



## Leadership North Carolina Class XXIX

Education Session  
December 7-9, 2021

### Speaker Directory

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

Tour Coordinator and Senior Docent  
International Civil Rights Center and Museum  
134 South Elm Street  
Greensboro, NC 27401  
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Dillon Tyler has worked in numerous nonprofit and government roles in Greensboro and North Carolina. He currently serves as the Tour Coordinator and as a senior docent at the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, a leading site along the U.S. Civil Rights Trail and an International Site of Conscience. Tyler takes a leading role in the museum, including with fundraising, outreach, operations, exhibit design, bookkeeping, and community engagement.

Within the community, Tyler is the 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 urban leaders working to improve cities across sectors, including urban planning, community development, entrepreneurship, government, transportation, sustainability, design, art, and media.

Tyler also serves as a Specialist within the North Carolina Army National Guard, where he is working to earn his commission as an Officer Candidate. 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*.

#### **Ms. Brenda Dalton James**

Community Activist and Woolworth's Sit-In Participant  
Greensboro, NC  
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Brenda Dalton James attended Dudley High School in Greensboro, NC. In 1960, while a student at Dudley High School, she participated in the F.W. Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins. She was the 2017 recipient of the Sit-in

Participant Award from the International Civil Rights Center and Museum (ICRCM). Ms. Dalton James continues to be a community activist and volunteers with the ICRCM.

### **Dr. Trip Stallings**

Education and Policy Consultant

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Trip Stallings is an education and policy consultant with over 25 years of experience working in North Carolina at the local, regional, and state levels. Current and recent clients include the John M. Belk Endowment, the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, myFutureNC, the North Carolina Education Corps, and the North Carolina Cyber Academy. Prior to his current consulting work, Trip was the Director of Policy Research at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University, where he co-led the Research and Evaluation team. His work there focused on providing timely information about policy-relevant education research to North Carolina policymakers and other stakeholders with education policy decision-making responsibilities. Topics included school vouchers, early-grade reading recovery, teacher career ladders, alternative school district structure and implementation, and funding for community colleges.

His state leadership opportunities have included: managing the Friday Institute's work with the myFutureNC Commission (which led to the creation of myFutureNC); guiding the development of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics' academic vision for its second campus; co-leading the evaluation of North Carolina's federally funded Race to the Top (RttT) initiatives; developing financial and policy analyses for the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan; co-evaluating the North Carolina School Connectivity Initiative; and co-developing the state's RttT proposal.

Before arriving at the Friday Institute, Trip worked as an education policy analyst for several North Carolina-based groups, including the Center for Teaching Quality, the Hunt Institute, The Program on Public Life at UNC, and the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research. His work for these groups included research on service-learning and pre-service teachers; locale, local economic conditions, and high school dropout; STEM teacher retention; local school boards; voter participation; "education governors;" and the history of federal involvement in education. He also taught at the middle school level for several years, followed by a stint in teacher education. He has completed graduate work in public policy (MPP, Duke, 2002) and education policy and politics (PhD, UNC-CH, 2010).

### **Ms. Cecilia Holden**

President and Chief Executive Officer

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**LNC Class XXIII Alumna**

Cecilia Holden has served as the first-ever President & CEO for myFutureNC, a statewide initiative focused on educational attainment, since December 2019. The organization is the result of cross-sector collaboration between North Carolina leaders in education, business, and government. In this role, Holden advances the strategic direction and priorities for the organization; collaborates with cross-sector leaders; develops and drives policy that increases North Carolina's level of education attainment; and builds the overall capacity of the organization.

Holden most recently held the position as the Director of Government and Community Affairs for the State Board of Education. In this capacity, she served as the principal contact and staff for the State Board of Education with state

and federal education policy makers and stakeholders, including the NC General Assembly, the Governor's Office, NC state agencies, and the U.S. Congress.

Holden's career includes extensive public and private sector experience. Prior to joining the State Board of Education, she served as the Chief of Staff for the North Carolina Department of Commerce. In addition, her North Carolina public service includes serving as the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources and the Director of Networking Technologies for the Department of Public Instruction. She has a proven track record of establishing and implementing creative strategies to optimize operations, return on investments, and excellence in customer satisfaction.

