

# PACER's SYMPOSIUM

*on Students with Mental Health  
and Learning Disabilities*

## SESSION DESCRIPTIONS & SPEAKER BIOS

August 16, 2023  
Minneapolis Convention Center

### KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

#### **The Power of Having a Positive Perspective**

*Sheletta Brundidge, morning keynote speaker*

#### **Newly Identified Adverse Childhood Experiences: Exposure to Racism and Surviving the Pandemic**

*Charlene Myklebust, afternoon keynote speaker*

### BREAKOUT SESSIONS

#### **1. Moving, Sensing, and Creating: A Mighty and Mindful Triad to Build Resilience in Young People**

*Presenter: Charlene Myklebust*

The science and practice of Mindful Education has taught us that the brain experiences significant cell activity and stronger neuronal connections when children move, engage their senses, and tap their creative juices. The engaging activities described and modeled during this session promote improved memory and increased self-awareness and attunement to others, and are considered to be brain-based learning strategies. These fun exercises may be used at home to increase caregiver and child bonding, and to support new pathways for learning. The experiential session will include a Google presentation, demonstrations, and audience participation.

*(Morning session only)*

#### **2. Building Connection for and with Young People through Digital Wellbeing**

*Presenter: Amy Webster and Katherine (KK) Myers*

Recent reports from the U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, point to the health risks associated with children's and adolescents' use of social media and technology. Though we often hear we are more "connected" than ever because of technology, loneliness rates have risen, and young people are spending significantly less time in person with others. In response to these concerns, LiveMore ScreenLess engages with young people in a process they have developed and call Facilitated Discussion. Holding Facilitated Digital Wellbeing Discussions with young people is a process that results in building connections and community. These discussions build awareness of how technology use impacts the learning and wellbeing of students and results in their feeling less alone and isolated. LiveMore ScreenLess will describe this process, share youth voices, and share how they train others to hold these discussions.

*(Morning and afternoon sessions)*

### **3. 2023 Educational Legislative Highlights**

*Panelists: Rachel Berger, Michael Carr, Linda Goldman Cherwitz, Natalia Madryga, Representative Cheryl Youakim (morning session only); moderated by Susan Einspar*

2023 was an exceptional year for education legislation. The Education Omnibus Bill signed by Governor Walz in May was 341 pages long and included changes to over 50 new and existing statutes, rules, and regulations. This session will provide an overview of the legislation, as well as a detailed discussion of significant changes that affect Minnesota students with disabilities such as the age for eligibility extended to 22, literacy programming and training related to the science of reading, revocation of parental fees for county waiver services, and disciplinary and exclusion rule changes for all students.

***(Morning and afternoon sessions)***

### **4. Working Effectively with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families in the School Setting**

*Panelists: Hassan Samantar, Bonnie Jean Smith, Jesús Villaseñor, and Dao Xiong; moderated by Sharman Davis Barrett*

As more culturally and linguistically diverse families settle in Minnesota and around the country, there is an increasing need for professionals to learn ways to engage with multicultural families. Learn practical tips from PACER's multicultural advocates on how to effectively communicate and engage with Somali, Hmong, African American, and Latino families in the school setting, and why engagement benefits both families and school staff.

***(Morning and afternoon sessions)***

### **5. Applying Structured Literacy: Early Impacts on Students with Disabilities**

*Panelists: Debra Bradford, Bobbie Plante, Patti Yaw, Lori Holm, Kim Jones, Judy Werner, Karyna Chrislock; moderated by Victoria Weinberg*

This panel discussion of interventionists and special educators will showcase how they explicitly teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills after completing training in LETRS and the impact it is having on students across special education. They will share examples of what they learned, how they adjusted their instruction, and the results for students with disabilities.

***(Morning session only)***

### **6. Progress Update: Following Districts Implementing Structured Literacy**

*Presenters: Victoria Weinberg and Beth Hillerns*

This session is a progress update from year four of applying implementation science to Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS). In this session panelists will discuss learnings and implications for schools and districts wanting to build and sustain capacity to achieve and repeat student growth. This is an ongoing project, and the long-term outcomes are still a work in progress.

