

Michigan Educational Research Association, Inc. (MERA)

Spring 2022 Conference

April 29, 2022

Presenter Biographies

(By order of presentations)

Melissa Saleh



I (Melissa Saleh) have been in education for 23 years. I started my career in a charter school in Detroit, Michigan as a 1st grade teacher for a year. I was then hired by South Lake Schools as 5th grade teacher. At Avalon Elementary School I have taught many years in a variety of grade levels that included Kindergarten through 6th grade. As a teacher, I always looked at myself as a leader. I have been a school improvement chair, served on many committees and have been a mentor to many teachers. I received my Educational Specialist Degree in Administration while also participating in the Galileo Leadership Consortium. This is my 5th year as the Avalon Principal. I never planned on becoming a principal, but it's the best decision I've made in my educational career. Building relationships with students, staff and families is the foundation of my work at Avalon.

Leadriane Roby



Dr. Leadriane Roby was appointed superintendent of Grand Rapids Public Schools in February 2020.

Leadriane (pronounced *Lee-dree-in*) is an experienced and reflective educator with a 26-year history in public education. She began her career as an elementary classroom teacher, advancing to other roles including instructional leader, mentor, elementary and secondary principal and district leader in school districts in Michigan and Minnesota.

From school performance turnarounds to new strategic planning practices to promoting safe and respectful learning environments, while embracing 21st-century approaches with data-driven decision-making and more, Leadriane's innovative leadership has impacted classrooms, communities, and cultures in urban and suburban districts alike. She has led school performance turnarounds, new strategic planning practices, and the promotion of safe and respectful learning environments - all while embracing 21st-century approaches. Dr. Roby ensures thorough and thoughtful decision-making by using many data points and engaging all voices.

Dr. Roby has always been determined to make a difference in the lives of students. She continues to be a strong advocate for educational equity, access and excellence for all learners. To this end, she has facilitated various groups, helping to create a roadmap to transform preK-12 education systems where all students benefit.

Dr. Roby earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from the University of Minnesota and a Master's degree in Education Administration from St. Mary's University of Minnesota. She holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology from Western Michigan University. Dr. Roby's research focused on the teacher mentoring experience. She deeply believes that teacher preparation and support shapes the academic experiences of students. She believes all students should receive the benefit of having caring, strong and engaged teachers who believe in them.

The mother of three adult children and a first-time grandmother, Dr. Roby and her husband, Steven are excited to be joining the Grand Rapids Community and calling Michigan home once again.

Elaine Weiss



Elaine Weiss is the Policy Director at the National Academy of Social Insurance, an EPI research associate, and the former National Coordinator of the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education. BBA was a national education policy campaign launched by the Economic Policy Institute to call attention to the many impacts of poverty-related impediments to effective teaching and learning and promote strategies to mitigate those impacts. Dr. Weiss's research interests include early childhood education, social and emotional learning, incorporating community voice in school improvement, and education policies that advance racial and social justice. Publications for EPI include

Examining the Factors that Play a Role in the Teacher Shortage Crisis (2020) and *Education Inequalities at the School Starting Gate* (2017) (both with Emma Garcia) and *The Hidden Costs of the Housing Crisis* (2008, with Melissa Maynard) for the Pew Charitable Trusts. She authored in-depth case studies of diverse communities across the country that employ integrated student supports to advance whole-child education systems. Those studies are the basis for her book, co-authored with Paul Reville *Broader, Bolder, Better: How Schools and Communities Help Students Overcome the Disadvantages of Poverty* (Harvard Education Press, June 2019). She has a B.A. and B.S. from the University of Maryland College Park, a J.D. from Harvard Law School, and a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the George Washington University Trachtenberg School.

Emma Garcia



Emma García is a Senior Researcher at the Learning Policy Institute. She has extensive research and teaching experience in the fields of economics of education, education policy, and quantitative methods. She has published academic and policy studies on a wide range of issues, including production of education, impact evaluation, educational equity, teacher labor markets, whole-child development, human development, international comparative education, and cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis.

García has held research positions at the Economic Policy Institute, the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education, the Campaign for Educational Equity, the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, and the Community College Research Center. She has also consulted with national and international organizations, including the National Institute for Early Education Research, MDRC, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. García recently served as an adjunct faculty member at the McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University.

García received a Ph.D. in Economics and Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, an M.A. in Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences from Columbia University, and B.A. in Economics from Pompeu Fabra University.

Sandi Jacobs



Sandi Jacobs recently joined the Baltimore City School District as Executive Director for Strategic Resourcing and Fiscal Management. She was previously a Principal at EducationCounsel, where her main area of focus was educator quality. Before joining EdCounsel, Sandi was the Senior Vice President for State and District Policy at the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). Sandi previously worked at the U.S. Department of Education as a Senior Education Program Specialist for the Reading First and Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration programs. She also taught 4th and 5th grade for nearly a decade at Public School 9 in Brooklyn, New York. Sandi was a Presidential Management Intern and a charter corps member

of Teach For America. She holds a master's degree from Columbia University's Teachers College and a BA from Columbia College.