Holden served as a middle manager with IBM and as the Business Operations Manager for a registered investment advisory firm. During her years with IBM, Holden was a Team Excellence Award winner and an IBM Achievement Club recipient and was selected for the IBM Executive Fast Track program. She built a reputation for implementing high standards for customer service while she oversaw a worldwide network of technical support engineers.

Holden began her career working as a Community Detention Counselor with Wake County Juvenile Court. She later served as the Information Technology Implementation Manager with Wake County, where she was responsible for the Public Safety and Criminal Justice information technology systems for which she received multiple National Association of Counties awards.

Holden holds a Master's in Business Administration from Duke University, a certificate in Public Administration from the University of North Carolina School of Government, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science and Business from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Holden is married to Tom Holden and they have a son and a daughter. They are members of Edenton Street United Methodist Church where Holden served on the Administrative Board and volunteers as a youth leader.

**Mrs. MC Belk Pilon**

President and Board Chair

John M. Belk Endowment

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MC Belk Pilon is President and Board Chair of the John M. Belk Endowment, where she and her team are committed to increasing access to and completion of postsecondary education in order to give all North Carolinians the chance at long-term, family-sustaining careers. Guided by the vision she shared with her father, the late John Belk, MC leads the Endowment on its mission to create a stronger North Carolina.

Like her father, MC serves her community in many ways. She has participated on several boards that champion education access and success for all children, including Good Friends, Greater Enrichment, and the Fletcher School. She is currently Chair of The John M. Belk Scholarship Advisory Board at Davidson College and active on the boards of myFutureNC, Inc.; The Belk Foundation; College Advising Corps; New Republic Partners; The Winer Family Foundation Advisory Board; The Belk Center Advisory Board; and The Charlotte Country Day School Board of Trustees, as well as their Advancement and Investment Committees. Recently, MC was the winner of the 2020 I.E. Ready Award, the highest honor bestowed by the State Board of Community Colleges. She was also awarded the 2016 Roanoke College Medal, the highest honor for an alumnus to receive, and the 2015 Central Piedmont Community College Distinguished Service Award.

MC earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and communications from Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, where she also worked as assistant alumni director after graduation. After returning to her hometown, she spent twelve years in retail management at Belk Inc. and five years with The Belk Foundation, a family foundation that focuses on improving early childhood education, teaching, and leadership in public schools.

MC and her husband, Jeff Pilon, live in Charlotte with their three children.

**Ms. Rebecca Feinglos Planchard**

**LNC Class XXVII Alumna**

Senior Early Childhood Policy Advisor  
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Rebecca Feinglos Planchard serves as the chief policy and strategy advisor for the Division of Child Development and Early Education in the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. She has served in NCDHHS for nearly four years, where she has advised the Secretary's Office on early childhood health, child welfare, and early learning. In 2020, Rebecca coordinated statewide COVID-19 response for Pre-K through grade 12 schools, in close partnership with education leaders. In 2021 Rebecca built and led the strategy team at the Division of Child Development and Early Education to utilize \$1.2 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funds for early childhood. Rebecca has also provided support to statewide Hispanic/LatinX and higher education policy throughout COVID-19 response.

Prior to joining NCDHHS, Rebecca served as the Early Childhood Policy Associate for the Chicago Mayor's Office, where she coordinated citywide outreach efforts to encourage preschool enrollment and worked across city agencies to advance the mayor's early education priorities. She also brings experience as an instructional coach for preschool, elementary, and middle school teachers in Dallas-Fort Worth, TX. Rebecca started her professional career in service as a bilingual kindergarten teacher in Fort Worth, TX. Rebecca is originally from Durham, NC. She is a graduate of Duke University with a BA in Spanish, history, and political science, Magna Cum Laude, and the University of Chicago with a master's degree in public policy and a certificate in municipal finance.

**Ms. Banu Valladares**

Executive Director  
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Banu Valladares is a nonprofit innovator and community leader currently serving as the Executive Director of Charlotte Bilingual Preschool (ClBP) in Charlotte, NC. Under her leadership, Valladares has transformed ClBP to respond to community need: the 5-star licensed dual language preschool is now also a nationally recognized 2-generation early childhood education model that builds pathways to economic mobility for children 0-5 years old and their families. Valladares represents the interests of Charlotte's Latinx families and informs early childhood education policy on the Mecklenburg County (NC) Early Learning Initiative Executive Committee, the NC Early Childhood Advisory Council, Care and Learning (CandL, NC), the NC Home Visiting and Parent Education System, and the NC

Early Education Foundation. She is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and serves on the Arts and Science Council Board of Directors and the Latin American Future Search.

