



## Leadership North Carolina Class 32

Education Session  
December 10-12, 2024

### Speaker Directory

#### **Mr. Dillon Tyler**

Executive Assistant and Tour Coordinator  
International Civil Rights Center and Museum  
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Dillon Tyler has worked in numerous nonprofit and government roles in Greensboro and North Carolina. He currently serves as the Executive Assistant and Tour Coordinator at the International Civil Rights Center and Museum, a leading site along the US Civil Rights Trail and an International Site of Conscience. Tyler takes a leading role in the museum in areas including fundraising, outreach, operations, exhibit design, bookkeeping, and development.

Within the community, Tyler is the former vice chair of Guilford County's Juvenile Crime Prevention Council and an alumnus of the New Leaders Council, which works to recruit, train, and promote young leaders coming from elected office or business and industry. In 2021, Tyler was accepted to the Next City Vanguard conference, an experiential urban leadership gathering of 40 rising global urban leaders working to improve cities across sectors, including urban planning, community development, entrepreneurship, government, transportation, sustainability, design, art, and media.

Tyler also serves within the North Carolina Army National Guard, where he is a Second Lieutenant as Platoon Leader for the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company in East Flat Rock. His latest deployment occurred during Hurricane Helene, where he was a county-wide Liaison Officer overseeing Guard force packages for aid distribution, route clearance, search and rescue operations, and presence patrols. Previously, Tyler had roles within the Walt Disney Company, the North Carolina Democratic Party, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. In his spare time, Tyler enjoys writing and acting. His stories and projects have been featured in local news publications, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*.

**Dr. Antoine J. Alston**

Associate Dean, College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences  
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Dr. Antoine J. Alston, a native of Rocky Mount, NC, is professor and associate dean for academic studies in North Carolina A&T State University's College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. He is a nationally recognized student mentor, agricultural educator, and expert in the areas of diversity and inclusion. He received his Bachelor and Master of Science Degrees in Agricultural and Extension Education from NC A&T State University and his Ph.D. in Agricultural and Extension Education from Iowa State University in 2000 at the age of 24.

Alston's dedication to student success is well known. His work has earned him many honors such as the UNC Board of Governors Award for Teaching Excellence, the Honorary FFA American Degree, the National Association of Agricultural Educators Outstanding Contribution to Agricultural Education Award, the George Washington Carver Distinguished Service Award from Iowa State University, and the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Teacher Fellow Award. Additionally, he was the first African American to receive a US Department of Agriculture Food and Agriculture Sciences Excellence in Teaching Award, the highest teaching honor from the USDA.

He resides in Reidsville, NC, with his wife Cicely H. Alston, a graduate of Winston Salem State University. They are the proud parents of Kayla Alston, a recent Graduate of NC A&T and current graduate student at Auburn University, pursuing a Master of Science in Wildlife Sciences as a Charles Barkley Graduate Fellow, and Briyana Alston, a Freshmen Provost Scholar majoring in Rehabilitation Studies at Winston Salem State University.

**Ms. Mebane Rash**

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Mebane Rash is the CEO and editor-in-chief of EdNC.org, where you can find essential news, stories, and perspectives about education. A native of North Carolina, she attended our public schools as a kid and currently lives in Deep Gap. Mebane's travel to all 100 counties, 46 states, and 30 countries informs everything she does. The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation awarded her the 2021 Friday Medal, which honors "significant, distinguished, and enduring contributions to education through advocating for innovation, advancing education and imparting inspiration."

**Ms. Yvonne A. Copeland**

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Yvonne Copeland is the inaugural director of the newly established Division of Child and Family Well-Being (DCFV) within NCDHHS, which brings together health, behavioral health, early development, and social programs that support children and families using a whole-person approach. Yvonne provides strategic direction and oversight for 1000+ employees in the operation of programs within DCFV's portfolio including Whole Child Health, Early Intervention, Community Nutrition Services, and Food and Nutrition Services.

Yvonne has over 30 years of strategy, policy, operations, and change management experience in public-sector health and human services. As SVP of Operations for a multi-state Quality Improvement Organization, she led all federal and state service lines (population health, external quality review, utilization management, and program integrity). As VP of Community Operations for a managed care organization, Yvonne worked to strengthen the behavioral health service delivery system, and to increase access to services, improve outcomes, and reduce unnecessary health care costs. As Executive Director for a trade association for public-sector managed care organizations, she led the organization through two major system transformations over a decade that led to a statewide IDD and behavioral health waiver to increase Medicaid beneficiaries' access to services, expand the provider network, improve beneficiary outcomes, and provide budget predictability and savings for the state.