Kelli Cassaday



Kelli Cassaday currently serves as an Education Consultant within the Office of Educator Excellence at the Michigan Department of Education. She serves as the recognized resource for the OEE for strategic implementation initiatives, legislatively required or external policy-related activities, project leadership and development for OEE, and research and internal policy related to the educator workforce. She has previously held various roles in education including, curriculum instructional coordinator, an item writer for state and national assessments, and as a teacher in several Michigan districts.

Kate Boswell Gallagher



Kate Boswell Gallagher currently serves as Manager of the Data and Accountability unit within the Office of Educator Excellence at the Michigan Department of Education. She serves as a recognized resource on educator workforce data, research and reporting, and educator preparation accountability systems. Prior to coming to the department she worked as a research coordinator and manager of data systems and with children with autism as a case manager and waiver specialist. She earned her bachelor's degree from Albion College and holds a master's degree in health science from Johns Hopkins University and a graduate certificate in statistics from Pennsylvania State University.

Arnetta Thompson



Dr. Arnetta Thompson is honored to be the Superintendent of Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System. She has served the school system for three years as Talent Management Director and the Assistant Superintendent of Talent Management & Instruction. Dr. Thompson attended Tennessee Technological University where she received her Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education with a concentration in Biology. She continued her education at Western Michigan University earning her Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, Grand Valley State University earning her Educational Specialist Degree and Eastern Michigan University earning her Ph. D.

Dr. Thompson is entering her 31st year in education, 18 of those years as an administrator. During her tenure as a successful educator, Dr. Thompson has been a classroom teacher, athletic coach and athletic director, assistant principal, principal, and curriculum specialist. While at Muskegon Heights, Dr. Thompson has been an integral leader in developing and sustaining the Supporting Emerging Educator Development (SEED) teacher residency program, created in partnership with Grand Valley State University. The SEED program has been a large contributor to stabilizing teacher retention in the school system, which has been consistently at 95% in recent years.

MHPSAS Board President Garland Kilgore said, 'Dr. Thompson has shown her ability to successfully lead. Her educational background, coupled with her experience in leadership throughout school systems, helped us reach our decision. Dr. Thompson has been an integral member of the team that has helped reshape and align the Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System toward success.'

Our mission is to create a stable and supportive environment where the students of the Muskegon Heights community can thrive daily and achieve a brighter future through the education we provide

Rané Garcia



After graduating from the University of Michigan, Rané fought for equity as a classroom teacher in Michigan, Texas, and Illinois. She then received her master's degree from Grand Valley State University and became an elementary school principal in a suburb of Grand Rapids. In this new role she learned the science of reading and all about systems installation and implementation. With MiBLSI team members leaning in, she led her building to implement systems of support in academic and social skills. These systems were designed to meet the needs of all students, those who needed extra support, as well as those who needed extra challenges. Culminating 16 years as a principal, Rané's K-6 building was a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon School based on academic growth within subgroups.

In 2016, Rané returned to her hometown of Muskegon Heights, first as the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, then as the superintendent. During a five-year period she worked to grow a strong team that prioritized rebuilding trust with families, creating systems for stability, and focusing on culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. During this time, she worked to provide the children of Muskegon Heights the opportunities and access that she experienced in the suburban school district.

Rané is grateful to have worked in each of these diverse school settings and roles. She hopes she has left behind as much joy, love, and learning as she received.

Rané is now the Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Michigan Department of Education. She is honored to be in this position and eager to support districts, ISDs, and professional organizations across Michigan as they work toward access and fairness for all children.

Andrew Middlestead



Andrew Middlestead is the Director of the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability in the Michigan Department of Education overseeing the development and administration of Michigan's 6 unique assessment programs. Andy also serves on the WIDA Executive Committee, The WIDA Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) Committee on Assessment Policy and Practice, he is chair of the conference planning committee for the 2019 National Conference on Student Assessment (NCSA), and has served in various leadership roles with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium as co-chair of the item development work group, and as the Michigan state lead. Prior to his current position he served as the Test Development

Manager in the office as well as spent time working with the Office of Career and Technical Education in MDE. Middlestead previously worked as a research associate with Dr. William Schmidt in the College of Education

Christopher Janzer



Chris Janzer is the Assistant Director for the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability within the Michigan Department of Education. He oversees Michigan's K-12 accountability systems. Chris joined MDE in October 2008 as an accountability analyst. From 2016-2018, he carried out the development, design, and implementation of a new index-based accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Out of that same accountability process, he also managed the creation of a new parent-friendly school dashboard. He and the accountability team are currently working on the development and implementation of an A-F letter grade and ranking system. Previously, he was the data analyst for Howell Public Schools where his responsibilities included state and federal reporting.