Valladares moved to Charlotte from Venezuela in 1982 to attend UNC-Charlotte, where she earned a master's degree in literature. She led statewide arts and education programs at the North Carolina Humanities Council, the North Carolina Arts Council, and SonEdna. In all her service roles, she has built strategic partnerships with national, state, and local agencies, advocating for capacity-building support for community-based African American, Asian American, Latinx, and American Indian cultural organizations.

In 2019, Valladares was honored as one of 50 local "Opportunity Champions" by Leading on Opportunity. She is the author of the bilingual book of poetry *Gypsy Child: Dancing Without Veils* (CPCC Press, 2005). She enjoys yoga, hiking, and walks with her therapy dog, Bella.

### **Ms. Eugenia Floyd**

4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher, Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools  
2021 North Carolina Teacher of the Year  
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Eugenia Floyd is the 2021 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in History from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Following graduation, she became a teacher assistant at Morris Grove Elementary School within the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools district. She completed her K-6 teacher certification at North Carolina Central University in 2013. Eugenia then began her career as a fourth-grade classroom teacher at Mary Scroggs Elementary School. Through a partnership with her district, she earned a gifted certification from Elon University. She then continued on to graduate with a Master's degree in Gifted Education in 2020 from Elon.

### **Ms. Maureen Stover**

AP Physics 1 Online Instructor  
North Carolina Virtual Public School  
2020 North Carolina Teacher of the Year and 2021 National Teacher of the Year Finalist  
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Maureen Stover is an Advanced Placement Physics I teacher at the North Carolina Virtual Public School. In addition to her role as a teacher, Maureen is the 2020 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year (NCTOY), a 2021 National Teacher of the Year finalist, and a 2022 National Educators Association California Casualty Excellence in Teaching awardee. Prior to her position as the NCTOY, Maureen taught biology, earth and environmental science, and advancement via individual determination (AVID) at Cumberland International Early College High School in Fayetteville, Cumberland County, NC.

Maureen has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and worked as an educational consultant for the National Science Teaching Association. She earned a Bachelor of Science in biology from the United States Air Force Academy, Class of 1997; a Master of Arts Education in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) from Adams State University in Colorado; a Master of Arts in

Teaching in secondary science from Western Governors University North Carolina; and a Leadership Certificate in STEM education from Teachers College Columbia University. As an educator, Maureen is dedicated to improving the educational opportunities for every student through equitable education initiatives and seeks to provide clear pathways for students to successfully enter the career or college program of their choice upon graduation from high school. Prior to becoming a teacher, she served as an Intelligence Officer in the United States Air Force.

**Mr. Freebird McKinney**

Director of Government and Community Affairs  
NC State Board of Education/NC Department of Public Instruction  
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Freebird McKinney currently serves as the NC State Board of Education/Department of Public Instruction's Director of Government and Community Affairs. This role has allowed him the opportunity to "build bridges" across NC between the SBE/ DPI and the Governor's office, the General Assembly, and each and every school district, as well as the multiple education advocacy groups and organizations that are collectively working to move public education forward in our state. For the last fifteen years, he has also served as a "Village Teacher."

As the 2018 North Carolina State Teacher of the Year, he had the honor of inspiring countless young men and women inside and outside of the classroom, both in public high schools (for 14 years), and at Elon University, as a School of Education adjunct professor. His mission continues to represent the role of an "Educator Diplomat" in acting as a conduit to support policy and decision makers as they work to elevate NC Public Schools. Whether it is motivating students to find their own voices and roles as citizens of this world through education or working with all sectors of education advocacy to advance equity and opportunity, Freebird is committed in his service to the students, schools, and communities of NC. He believes, ultimately, that through collective and committed relationship-building, we can shape our united future through an "Education Culture Transformation."

