providing oversight to 10 regional offices serving states, tribes and territories.

Previously, she was the inaugural assistant superintendent for early childhood education for the District of Columbia, where she led the first publicly funded pre-kindergarten program. Her efforts led to developing dynamic new learning opportunities for children and their educators and public-private partnerships.

In other professional experience, she has held positions with the Departments of Education and Public Welfare in Pennsylvania; United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey in Philadelphia; and the U.S. Department of Education.

Thompson Payton has been honored for her leadership in early childhood education by the Administration for Children and Families; the Children’s Defense Fund; and the Temple University Institute on Disabilities. Essence magazine named her one of the “50 Women Who Made Us Proud.”

She also serves on boards and committees for nonprofit associations and professional organizations. She wrote *Black Girl Magic: C-suite Leadership in Philanthropic Organizations* and has been cited in numerous news media for her expertise. In addition, she is the author of three publications related to school readiness and advocacy.

She holds a significant passion for racial equity and promoting Black women’s success in executive-level leadership. Among the numerous special initiatives she has led at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, she helped to develop Racial Equity 2030, a \$90 million global challenge focused on sparking innovation and eradicating racial inequities supporting communities across the globe in reimagining their future.

She holds a doctorate in educational and organizational leadership and a master’s degree in social work from the University of Pennsylvania.



Alison Williams
Educator Professional
Development

Alison Williams serves as Senior Deputy Chief of Content and Curriculum at District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), bringing over 20 years of instruction and educational leadership to her role. Her career spans multiple school systems in the DMV area, including positions in Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, and DC Charter Schools, before returning to DCPS where she worked as an instructional coach and later became Director of Elementary Literacy Professional Learning.

In her current position, Alison oversees curriculum, assessments, interventions, and special programming across all core content areas in grades K–12 for over 51,000 DCPS students. With a focus on ensuring all students in the district are provided with equitable learning opportunities grounded in research-based best practices, Alison prioritizes the ongoing design, implementation, and analysis of curricular and professional learning opportunities across content areas for district leaders, teachers, and students.



Camille Wilson
Family Engagement

Camille M. Wilson, Ph.D., is a University Diversity and Social Transformation Professor and Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy at the University of Michigan. She explores the intersections of school-family-community engagement, educational improvement, and transformative leadership. Within this work, she highlights the educational advocacy, activism, and choices of marginalized families and communities of color from critical, gendered, and racial justice perspectives. She also studies the equity-based efforts of school-based leaders committed to better serving diverse populations.

In addition to publishing her scholarship extensively in national and international venues, Dr. Wilson’s work and commentary has been featured in prominent media outlets like the New York Times and Harper’s Bazaar. Actively collaborating with youth, family, and community activists in national and regional educational improvement initiatives is also a vital aspect of her work.

In 2020, Dr. Wilson founded the Community-Based Research on Equity, Activism, and Transformative Education ([CREATE](#)) Center at the University of Michigan’s Marsal Family School of Education. The CREATE Center supports and networks equity-driven scholars and education advocates and activists who are committed to conducting and/or leveraging research that helps catalyze transformative public education in racially just ways. Dr. Wilson earned her doctorate in urban schooling in 2001 from UCLA.

Mathematics Advisory Board

Deborah Loewenberg Ball, Marta Civil, Douglas Clements, Maisie Gholson, José Martínez Hinestroza, Danny Martin, Julia Sarama, Edd V. Taylor

The titles and bios listed represent roles held at the time of the release of Great First Eight K–2.



Deborah Loewenberg Ball
Mathematics Education

Deborah Loewenberg Ball is the Jessie Jean Storey-Fry Distinguished University Professor of Education at the Marsal Family School of Education at the University of Michigan, an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, a research professor in the Institute for Social Research, and the director of TeachingWorks. She taught elementary school for more than 15 years and continues to teach children every summer. Loewenberg Ball's research focuses on the practice of teaching, using elementary mathematics as a critical context for investigating the challenges of helping children develop understanding and agency and to work collectively, and on leveraging the power of teaching to disrupt patterns of injustice. She is an expert on the demands of teaching and the imperatives for teachers' professional education.