Yvonne is a graduate of Meredith College with a Master of Business Administration and Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Statistical Research Methods/Sociology.

**Ms. Catty Quiroz Moore**

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Ms. Moore was superintendent of the Wake County Public School System, which is the 15th largest school system in the country, for more than five years. She served as a classroom teacher, school assistant principal and principal, and as a district-level administrator for more than three decades, primarily in the WCPSS. She began her career as a teacher in Nash-Rocky Mount Schools. Ms. Moore's recognitions and honors include: North Carolina PTA Superintendent of the Year, Magnet Schools of America National Superintendent of the Year, NC Regional Superintendent of the Year, and NC Finalist for Superintendent of the Year.

Ms. Moore completed her undergraduate studies at North Carolina State University and her master's degree as a Principal Fellow at UNC-Chapel Hill. She completed her superintendent licensure at East Carolina University while enrolled in the ECU doctoral program.

**Dr. Anthony D. Jackson**

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Anthony D. Jackson, Ed. D, is the Superintendent of Chatham County Schools, serving over 9,000 students in 20 schools with 1500 employees. During Dr. Jackson's 30+ year educational career, he has served as a teacher assistant, teacher, administrator at all three levels, central office administrator, and Superintendent of rural, urban, and suburban districts.

Throughout his career, Dr. Jackson has received numerous awards and commendations, including being named the North Carolina Central Region's Superintendent of the Year in 2014 and 2019. In 2019, Dr. Jackson was named the 2020 North Carolina A. Craig Phillips Superintendent of the Year and, most recently, was selected as the NCAE 2024 Superintendent of the Year.

Dr. Jackson has a Bachelor of Science degree from East Carolina University, a master's degree from North Carolina Central University, and a doctorate degree in education from Walden University. He also serves as thought partner and mentor to new and novice Superintendents throughout the state and as adjunct professor in the masters and doctoral programs at North Carolina State University and High Point University.

**Dr. Sherry H. Thomas**

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Sherry H. Thomas has a B.S. and M.ED in special education and has worked in the field of special education for over 38 years. In a local NC district, she was a classroom special education teacher in both separate, resource, and inclusion settings; an educational diagnostician and a program specialist; the autism coordinator; and supervisor for related service providers and assistive technology.

Before retiring in April 2023, Sherry held positions at the state level, including Consultant for Learning Disabilities and ADHD, Section Chief for state level disability specific consultants and related service providers, and Assistant State Director and Senior State EC Director at the NC Department of Public Instruction. She has been recognized by the NC Council for Exceptional Children with the Felix S. Barker

award, and she was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine by Governor Cooper. Sherry has also held several adjunct positions at state and private universities, in the special education department.

Sherry is currently providing educational consulting to Foster Family Alliance-NC and is a TA provider with the IDEA Data Center (IDC). A native of Lincoln County, NC, Sherry lives in Raleigh and enjoys time with her family-especially her grandchildren, reading, volunteering and kayak paddling on the lake.

**Mr. Ryan Henderson**

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Ryan M. Henderson is a native of Philadelphia and received his education in South Jersey. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Rowan University. Ryan is a devoted husband and father of four, as well as a proud grandfather of five. He has extensive experience working with individuals of all ages and cultural backgrounds, with a passion for supporting the “underdog.” Ryan has dedicated his career to serving the underserved and underprivileged for nearly two decades. His professional journey began as a case manager for the homeless male population in Camden, NJ, and he has spent most of his career as a teacher in Title I schools. His teaching career started at Delsea Regional High School in Gloucester County, NJ, where he began as a substitute teacher. During this time, he also embarked on a ten-year athletic coaching career, leading teams in football, basketball, and track and field to championship wins.

In 2014, Mr. Henderson transitioned to become the TV Broadcasting teacher at Glassboro High School, where he won awards for video production, recognized by the Board of Education. Seeking new opportunities, Ryan moved his family to the South and took on a substitute teaching role at Sugar Creek Charter School in Charlotte, NC, as there were no TV Broadcasting positions available at the time. Eventually, a position opened up, allowing him to become the TV Broadcasting and Film Teacher at Sugar Creek Charter School’s J. Frank Martin High School campus. In 2023, Ryan earned the prestigious title of Burroughs Wellcome Fund Teacher of the Year for all charter schools in North Carolina.

**Ms. Kimberly Jones**

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Kimberly Jones is an English and Humanities teacher for Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools and the 2023 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year. She has been a teacher in Chapel Hill/Carrboro since 2006. Kimberly earned her Bachelor’s Degree in English and a Master’s Degree in Education from Wake Forest University.