**Ms. Julie Pittman**

Special Advisor to the Superintendent: Teacher Engagement  
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Julie Pittman joined DPI as the Special Advisor to Superintendent Catherine Truitt for Teacher Engagement. A 23-year educator, Pittman has been a high school English teacher in Rutherford County Schools since 2003 and was named the 2018 Burroughs Wellcome Fund Western Region NC Teacher of the Year. In 2019-2020, she worked as a teacher on loan to No Kid Hungry, serving as the education outreach manager in North Carolina. She holds a master of arts degree from UNC Chapel Hill and is a National Board Certified Teacher. She serves as a Governor Cooper appointee to the NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching Board of Trustees, is a member of the NC Hispanic/LatinX Action Coalition, and is a board member of American Friends of the Bajío. Pittman has worked in rural and urban public school districts in the state to develop educator advocacy and teacher leadership

opportunities. As the Special Advisor, Pittman works to lift up the voices of educators as well as other education stakeholders to the department and other state level agencies. Her weekly school visits serve as a source of feedback from those who are serving our students daily.

**Dr. Kimberly Gold**

**LNC Class XXII Alumna**

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Kimberly Gold joined the North Carolina Community College System Office in July 2019 as the Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer. Prior to serving in this role Dr. Gold served as the 5th president of Robeson Community College. During her time in the North Carolina Community College System Kimberly served in a variety of roles beginning at Isothermal Community College (ICC) in 1995 as an adjunct faculty member and ending her service at ICC as the Executive Vice President in 2016. Other roles at Isothermal included serving as the Vice President for Academic and Student Services (2008-14), Dean of the Business Sciences (2005-08), and faculty member from 1996 to 2005. In her role as faculty member, Kimberly taught business classes including accounting, economics, marketing, and finance. Prior to her service at Isothermal Dr. Gold also taught at Montreat College and worked as a Production Manager for American Greetings Inc.

Dr. Gold earned degrees in Bachelor of Science from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (1987), Master of Business Administration from Western Carolina University (1995), and Educational Specialist (2004) and Doctorate in Education (2007) from Appalachian State University.

Dr. Gold lives in Raleigh, North Carolina and has two grown children.

**Dr. Andrew Kelly**

Senior Vice President for Strategy and Policy  
University of North Carolina System  
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Dr. Andrew Kelly serves as the Senior Vice President for Strategy and Policy. Kelly leads the Division of Strategy and Policy, which is charged with enhancing and furthering the UNC system's strategic goals. In addition to serving as a higher-education policy expert to the President and the Board of Governors, he is tasked with developing a robust performance measurement system and proactively identifying new initiatives to promote system goals.

Prior to joining UNC, Kelly was a resident scholar in education policy studies and the Founding Director of the Center on Higher Education Reform at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). In his roles, Dr. Kelly conducted research on college affordability innovation in higher education and federal and state policy and advised members of congress, state policy makers, and presidential candidates. Kelly has published work in academic journals and in popular outlets such as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Chronicle of Higher Education, Education Week, The Atlantic, and National Review.

Dr. Kelly is a summa cum laude graduate of Dartmouth College, where he earned a degree in history. He holds a master's degree and Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley.

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

President

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities

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A. Hope Williams is in her 30<sup>th</sup> year as president of North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), the statewide 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 student scholarships and grants as well as 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 Cabinet and was named a 2017 CEO of the Year by the *Triangle Business Journal*. She chairs the boards of MCNC, Dupont Circle Investments, and the North Carolina Aquarium Society, serves on the Governor's Education Cabinet and on the boards of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and the National Student Clearinghouse, College Foundation, Inc., the National Advisory Board of the Institute for Emerging Issues, the NCWorks Commission, the myFutureNC Commission, and Communities in Schools of North Carolina.

### **Dr. T. Rhett Brown**

President

Wingate University

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Rhett Brown became the 10th president of Wingate University on June 1, 2015. He earned a BA in English from Wingate College, received his MBA from Wingate University, and completed the work for his Doctor of Education (EdD) at the University of Alabama.

During his first year as president, President Brown established the "One Day, One Dog" day of service and giving. In 2019, more than 1500 volunteers participated in community-wide service projects. To date, close to \$750,000 dollars has been raised to support student scholarships and the 2020 Student Relief Fund.