Loewenberg Ball has authored more than 200 publications and has lectured and made major presentations around the world. She has also developed collections of video records of practice that are broadly used to make teaching practice visible. Her research has been recognized with several awards and honors, and she has served on national and international commissions and panels focused on the improvement of education. She currently serves on the National Science Board and the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute Board of Trustees and previously served as president of the American Educational Research Association (2017–2018) and as dean of the University of Michigan School of Education (2005–2016). Loewenberg Ball has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Education, and is a fellow of the American Mathematical Society and the American Educational Research Association.



Marta Civil
Mathematics Education

Marta Civil, PhD, is a professor of Mathematics Education and the Roy F. Graesser Endowed Chair in the Department of Mathematics at The University of Arizona. She has over 30 years of experience collaborating with teachers, children, and families, primarily in Mexican American communities. Her work focuses on cultural, social, and language aspects in the teaching and learning of mathematics, linking in-school and out-of-school mathematics, and parental engagement in mathematics. Her research is grounded on the concept of Funds of Knowledge and seeks to learn from the communities to develop learning environments that reflect the richness of community knowledge. She has led several externally funded initiatives, including a gender equity project in STEM; a parental engagement project in mathematics education; and CEMELA (Center for the Mathematics Education of Latinos/as), a multi-university consortium focused on research and practice on the connections between the teaching and learning of mathematics and the cultural, social, and linguistic contexts of Latina/o students. Her most recent work includes a K–3 parental engagement mathematics project aimed at developing a two-way dialogue between home and school, and a collaboration with two other universities focused on the development of a mathematical partnership that engages teachers, parents, and multilingual children in grades 2–5 in underserved communities. She is also working on how to apply lessons learned from her work in equity in K–12 settings to entry level college mathematics teaching and learning. She received the TODOS Iris M. Carl Equity and Leadership Award in 2013 and the NCTM Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021. She became an AERA Fellow in 2023 and a member of the National Academy of Education in 2025.



Douglas Clements
Mathematics Education

Douglas H. Clements, PhD, is a Distinguished University Professor, Kennedy Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Learning, and Executive Director of the Marsico Institute for Early Learning at the University of Denver. Previously a kindergarten teacher for five years and a preschool teacher for one, he has conducted research and published widely in the learning and teaching of early mathematics and computer applications in mathematics education. Recently he is creating, using, and evaluating a research-based curriculum and taking successful curricula to scale using technologies and learning trajectories. He has published over 200 refereed research studies, 30 books, 107 chapters, and 300 additional works. A research study showed he was first in the USA and second in the world in a rating of the most influential math education researchers in the past half-century. Dr. Clements has been the principal investigator of over 40 projects, including those funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the U.S. Dept. of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He has served on six national research committees funded by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and other organizations and is coauthor of each of their reports. Additional information can be found at his academia.edu and researchgate.net pages.



Maisie Gholson
Mathematics Education

Maisie L. Gholson, PhD, is an associate professor in Educational Studies at the University of Michigan. Within a Black feminist framework, Gholson's research seeks to understand how Black children and adolescents' identity and social development mediate participation patterns and educational achievement, particularly in mathematics at various ecological scales. Her current projects examine how social networks (i.e., relational ties) among young Black youth create different sources of support and power, including physical, racial, gendered, and social, and provide different learning trajectories in secondary contexts. She has received a prestigious Early CAREER grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and serves as a principal investigator on multiple NSF grants. Gholson currently serves as a committee member for the American Institute of Research for a practice and evidence guide for the What Works Clearinghouse and the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine Committee on *Equity in PreK–12 STEM Education*. She also serves as editorial board member for the international journal in mathematics education, *Educational Studies in Mathematics*. Her service is also local to the state of Michigan, where she serves on the Early Mathematics Task Force. She is the mother of an autistic child and advocate for children with disabilities. Gholson is a former high school mathematics teacher and prior to that a patent writer in her hometown of Houston, Texas. She received her PhD in curriculum and instruction in 2016 from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). She received her BS in electrical engineering from Duke University.