Kimberly has spent the majority of her career teaching high school English and has a special dedication to Holocaust and Human Rights education. She serves as a Regional Site Director for TOLI, a National Holocaust and Human Rights education nonprofit, and also works as an education consultant for PBS on the state and national level. She also serves her profession in a variety of board and commission positions that seek to advance public education, improve student outcomes, increase equity and cultural relevance in teaching and learning, and elevate teacher voice and efficacy.

These positions allow Kim to support fellow educators throughout the state and country in building lessons that help students to use their learning to build positive, productive, and empowered futures for themselves and their communities.

Kim has won numerous awards in her teaching career including recognition by Governor Roy Cooper and the NC African American Heritage Commission for contributions to public education across North Carolina and the NC Attorney General's Dogwood Award for public service in the field of education.

**Mr. Freebird McKinney**

Director of Partnership Development, Participate Learning

2018 North Carolina Teacher of the Year

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Freebird McKinney is a Village Teacher and a Global Educator. As the 2018 North Carolina State Teacher of the Year, he had the honor of inspiring countless students inside and outside of the classroom, both in public high schools (for 17 years), and at Elon University. His mission has always been to motivate students to find their own voices and roles as Global Citizens, as well as encouraging fellow educators to expand their classrooms into the global community. Partnering with Go Global NC and Dustin's Greenhouse, he led students and educators on global immersion programs to Mexico, China, Peru, Ecuador and the Galapagos, South Africa, and Europe. Previously, in his role as the Director of Government and Community Affairs for the NC State Board of Education, Freebird served on multiple boards and commissions dedicated to expanding educational access and opportunity for NC students. This role also allowed him to work with the NC Department of Public Instruction, the NC General Assembly, school districts across NC, and education partners in creating opportunities for teachers and students to see that they are indeed "Educator Diplomats." Now serving as the Participate Learning Director of Partnership Development, Freebird is continuing to actualize his passion for Global Education by supporting partner districts and by sharing the benefits of global learning in developing students who are global citizens in a globally competitive and connected world. Freebird now resides in Burlington, NC, with his wife, Kelly, and their two children, Dorothy Gail and Jeremiah.

**Ms. Heather Smith**

Math Teacher, Waynesville Middle School  
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Heather is the 2024 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year, teaching 8th-grade math at Waynesville Middle School in the Haywood County Schools district. With eight years of experience, she has become a leading figure in education, known for her dedication to student growth and innovative teaching methods. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education K-6 from Western Carolina University and has additional certification in Middle Grades Mathematics (6-9). Heather is also a National Board Certified Teacher.

Her teaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that positive relationships are essential for a successful classroom. She maintains that students excel when they feel loved, valued, and challenged. This principle guides her interactions with students, colleagues, parents, and the broader community, creating a supportive environment where everyone is empowered to succeed.

Heather's enthusiasm for making math engaging and relevant helps students connect mathematical concepts to real-world scenarios. She integrates practical applications into her lessons, which not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a love for learning. In addition to her classroom role, Heather serves as the 8th Grade Department Chair, a member of the MTSS team, chairs the Sunshine Committee, and sponsors the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). She also mentors future educators as a clinical educator for student interns.

Recognized locally and statewide, Heather has received numerous accolades, including Waynesville Middle School Teacher of the Year (2023), Haywood County Schools Teacher of the Year (2023-2024), and the 2024 Burroughs Wellcome Fund Western Region Teacher of the Year. Her achievements also include being named to the College of Education and Allied Professions Honor Roll of Peak Performers by Western Carolina University in 2024.

Committed to transforming lives through education, Heather builds strong relationships that support the growth and development of everyone she works with. Her data-driven approach ensures personalized instruction and integrates life and social skills into the curriculum.

As a devoted wife of a public school teacher and a proud mother of two, Heather deeply values public education and is passionate about bringing joy and positivity to her community and schools. She delights in hosting an annual pancake party for parents in her classroom and loves spending time hiking or at the lake with her family. Additionally, Heather actively volunteers in her local community and attends various sporting events that her children are involved in. She firmly believes in the power of collective effort to support educators and uplift students, striving to make a meaningful impact on their lives.

**Ms. Julie Paige Pittman**

Special Advisor to the NC Superintendent for Educator Engagement  
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With over 25 years in public education, Julie Pittman has dedicated her career to enhancing the educational experience for teachers, students, and communities through strategic partnerships, stakeholder collaboration, and educator engagement. As the 2018 Western Region North Carolina Teacher of the Year and current Special Advisor to the NC Superintendent for Educator Engagement, Julie works tirelessly to align educational initiatives with state and national goals to drive meaningful change in classrooms and communities across North Carolina.