A first-generation college student, Dr. Brown fostered support for the First-Generation Orientation bridge program. Special programming and monthly workshops guided the inaugural cohort of 50 first-gen students this fall. And in partnership with Union County Public Schools, President Brown established Wayfind—a program that mentors 20 high-potential, at-risk eighth-grade students throughout their tenure at two local high schools. Upon completion of the Wayfind program, all graduates will be awarded a full-tuition scholarship to attend Wingate University.



Under his leadership, the diversity on Wingate's campus has grown by 108%. Non-white students now make up 42% of the undergraduate student body. Major steps have been made in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion, including the establishment of a DE&I council, which Dr. Brown chairs. The council helped establish a Unity House in 2020 to support underrepresented students and employees. President Brown's efforts helped secure grant money to go toward eight initiatives covering three primary areas: hiring more minority faculty and staff members; training employees on unconscious bias; and providing more multicultural programming for students.

Most recently, Dr. Brown led the charge to establish a committee to study Wingate's namesake after it was learned Washington Manly Wingate owned and sold enslaved people. The committee will work to reclaim the Wingate name and recommend action to the Wingate Board of Trustees.

A veteran of Operation Desert Storm, President Brown served with Seabees from the U.S. Navy Reserve. He and his family are members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Monroe, where Dr. Brown currently serves as one of nine vestry members.

### **Dr. Elwood L. Robinson**

**LNC Class II Alumnus**

Chancellor

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Elwood L. Robinson was elected Chancellor of Winston-Salem State University in, September of 2014, by the Board of Governors of the 17-campus University of North Carolina, and he assumed his duties on January 1, 2015. Prior to election as Chancellor at WSSU, he served as Provost and Vice-President of Cambridge College. As Cambridge College's chief academic officer, Robinson has advised the president on matters of educational policy and the development of teaching and academic programs.

A native of Ivanhoe, NC, Robinson graduated magna cum laude from North Carolina Central University in 1978 with a degree in psychology and then earned a master's degree in the field from Fisk University in Tennessee (1980). After completing a pre-doctoral internship at Duke University Medical Center, performing rotations in neuropsychology, psychiatric inpatient and behavioral medicine, and health psychology, he earned a doctorate in clinical psychology from Pennsylvania State University (1986). He later completed his clinical training as a research associate at Duke University Medical Center (1990-1993).

Robinson joined the faculty of NCCU in 1984. In 1993, he was named Director of the Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) Program, which provides research-training opportunities for students and faculty from minority groups underrepresented in the biomedical sciences. From 1993-1996, Robinson also served as chair of NCCU's Psychology Department. In 2006, Robinson was named founding Dean of the NCCU College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, where he oversaw nine departments, five centers and over 200 faculty and staff. He remained in the post until he left North Carolina for Cambridge College in 2012.

Active in professional and civic organizations, Robinson has received numerous awards and honors over the course of his career. A former National Institutes of Health Fellow, he has received the Sigma Xi Award (1995), the Omega Psi Phi Founder's Award (2007), an Image Award from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (2003), and the Order of the Long Leaf Pine (2012). He has served on the boards of the YMCA of the Greater Triangle, the Center for Child and Family Health, and the Uplift Foundation, and has served as a delegate for the People to People Citizen Ambassador Program to China, Egypt, and South Africa.

Robinson is married to Denise Robinson, a 1978 NCCU graduate and former elementary school teacher. Together, they have two children: Chanita Robinson Coulter, a graduate of North Carolina A&T State University and schoolteacher living in Charleston, SC; and Devin, a student at North Carolina A&T State University.

### **Garrett Elder**

Student

Wingate University

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Garrett Elder is a junior at Wingate University, majoring in communications with a minor in marketing. He was born and raised right down the road from Wingate, in Charlotte. Garrett came to Wingate because he loved the school's atmosphere. As soon as he visited the campus, he knew he wanted to take his next academic steps there. He has been blessed with countless opportunities at Wingate that he would not have had at a larger college or university.

Garret is heavily involved in several aspects of campus life. He is a resident assistant in a first year area, a student worker in both the Office of Marketing and Events and the Athletic Communications Office, and a part of a few clubs.