***(Afternoon session only)***

### **7. Changing the Way We Think About Behavior and Student Discipline**

*Presenters: Laura Jean, Paulo Castro, Lilian Ejebe*

Join us for a guided panel and audience discussion about the need to change how we think about, approach, and respond to students with disabilities who break the rules and violate the student discipline policy. How do we use the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to improve access to education for students with disruptive behaviors? Why doesn't punishment work? What should we be doing instead?

***(Morning and afternoon sessions)***

# 2023 SPEAKER BIOS

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

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### **SHELETTA BRUNDIDGE**

Sheletta is an Emmy Award-winning comedian, radio host, television anchor, newspaper columnist, and best-selling author of children's autism books. She is also the mom of children with autism, and founder of ShelettaMakesMeLaugh.com, an online podcasting company that provides culturally competent commercial production.



### **CHARLENE MYKLEBUST, PSY.D.**

Charlene is president and educational leadership consultant with EQ Learn, LLC, and Stone Arch Learning, LLC. She has served as a regular and special education teacher, public school administrator, mental and chemical health provider, and executive director of mental health and partnerships in Intermediate District 287.

## BREAKOUT SESSION SPEAKERS

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### **RACHEL BERGER**

Rachel is the former executive director and founder of Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota, a nonprofit dedicated to educational advocacy, and is a passionate advocate for literacy and students with learning disabilities. She is also a learning disability assistive technology specialist for MicrosoftEDU. Over the course of her career, Rachel has been instrumental in numerous legislative and public policy initiatives around literacy and disability rights on the local and national level.



### **DEBRA BRADFORD**

Debra has been teaching reading for the past 33 years; mostly as a general education teacher (grades K-2) and for the last four years as a special education teacher in Rush City, Minnesota. Her degrees include a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, a Master of Education in Technology Integration, and a Master of Science in Special Education.

# 2023 SPEAKER BIOS



## MICHAEL CARR

Michael is a former schoolteacher, camp director, canoe guide, litigator, and nonprofit executive director who has enjoyed being a PACER parent advocate and part of the public policy team supporting families and their children with disabilities, youth with mental health challenges, and bullying prevention for well over a decade.



## PAULO CASTRO

Paulo is an attorney with the Youth Services Team at the Minnesota Disability Law Center. Paulo deals with special education issues related to implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), school discipline, and placement settings, among others. He is originally from Brazil and is also a licensed attorney in his home country. In his legal professional career, he has worked in both the private and public sectors in the U.S., as well as in Brazil.



## SHARMAN DAVIS BARRETT

Sharman has spent the last 30 years devoted to providing leadership, direction, and technical assistance to families and professionals in the parent center movement. She is currently the co-director of the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center at PACER. She helped develop and manage the first PIRC (Parent Information and Resource Center) at PACER Center. Sharman is the author of several publications, and she has presented nationally and internationally at conferences and meetings.



## LINDA GOLDMAN CHERWITZ

Linda brings a unique perspective to PACER as a neurologist and parent of a child with special needs. As a health advocate, she guides parents through the complexity of public resources, including health issues in schools, insurance companies, and more. Additionally, she coordinates the Parents And Residents Together (PART) program, educating physicians, who are then connected to learn from families of children with special needs. She also chairs PACER's Medical Advisory Board.



## KARYNA CHRISLOCK

Karyna is a school psychologist with the Forest Lake Area School District. She coaches special education teachers to implement sequential, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics. She also uses data to inform systems change.

# 2023 SPEAKER BIOS



## SUSAN EINSPAR

Susan is a former Illinois Due Process Hearing Office and Florida Guardian ad Litem training director. She has been with PACER for 13 years and currently serves as its legislative and public policy coordinator. Susan is a speaker for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center and a parent trainer and advocate.



## LILIAN EJEBE

Lilian is the lead attorney of the Education Law Advocacy Project (ELAP) of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services Inc. (SMRLS). She has been with SMRLS since 1990 and supervising ELAP since 1995. Lilian has extensive experience representing children from low-income families in public education, especially students with disabilities and students facing other school-related problems that negatively impact their right to equal educational opportunities. She is a graduate of William Mitchell College of Law and has four children who all went through the Minnesota public education system.



## LORI HOLM

Lori is a teacher in the Cannon Valley Special Education Cooperative. She is trained in Orton Gillingham, and is a LETRS trainer.