Julie specializes in fostering consensus among diverse groups, building effective partnerships, and leading high-impact initiatives that support educators, schools, and districts. From overseeing the NC Teacher Leadership Council and facilitating statewide conferences to managing educational outreach programs, Julie has a proven track record in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and leading cross-functional teams.

Passionate about empowering educators and elevating educational systems, Julie is committed to creating sustainable, positive outcomes for students and teachers alike.

**Ms. Emma Braaten**

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Emma Braaten is the Director of Digital Learning at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation. In this role, Emma leverages her 23 years of experience as a former Chief Technology Officer in Chatham County Schools (NC), Digital Learning Specialist and Digital Learning Coach with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), School Librarian, and Classroom Teacher to inform research and application in the K-12 setting and beyond. She works collaboratively with educators and stakeholders to support the effective implementation of instructional practices, content standards, and technology to make learning more accessible for all students. The work of Digital Learning is primarily focused on the Friday Institute's impact area around the use of existing and emerging technologies, especially in the age of AI, to amplify teaching and learning in North Carolina and beyond.



**Dr. Forrest D. Toms, Sr.**

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Forrest D. Toms currently serves as CEO, NC Research & Engagement Group, LLC. Dr. Toms is a former Associate Professor in the Leadership Studies Doctoral Program at NCA&T State University. His research was in the areas of leadership enhancement and development with faith-based institutions, the science of community engagement with African American leaders and communities, and the development of research metrics related to engagement activities in underrepresented communities.

Dr. Toms has a national reputation for his systems approach, methods, and processes related to diversity, cultural competency, and community engagement. He has successfully designed, implemented, and assessed effective organizational change models for school systems, health and human service agencies, business/industry, and community organizations in North Carolina and nationally.

**Dr. Chris Harrington**

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Originally from Detroit, MI, Chris Harrington was appointed State Director of ApprenticeshipNC, North Carolina's State Apprenticeship Agency, in January 2024.

He earned a Ph.D. from North Carolina A&T State University (leadership studies), an M.B.A. from The University of Tennessee, and a B.S. in Organizational Management from Crichton College.

His forty-year career spans multiple industries and countries where he served in various executive and leadership roles including with the US Army, Technicolor, Sony, Dräger, and Elastic Therapy (ETI). Just prior to his appointment, he served as Professor of the Practice of Management at High Point University.

Harrington started an apprenticeship program at ETI, was a founding leader of a youth apprenticeship consortium, completed his dissertation research on factors influencing whether firms would engage in apprenticeship, and sits on several executive boards focused on workforce and economic development.

**Dr. David Cross**

Career and Technical Education Director  
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Dr. David Cross, Jr., proudly serves the Randolph County School System as the Career and Technical Education Director. He has a Bachelor's of Arts in Communication from Wake Forest University and earned his Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Liberty University. In his role as CTE Director, he works with staff across the school system to ensure all students have a post-secondary plan and placement. He has been with the school system for nearly 15 years as a teacher, coach, principal, and now Director.

**Mr. Terence Franklin**

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Terence Franklin is presently the Maintenance Reliability Manager at the Post Consumer Brands Asheboro, NC, facility.

Terence earned his BSEE from North Carolina A&T State University. He is certified as a Six Sigma Black Belt as well as a Certified Maintenance Reliability Professional (CRMP). His professional experience has been in implementing technology in the design, programming, troubleshooting, maintenance, and improvement of manufacturing equipment and processes.

Terence has been involved with the apprenticeship program for the past eight (8) years and presently serves as the Vice Chairperson of Apprenticeship Randolph.

**Dr. Jeff Cox**

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Dr. Jeff Cox is the 11th president of the North Carolina Community College System and a lifelong champion of North Carolina public education.

Prior to leading the System, Dr. Cox served as the President of Wilkes Community College from 2014 to 2023 where he led a fantastic team of faculty and staff that more than doubled the completion rate at the college, raised \$20 million to support strategic initiatives, and created a five-year strategic plan seen as a national model for other institutions.

Cox formerly served as the Superintendent of Alleghany County Schools from 2005 to 2014. He also has served as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction for Lee County Schools and as an elementary principal and assistant principal in Union County Schools. He began his career as a high school teacher and coach.

In 2017, Dr. Cox was awarded an Aspen Institute Presidential Fellowship for Community College Excellence. He was one of 40 college leaders in the country selected for this prestigious program.

Dr. Cox earned his Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He also has a Master's in School Administration and a bachelor's degree in English—Secondary Education, both of which he earned from Appalachian State University. Dr. Cox and his wife, Reba, have three sons—Dylan, Evan, and Zach; a daughter-in-law, Shae; and one sassy Corgi named Jasmine.