### **Brandy Fuentes**

Student

Wingate University

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Brandy Fuentes is a senior Honors student at Wingate University from Elkin, NC. She is majoring in Human Services and minoring in Spanish and Marketing. Currently, she is attending Wingate University on a full-ride sponsored by Golden Door Scholarship, which grants undocumented students the opportunity to obtain a higher education. Throughout her time at Wingate, Brandy has participated in a variety of extracurricular activities and career opportunities. At Wingate, Brandy has dedicated her time to enhancing the student experience through her positions as a writing tutor, teaching assistant, research assistant, and as a bilingual tour guide. Furthermore, she has expanded her professional skill set through her participation in diverse internships. Through her engagement as a Project Destined real estate, Union County child welfare, and New Frame LLC government relations intern, Brandy has been able to learn how to construct flow projections and sensitivity analysis for real estate professionals, assist a senior social worker with child abuse cases, and most importantly, advocate for legislative change at the NC General Assembly.

When Brandy is not advancing her professional and academic career, she is engaging in self-care. Her hobbies include exploring new places, listening to music, pottery, fitness, and dancing. Brandy is a person who loves to learn and be challenged holistically. She works every day to be a better version of herself in order to adequately represent her community. After graduating from Wingate, Brandy hopes to obtain a job in a fast-paced environment that will challenge her before continuing her education. Brandy's ultimate goal is to obtain a MSW/JD degree to conduct systemic change through macro social work for marginalized communities.

### **Angel Maynor**

Student

Winston-Salem State University

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Angel Maynor is a 21-year-old junior majoring in Information Technology at Winston-Salem State University. She is a Marine Corps brat, so when asked where her hometown is, she says "everywhere." She was born in Pensacola, FL,

but raised all over the world. Before moving to North Carolina, she lived in Okinawa, Japan, for four and a half years. She transferred to WSSU last fall from Craven Community College in New Bern, NC, where she obtained her Associates in Arts degree.

Angel is currently enrolled in WSSU's five-year BS-MS (4+1) program which is allowing her to take certain Computer Science & Information Technology (MCST) graduate courses in her senior year in the place of the corresponding undergraduate courses. She will obtain a B.S. in Information Technology, and then with an additional year will obtain a M.S. in Computer Science and Information Technology. Some organizations that she is involved in on campus are Learn. Empower. Advocated. Dedicate (L.E.A.D); National Council of Negro Women (NCNW); and Active Minds. In her free time, she enjoys going to the gym, participating in hackathons, delivering groceries for the Triad area, and spending time with her family.

### **Jevon McKiver**

Student

Winston-Salem State University

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Jevon McKiver is a junior majoring in computer science at Winston Salem State University, where he is part of the Math & Stats club and the Ey bit ambassador program, a member of the football team, and an ambassador for career services and development. Jevon is from High Point, NC. He is 1 of 9 (all boys) and has interests in anime, video games, and fitness. His favorite books are *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* by Robert Kiyosaki and *The 48 Laws of Power* by Robert Greene. He is the independent business manager for MTG FX, where he and his team work to build investment portfolios for their clients. He devotes time every 2 weeks to go to Wilmington, where he gives back to the homeless by working at a local food bank.

### **Ms. Minnie Forte-Brown**

Engagement Advisor, NC10

Former President, North Carolina School Boards Association

Former Chair, Durham Public Schools Board of Education

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Minnie Forte-Brown is nationally recognized for public school advocacy and for board of education leadership. President of the NC School Boards Association, Southern Regional Director of the National School Board Association, former chair of the Council of Urban Boards of Education, university professor, and other management roles are included on her extensive resume.

Forte-Brown was elected to the Durham Public Schools Board of Education in 2004 and served as a member and in vice-chair and chairperson positions until 2020. She taught at NC Central University in the departments of English and Mass Communication until retirement in 2011. She currently serves as adjunct faculty in the same department. Her statewide experience includes an appointment to the NC Council on the Status of Women and the NC Gang Advisory Task Force. Currently she serves as Engagement Advisor for NC10, which is a coalition of all the Historically Black Colleges and Universities in North Carolina, public and private. She is vice chair of the board and co-founder of the East Durham Children's Initiative, which has expanded to DCI, Durham Children's Initiative, and board member for KIPP:NC, which includes Gaston, Halifax, Durham, and Charlotte. Forte-Brown serves as a regional consultant for Ray and Associates, a nationally recognized search firm for school superintendents and executive leaders. She also owns Forte-Brown Consulting, LLC.