José Martínez Hinstroza
Mathematics Education
(for grades 1–2)

José Martínez Hinstroza, PhD, is an assistant professor in elementary mathematics education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas State University. A former kindergarten and elementary school teacher, Martínez's work focuses on bilingual mathematics education, including teaching and learning in language immersion classrooms and the preparation of preservice teachers to teach bilingual children. Through his participatory research, he has engaged in prolonged collaborations with bilingual, Latinx teachers. He has published both research and practitioner-oriented papers in peer-reviewed journals and edited books, and his current research is funded by The Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) program from the National Science Foundation.



Danny Martin
Mathematics Education

Dr. Danny Bernard Martin is professor of Education and Mathematics at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). He teaches content and foundations courses in the undergraduate elementary education program as well as courses in the PhD program in Mathematics and Science Education. He served as Department Chair of Curriculum and Instruction from 2006–2011 and again from 2013–2016. Prior to coming to UIC, he was instructor and professor in the Department of Mathematics at Contra Costa College for 14 years, serving as Chair for three years, and was a National Academy of Education Postdoctoral Fellow from 1998–2000. Dr. Martin’s research has focused primarily on understanding the salience of race and identity in Black learners’ mathematical development. Martin is author of the book *Mathematics Success and Failure Among African-American Youth* (2000/2006, Erlbaum), co-author of *The Impact of Identity in K–8 Mathematics Learning and Teaching* (2013, NCTM), co-author of *The Impact of Identity in K–12 Mathematics: Rethinking Equity-Based Practice* (NCTM, 2024), editor of *Mathematics Teaching, Learning, and Liberation in the Lives of Black Children* (2009, Routledge), and co-editor of *The Brilliance of Black Children in Mathematics: Beyond the Numbers and Toward New Discourse* (2013, Information Age). He currently serves as co-Chair and co-PI of the Racial Justice in Early Math (RJEM) Project, a collaboration between UIC and the Erikson Institute.



Julie Sarama
Mathematics Education

Julie Sarama, PhD, is the Kennedy Endowed Chair in Innovative Learning Technologies and Distinguished University Professor at the University of Denver. She conducts research on young children’s development of mathematical concepts, implementation and scale-up of educational reform, professional development, and implementation and effects of software environments (including those she has created) in mathematics classrooms. These studies have been published in more than 125 refereed articles, 10 books, 160 chapters, and over 200 additional publications. In total, she has directed 36 externally funded projects from IES, NSF, and the National Institute of Health (NIH). She has taught secondary mathematics, computer science, gifted math, and methods and content courses for elementary to secondary teachers.



Edd V. Taylor
Mathematics Education

Edd V. Taylor is an Associate Teaching Professor of Mathematics Education. His research examines relationships between youths’ everyday cultural practices and mathematical thinking and the role of such knowledge in addressing issues of equity in mathematics learning and achievement. He also investigates what might be learned from this research related to mathematical cognition more generally.

Dr. Taylor’s primary focus in addressing these issues has been through understanding how children and adolescents come to develop mathematical ideas, and the links between their ways of understanding mathematics that are both complementary and sometimes in conflict with standard classroom practices in math. Dr. Taylor seeks to understand how knowledge of everyday cultural practices might be used to address equitable mathematical learning in classrooms. His research related to learning in corner stores, classrooms, churches, and within professional development settings, can be found in publication such as *The Journal of the Learning Sciences* (JLS), *The Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education* (JMTE), the *Journal of Research in Mathematics Education* (JRME), and *Mind, Culture and Activity*.

Dr. Taylor has served on committees and boards for the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the Association of Mathematics Teachers Educators (AMTE), and the Jean Piaget Society.

Other Collaborators

Great First Eight is a program of Stand For Children. We are very grateful to receive accounting, graphic design, guidance, marketing, technology, and other support from our Leadership Center.

The titles listed represent roles held at the time of partnership.



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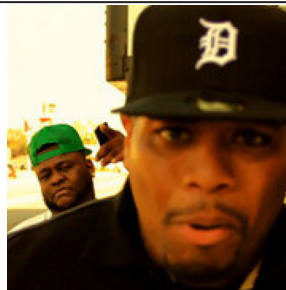
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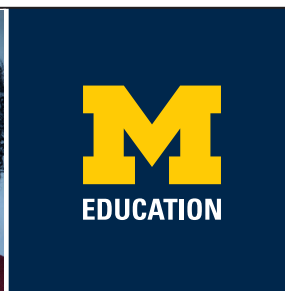
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