#### **Dr. Bethany D. Meighen**

Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, Division of Academic Affairs  
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Bethany Meighen, the Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, is the chief student affairs officer at the UNC System and serves as the liaison between the System and the 17 institutions on matters related to student success, financial aid, admissions, student development, and behavioral health. She also oversees access programs and works closely with committees and educational agencies on policies related to minimum admissions and course requirements. Meighen received an undergraduate and master's degree from the University of Charleston and an Ed.D. from the University of North Carolina.

#### **Dr. A. Hope Williams**

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A. Hope Williams is president of North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), the state office of the 36 private, nonprofit colleges and universities in North Carolina. She works closely with the

State of North Carolina and the federal government, and with the North Carolina public K-12 and higher education sectors to address education and related public policy and funding issues. In addition, she oversees fundraising for scholarships and grants and the development of collaborative programs for the benefit of NCICU campuses. She joined NCICU in 1986 and has served as president since 1992.

Dr. Williams received her undergraduate degree from Duke University, an MPA from North Carolina State University, and a Ph.D. in Education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a member of the Governor's Education Cabinet, received the 2023 Trailblazer Award from the NC ACE Women's Network, and was named a 2017 CEO of the Year by the Triangle Business Journal. She is immediate past chair of the boards of MCNC, the North Carolina Aquarium Society, and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and chairs the board of Dupont Circle Investments. She also serves on the boards of the National Student Clearinghouse, College Foundation, Inc., the National Advisory Board of the Institute for Emerging Issues, the NCWorks Commission, the myFutureNC Commission, Communities in Schools of North Carolina, the Coalition for College Cost Savings, and the North Carolina Governors School Foundation.

#### **Dr. Chuck Wallington**

Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing and Communications Officer

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Chuck Wallington is an Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing and Communications Officer for Cone Health. In this role, he reports to the CEO and is one of 10 members of Cone Health's most-senior leadership team. This team establishes the business strategy for this Greensboro, NC-based healthcare enterprise.

Prior to joining Cone Health, Chuck was a leader with American Express where he was a vice president of communications. In this role, Chuck had global responsibility for internal and external communications for the American Express customer service centers in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and India.

Chuck earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2017, he also earned a master's degree in communications management from Syracuse University. His master's thesis, which is titled "Barriers, Borders and Boundaries: Exploring why there are so few African-American males in the public relations profession," was named one of the Top 15 Public Relations Research Insights of 2020.

In June of 2021, Chuck earned a Ph.D. in Leadership Studies from North Carolina A&T State University. His dissertation is titled "Navigating the C-Suite: Exploring the leadership journeys of African-American male executives in U.S. corporations." Chuck's dissertation is now a book titled "A Seat at the C-Suite Table: Insights from the Leadership Journeys of African American Executives." His book was released in the marketplace in January of 2024. As a published author with more than 30 years of professional experience, Chuck often is invited to be a guest lecturer for public relations, communications and marketing students at colleges and universities across the United States.

Chuck is the 2024 winner of the Betsy Plank Award for lifetime commitment to mentoring students and professionals in the field of public relations. He also is a 2024 recipient of the Black History Maker Award from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. In 2023, Chuck received the D. Parke Gibson Pioneer Award from the Public Relations Society of America. This award is given to a public relations professional who has helped increase the awareness of the field within multicultural communities and who has helped promote issues and solutions to meet the needs of those professional communities. Chuck also is a 2022 recipient of the Robert S. Abbott Memorial Award for Meritorious Service in Mass Communications from the Savannah State University.

Professionally, Chuck is a member of the Public Relations Society of America where he serves on national board of directors. He also serves on the boards of the Institute for Public Relations, the Diversity Action Alliance, and the Museum for Public Relations. He also is a member of the Arthur W. Page Society for senior communications executives. Civically, Chuck is an active Life Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and the Sigma Pi Phi Boule'. Chuck and his wife Sandra reside in Greensboro, NC. They are active members of St. James Presbyterian Church.

## Class 32 Education Session Planning Committee

The following members of LNC Class 31 make up the planning committee for the Class 32 Education session.

### **Jenn Chase** *Wake*

Chief Marketing Officer, Executive Vice President

SAS

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Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer Jennifer Chase is a visionary leader with a remarkable 20-year journey at SAS, blending her expertise in both marketing and R&D. She leads the company's data-driven marketing strategy for global brand awareness, demand generation, and customer engagement. Her role encompasses brand strategy, product marketing, communications, field marketing, and more. She believes in the power of data and analytics to create a better world.