She is most proud of the naming of the Durham Public Schools Staff Development Center in her honor as she retired from board service last year. Her past and present professional affiliations include Member, President-Elect, President, Past President, NC School Boards Association; Director, Southern Region, National School Boards Association Member; Vice Chair, Chair, Council of Urban Boards of Education; Bachelors in Speech/English; Master's in Speech Pathology and Audiology Recognition; Order of the Long Leaf Pine, NC's Highest Honor, given by Governor Bev Perdue in 2011; numerous Awards for community service; Faculty, AASA (American Association of School Administrators) and Howard University Urban Superintendents Academy.

## XXVIII Education Session Planning Committee

The following members of LNC Class XXVIII formed the committee to plan and implement the 2021 Class XXIX Education session.

**Jesse Battle** *Durham*

Senior Director of Community Partnerships

TROSA

[jbattle@trosainc.org](mailto:jbattle@trosainc.org)

Jesse is currently the Senior Director of Community Partnerships at TROSA. Jesse assumed this position after serving as the Director of the TROSA Men's Program for 19 years. Jesse is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor and a Licensed Clinical Addictions Specialist. His professional career and passion that he has for marginalized populations have been influenced by events in his life. After several periods of incarceration, Jesse eventually got to the point in his life that he was tired and wanted something different to happen. He had society's three strikes against him (no high school diploma, a felony record, and no job skills) that created a significant barrier to the life he wanted.

Being able to achieve professional goals has allowed Jesse to assist individuals trapped by the collateral consequences of past behaviors/substance-use disorders in obtaining the life they desire. At times, the barriers that a justice-involved individual may face are often perceived as insurmountable. Jesse wants to make sure that these individuals do not lose hope. Edward Louis Cole once said, "You don't drown by falling in the water; you drown by staying there." Jesse's goal is to inspire people to swim, no matter if they see the land or not, just keep swimming.

Additionally, Jesse just celebrated his 20th wedding anniversary with his loving wife, Sharon. They have three children, and his four grandchildren have become a primary focus in his life. Being a role model for them is an objective that he will continue to pursue.

**Kevin Byers, Session Co-Chair** *Forsyth*

Assistant Dean for Budget and Administration

Winston Salem State University

[byersk@wssu.edu](mailto:byersk@wssu.edu)

Kevin B. Byers is Assistant Dean for Budget and Administration at Winston-Salem State University's School of Health Sciences and is currently serving as the Interim Chief Operating Officer for the Center of Excellence for the Elimination of Health Disparities

An innovative business leader and experienced administrator, Byers has more than 15 years of financial management experience in both the public and private sectors.

With his keen eye for budget and business operations analysis throughout his career, Byers has progressed through the ranks by increasing efficiency and enhancing financial management practices and strategies. His areas of specialty include contracts and grants, accounting, auditing, financial analysis, human resources management, and fixed asset management.

At Winston-Salem State University, Byers began in 2004 as an Accounting Technician in the Grants and Contracts office. In 2007, he became a University Program Specialist in the Office of Sponsored Programs, where he administered federal, state, and private grants in excess of \$10 million. In 2011 he was named to his current position.

Byers is a community-minded leader who champions social justice and believes in volunteer service. In Winston-Salem, he has served on a number of non-profit and for-profit boards. A few current board memberships include: Trellis Supportive Care, Experiment in Self Reliance, and Wake Forest Clinical and Transitional Science Institute.

A native of Connecticut, Byers earned his bachelor's degree from Saint Paul's College in Lawrenceville, VA. He received his MBA from Saint Leo University in St. Leo, FL.

**Dr. Jeni Corn Wake**

Director of Research and Evaluation  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  
[jeniocorn@gmail.com](mailto:jeniocorn@gmail.com)

Jeni Corn is the new Director of Research and Evaluation for the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration at NCDPI. Jeni has extensive experience conducting research in school settings and providing technical assistance to school, district, and state-level education staff focused on research, evaluation, and policy in the southeast – most extensively in North Carolina. Most recently she served as the Director of Strategic Initiatives for myFutureNC, working with sector leaders and education stakeholders to strengthen pathways in support of the statewide attainment goal. As the Director of Evaluation Programs at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation for more than ten years, Jeni led several large, statewide evaluation and research studies of innovations in K-12 schools and districts, including leading the evaluation of initiatives funded under North Carolina's Race to the Top grant and development of the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan.