## LAURA JEAN

Laura is the coordinator for PACER's Children's Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project. She has experience as an advocate, educator, writer, and policy analyst who has worked with children and families from around the world for more than 20 years. Laura holds a Bachelor of Science in Child Psychology from the University of Minnesota and a Master of Public Affairs from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs.



## NATALIA MADRYGA

Natalia is a government affairs manager at Hylden Advocacy & Law, where her portfolio has focused on early childhood, education, and nonprofit access to infrastructure. She has staffed three state senators and worked as part of the senate majority media team where she composed columns, press releases, and letters to the editor for several senators. Natalia earned a degree in Political Science at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island and is currently in her fourth year of law school at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.



# 2023 SPEAKER BIOS



## HASSAN SAMANTAR

Hassan is a multicultural specialist, trainer, and parent advocate at PACER Center. He conducts workshops for educational professionals, leads parent workshops, and provides individual assistance to families. Hassan also translates PACER materials into Somali. Hassan collaborated to conceptualize, design, and implement the Family Connections WhatsApp project, which uses technology to address the educational concerns and informational needs of Latino and Somali families in Minnesota.



## BONNIE JEAN SMITH

Bonnie Jean is a multicultural specialist, trainer, and parent advocate at PACER Center. Bonnie Jean has also worked with high school students as a behavior specialist, and as an early childhood educator and director. She is a member of the MN Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, an evaluator for the MN State Council for Quality, and a member of the monitoring and technical review system team for the federal Administration on Developmental Disabilities.



## JESÚS M. VILLASEÑOR

Jesús is a senior multicultural specialist, trainer, and parent advocate at PACER Center. He conducts outreach and workshops to Hispanic families, translates advocacy training materials, and assists families in obtaining educational, medical, social, and recreational services for their children (with or without disabilities). Jesús collaborated to conceptualize, design, and implement the Family Connections WhatsApp project, which uses technology to address the educational concerns and informational needs of Latino and Somali families in Minnesota.



## AMY WEBSTER

Amy is the director of Digital Wellbeing Services for LiveMore ScreenLess and is on a lifelong quest for wellbeing herself, with a passion to share tools with others. She's passionate about equipping educators, adult champions, and young people to hold space for Digital Wellbeing facilitated discussions. She has seen first hand the transformative process of these conversations and witnessed how hungry young people are for these conversations. A grounding belief of hers, and of LiveMore ScreenLess, is there is no wellbeing without Digital Wellbeing.



## VICTORIA WEINBERG

Victoria has been with the Minnesota Department of Education since August of 2007 as an education specialist working in areas such as specific learning disabilities, dyslexia, multi-tiered systems of support, implementation science, and evidence-based practices in literacy and math. She has been a special educator for 31 years in a variety of positions not limited to residential treatment, inclusion specialist, instructor of pre-service teachers, and director of prevention intervention programs for a community-based organization. She has her PhD in Learning and Cognition from the University of Minnesota.

# 2023 SPEAKER BIOS



## JUDY WERNER

Judy has been a special education teacher in Moorhead for over 20 years, and is Orton Gillingham and LETRS trained. Judy teaches early elementary students with all disabilities.



## DAO XIONG

Dao is a multicultural specialist, trainer, and parent advocate at PACER Center. He conducts workshops for families and professionals, translates advocacy training materials, and provides individual assistance to Hmong and Asian families. Dao regularly guest hosts a MN radio show that reaches the Hmong and Asian communities and speaks on topics related to family engagement. He currently serves on the board of directors of the Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul. Dao is the father of seven children, including a daughter with an intellectual disability and mental health diagnosis.



## PATTI YAW

Patti is a special educator of students with low incidence disabilities in Alden, Minnesota.



## REPRESENTATIVE CHERYL YOUAKIM

Representative Youakim is a tireless advocate for educational legislative change to benefit both parents and schools. As a former paraprofessional in the school system, she is acutely aware of the challenges faced by both the system and individual parents. As the Chairperson of the Legislative Finance and Policy Committees, she led the way to the largest educational legislative reform package in decades.

*Panelists not pictured: Beth Hillrens, Katherine (KK) Myers, Kim Jones, and Bobbie Plante.*



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