Jennifer champions diversity and inclusion and advocates for equality in leadership, marketing, and tech industries. She serves as the executive sponsor of the SAS Women's Initiatives Network and SAS Women in Analytics Network, promoting diversity in analytics. She founded the SAS Marketing Associate Program, providing early career professionals with opportunities to explore diverse marketing functions at SAS. She is also a member of Chief, a network focused on connecting and supporting women executive leaders.

Beyond her corporate achievements, Jennifer is deeply engaged in civic duties and her community. She is a volunteer with the Wake County Board of Elections and the Foodbank of Western & Eastern North Carolina.

### **Dr. Rochelle Cook, Co-Chair** *Guilford*

Founder

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Rochelle Cook, PhD, believes that leadership should inspire and ignite results that are visible, beneficial, and contagious. Her experience in engineering and process improvement roles in the manufacturing and healthcare sectors along with her role as an adjunct professor enable her to thrive as a transformational leader. As a life learner, she's maintained certifications in healthcare quality (CPHQ®), Six Sigma (ASQMBB), and Project Management (PMP®) to stay abreast of the global changes that occur in quality and project-based environments.

One of Dr. Cook's passions is mentoring others. She advises students as they complete their degree programs. She also serves on the 100+ Women Strong Executive board at Auburn University and the Industrial and Systems Engineering advisory board at North Carolina A&T State University. Cook was honored to receive the Auburn University Samuel Ginn College of Engineering Outstanding Alumna Award.

**Jill Cox Wake**

President and CEO

Communities In Schools of North Carolina

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For the past three years, Jill K. Cox has led Communities In Schools of North Carolina. As President & CEO, Cox leads the state's largest integrated student supports federated network of 19 affiliated organizations serving more than 109,000 students and families across the state. She has guided the CIS network through strategic growth and successfully navigated the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic, driving the creation of new and innovative pathways for service delivery. She brings more than 20 years of expertise in external and community relations, change management, and marketing strategy to the role and excels at implementing projects designed to drive organizational effectiveness, build brand identity, influence policy, and grow resources under management. She also serves as co-chair of North Carolina's Child Fatality Task Force, is a member of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model statewide committee, and sits on the Governance and Accreditation Committee and the Network Vision Council for Communities In Schools' national office, where she helps guide strategic direction and innovation on a national scale. Most recently, Cox was selected to serve as part of Cohort 31 of Leadership North Carolina. She earned her B.A. in Journalism from Southwest Texas State University and achieved the Duke Nonprofit Management Certificate.

**Dr. Frank Creech Greene**

Superintendent

Greene County Schools

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Dr. Frank Creech has served large urban and small rural low-wealth districts in NC for over 25 years as a teacher, principal, and district leader. Frank earned his MSA and Ed.D at UNC Chapel Hill. He was an adjunct instructor in the Campbell University MSA program for 12 years. As an NC Department of Public Instruction transformation coach, he worked with educators in low-performing schools and helped districts implement improvement processes. In 2014, Frank joined Greene County Schools (GCS), where he currently serves as superintendent. The small district is known for innovation and STEM education. GCS is home to three of the 53 public, private, and charter schools recognized by the State Board of Education as *STEM Schools of Distinction*. Frank is a member of the NC STEM Ecosystem Steering Committee and serves on the STEM Learning Ecosystem Community of Practice Advisory Council. In 2022, Frank led a competitive grant application that resulted in a \$50 million grant from the Needs-Based Public School Fund. A new high school will open in 2026 to replace Greene Central High School, which has served Greene County for 63 years.

Frank serves on the executive board of the NC School Superintendents Association. Locally, he serves on advisory boards for the Boys & Girls Club of the Coastal Plain and the Lenoir Greene Partnership for Children. GCS frequently collaborates with community college and university partners to address regional workforce needs. Frank is passionate about ensuring Greene County students develop the skills they need to be successful in their future pursuits.

**Dr. Nancy Cross *Randolph***

Assistant Director, Office of Career and Technical Education  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  
[nancy.cross@dpi.nc.gov](mailto:nancy.cross@dpi.nc.gov)

Dr. Nancy Cross currently resides in Randolph County, where she has lived for 33 years. She grew up in Stokes County and still considers the small town of Pinnacle to be home, where she spends a considerable amount of time there with her mother. She served as a math and science teacher, instructional lead teacher, early college liaison, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) director prior to joining the Office of CTE with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in 2021. She now has the honor of serving as Assistant Director for the Office of CTE. She is passionate about using data to support the CTE narrative and increase awareness of the positive impact CTE can have on all students. She has three children who are enjoying life as young adults. Charley, her oldest, is an occupational therapist and lives in Randolph County. Jamey, the middle child, is a public information officer for the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and lives in Raleigh. And Ben, the youngest, is an assistant county ranger with the NC Forest Service in Rockingham County and lives in Greensboro.

**Colleen Kinser *Johnston***

Director, ICFNC  
North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities  
[kinser@ncicu.org](mailto:kinser@ncicu.org)

Colleen Kinser is a dedicated professional with a proven track record of over fifteen years of service to North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), where she currently serves as the Director of the Independent College Fund of North Carolina (ICFNC). In her role, Colleen works with a dynamic team responsible for fundraising, policy advocacy, and collaborative programs aimed at supporting the 36 private, nonprofit colleges and universities across the state.

With a strong commitment to higher education and a passion for helping students achieve their dreams, Colleen has played a key role in the success of the ICFNC's annual fundraising campaigns, securing support for student scholarships and enrichment programs. Through her leadership, she has fostered partnerships with a diverse array of corporations and foundations throughout North Carolina, aligning their philanthropic efforts with the mission of making college education accessible to all students.

Prior to her tenure at NCICU, Colleen worked in the Institutional Advancement department at Meredith College. It was during her time as a student at Meredith College that her appreciation for independent higher education took root. She earned both a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Meredith College, an institution that served as the "right fit" for her own educational journey. This personal connection fuels her drive to help others discover and attend the college that aligns with their aspirations and potential. In 2023, Colleen achieved the milestone of becoming a Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE), marking her dedication and expertise in the field of fundraising.

Colleen grew up in Raleigh, NC, and currently resides in Garner. In her free time, she enjoys being with her two children and volunteering with her church's children's ministry.



**Steven Martin, Program Chair** *Wake*

President & CEO

Constellation Quality Health

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Steven is the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for Constellation Quality Health. An experienced and empathetic leader, Steven previously served as a Vice President within Atrium Health's Quality Division. His responsibilities included the comprehensive oversight for accreditation, medical staff services and quality, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (Patient Non-Discrimination), and the Insurance and Payor Quality of Care Complaint process.

He served as a member of the Joint Commission's Health Systems Liaison Advisory Council and as Deputy for the COVID-19 Surge Operations Leadership Group at Atrium Health. His additional prior leadership roles include Vice President for Business Development/Senior Consultant at Courtemanche & Associates, Inc., and Director of Quality Management at Carolinas HealthCare System. Steven also served as a Hospital Surveyor with The Joint Commission.

Steven holds a Master's in Health Administration from the Medical University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Wofford College. His credentials include Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives (FACHE) and Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality (CPHQ). He is an alumnus of Leadership North Carolina Class 31 and serves as the LNC Class 32 Program Chair.

**David Mize** *Guilford*

Senior Tax Manager

DMJPS, PLLC

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David cares deeply about the nonprofit organization Earlier.org. This organization works tirelessly to find earlier detection for breast cancer. David serves on the board of directors for this organization and is humbled by the opportunity to do so. Listening to stories of women beating breast cancer and how important it was for them to find it as early as possible really solidifies the work the organization does.

David is involved in the PTA for his daughter's middle school. David helps and volunteers as often as possible in school events. David enjoys being involved in his daughter's school activities and loves seeing the kids grow in their schooling.

**Dr. Jack Monell** *Forsyth*

Provost Fellow & Associate Professor of Justice Studies

Winston-Salem State University

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Dr. Jack S. Monell is a Provost Fellow and Associate Professor of Justice Studies in the Department of History, Politics and Social Justice at Winston-Salem State University. As the Provost Fellow, he is delegated to work in the office of faculty affairs where he addresses varying faculty area metrics and works to enhance the efficacy of product delivery. In his role as a faculty member, he instructs a myriad of courses to include Social Justice and tackles many of the societal issues often seen through popular culture and the media. As the immediate past faculty senate chair and executive committee member for

the UNC Faculty assembly, he worked tirelessly to address the needs of his faculty at institutional and system levels.

He has over thirty years of experience working for various government entities, NGOs, nonprofits, and undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral granting institutions. As a national trainer, he provides technical and supportive services to local, state, and federal agencies in the fields of criminal justice and social work. His work has taken him to S. Korea, Cuba, and was recently awarded an NEH Fellowship at the University of Tampa to work on studying the sociopolitical activity of Cuban immigrants in Florida. Additionally, he completed a two-year Whisenton Public Scholars Fellowship through the Kettering Foundation studying Black masculinity and generational trauma.

Dr. Monell received a post-graduate certificate in Sociology from Appalachian State University, Ph.D. from Walden University, M.S.W. from Howard University, and B.A. from Towson State University, respectively. Dr. Monell's areas of interest include Afro-Latino communities, African American male masculinity, urban youth and their families, popular culture, gangs, and delinquency paradigm shifts. He is an active member of the American Society of Criminology, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, North Carolina Criminal Justice Association, and National Association of Social Workers.

**Jacki Russell, Co-Chair *Wake***

Director, Division of Disability Determination Services (DDS)  
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services  
[jackeline.russell@ssa.gov](mailto:jackeline.russell@ssa.gov)

Jacki is thankful for the opportunity to serve, work with, and work for North Carolinians and the NC DDS staff in her role as NCDDS Director for 6+ years. She previously served more than 20 years leading and managing organizational change, strategic planning, program design/improvement, professional development, and utilization of data to support equity in services and advocating for people with disabilities. She started her career in 1993 as a Speech Pathologist, providing services in homes, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and schools. She later worked with the Wake County Public School System in several roles, including Speech Pathologist, Assistive Technology Specialist, Senior Administrator, Director of Policy, and Senior Director of Policy and Fiscal Compliance. Utilizing her experiences as a service provider, educational and organizational leader, fiscal manager, data-driven decision maker, and advocate for people with disabilities, she has focused on strengthening the culture of continuous improvement at the NC Division of Disability Determination Services. Education and advocacy to obtain federal regulation changes to improve the federal Disability Program are a focus for Jacki, providing an opportunity last year for Congressional testimony in a Sub-Committee Hearing about the Disability Program Crisis.

Jacki was born and raised a Hoosier and moved to North Carolina many years ago. Her first job was detasseling corn, which gave her an appreciation for work that can be done in air conditioning. Jacki challenges each of you to pursue the changes you see as needed to serve North Carolina, even when it's out of your comfort zone, as you never know when it will work out to the benefit of those you are supporting. She loves living in North Carolina, where she resides with her husband Sean and dog Mimi. She enjoys the peace that comes from watching the ocean roll in at the beach, walking trails in the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains, cooking family dinners, and traveling with her family which includes her son Garrett (26) and daughter Maggie (23). Jacki is active in the community through mentoring and

volunteering with her church. When Jacki is not spending time with family she enjoys reading, learning, and walking the many greenway trails in Raleigh.

**Dr. Paola Sztajn Wake**

Dean, College of Education  
North Carolina State University  
[psztajn@ncsu.edu](mailto:psztajn@ncsu.edu)

Paola Sztajn is Dean of the College of Education at North Carolina State University. She is a professor of mathematics education and, since her arrival at NC State in 2008, she has served as Interim Associate Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Policy, Provost Fellow, Associate Dean for Research and Innovation in the College of Education, Head of the Department of Teacher Education and Learning Sciences, and faculty senator. Her research program focuses on elementary teachers' professional development in mathematics. She has over 90 published papers, chapters for different handbooks in mathematics education, an edited book with Teachers College Press, and an authored book for practitioners with Corwin Press.

Paola's research has been funded with over \$33M in external support. She has served two terms as a program officer at the National Science Foundation, member of the editorial board for the Journal for Research in Mathematics Education, chair for the Special Interest Group-Research in Mathematics Education from the American Educational Research Association, and Vice President for Advocacy, Equity and Research for the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators. Paola is married to Rusty May, who is a high school social studies teacher, and they have two grown-up children living in Charlotte and Raleigh. Paola is an avid traveler when time allows and also enjoys hiking and yoga.

**Dr. Jessie Tenenbaum Wake**

Associate Professor  
Duke University  
[jessiet@gmail.com](mailto:jessiet@gmail.com)

In the course of her career, Jessie has worked in industry, academia, and government. She started her career as a Program Manager at Microsoft before returning to academia for a PhD in biomedical informatics. She then joined Duke University first as Associate Director for Bioinformatics and later as a faculty member. In 2019 (9 months before COVID hit) she took a leave of absence from Duke to serve as Chief Data Officer (CDO) for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS), overseeing data strategy across the Department to both enable and evaluate data-driven policy to improve the health and well-being of the residents of North Carolina.

After 5 years as CDO at NC DHHS, Jessie returned to Duke University this fall. Her research focus is on AI and informatics methods to enable a data-driven approach to "whole person health" including social determinants of health and mental health. Her research interests also extended to ethical, legal, and social issues related to big data and precision medicine.

Nationally, Jessie has served as Associate Editor for the Journal of Biomedical Informatics, an elected member of the Board of Directors for the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA), and on the Board of Scientific Counselors for the National Library of Medicine.

Jessie lives in Raleigh with her husband and teenage twin boys. For fun Jessie likes to bike, read, camp, be in nature, listen to AI podcasts, and do jigsaw puzzles.