Jeni grew up in Greensboro and graduated from Page High School. She went on to UNC-Chapel Hill for undergraduate and master's degrees before moving to Raleigh to pursue her doctorate at NCSU. She lives in Raleigh with her 11-year-old daughter and their 1-year old puppy, Dolly Parton.

**Lynn Duffy Orange**

SAVP Leadership Development and Talent Acquisition  
University of North Carolina System  
[Lynn@Talentbuilders.net](mailto:Lynn@Talentbuilders.net)

Lynn is a strategic partner and trusted advisor to senior leadership in acquiring, developing, and retaining top talent. Recognized as a leader in innovative and proven approaches to leadership and team development, she brings extensive experience in global financial services, healthcare, biotech, consulting, and higher education. Lynn understands the realities in which clients operate, having held senior human resources and operations leadership roles for over 20 years. Clients appreciate her insightful and direct style.

Lynn has expertise in talent management systems and initiatives including executive assessment, succession planning, leadership development, high potential programs, and team effectiveness.

**Ray Garcia Out-of-State**

Manager Trainee  
84 Lumber  
[raymongarcia9614@gmail.com](mailto:raymongarcia9614@gmail.com)

Raymundo brings a strong background in social entrepreneurship, community engagement, and philanthropy. Raised in Marietta, a suburb of Atlanta, he grew up in a predominantly black and brown community characterized by significant disinvestment. As the first in his family to graduate college, he holds degrees in Public Policy, History, and Social Entrepreneurship from UNC Chapel Hill. Following his passion for systems level change, Raymundo joined the William R. Kenan Charitable Trust where he bolstered community-based investment in Latinx Durham through community asset-mapping. Thereafter, he worked with Lead for America as the Director of Development where he

built systems for people to join LFA's mission through all forms of giving. Raymundo then served as the Director of Strategic Advancement at MENTOR North Carolina, which aims to fuel the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships for North Carolina's young people while working to address the systemic barriers that they face on a daily basis. Ray is currently a manager trainee at 84 Lumber in Atlanta, GA.

From a young age, Ray has always benefited from the results produced in the social sector, whether that was an after school program where he could be cared for so his parents could make a little extra in their weekly paycheck or a back-to-school drive to receive school supplies. Coursework at UNC allowed him to contextualize his experiences through an understanding of how structural inequity affects marginalized groups and the reason nonprofits exist to begin with. As a result of these experiences, Ray developed an insatiable drive to impact the public sector, particularly in the realms of government and philanthropy. Since foundations, nonprofits, and local governments have the potential to reach many lives through collective impact, he hopes to push the public sector to create more orchestrated movements of social change by working with (not for) disenfranchised communities.

In his spare time, Ray enjoys a good Netflix binge, kayaking (or anything outdoorsy), and cooking up a new dish inspired by Tik Tok.

**Anna Helms *Mecklenburg***

Assistant Director for Constituent Relations  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
[ahelms35@unc.edu](mailto:ahelms35@unc.edu)

Anna Helms is the Assistant Director for Constituent Relations at UNC Charlotte where she fosters, supports, and expands the University's relationships with the state, regional, and local government and non-government organizations. Working for her alma mater, Anna is able and proud to strengthen the University and fulfill its mission.

Anna was born and raised in Union County, NC. After college she worked in Raleigh and Washington, DC, before her strong roots in North Carolina called her back.

Anna enjoys spending time browsing bookstore shelves and reading, trying out new dessert recipes, and continuing to work toward the goal of visiting all 100 counties in North Carolina.

Anna earned her bachelor's in English and journalism from UNC Charlotte.

**Naomi Irvin, Program Chair *Wake***

Chief of Staff - Government Markets  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina  
[naomi.irvin@bcbsnc.com](mailto:naomi.irvin@bcbsnc.com)

Naomi Irvin is a California native who began calling North Carolina home in 2006. She earned her BSBA with a Management concentration and MBA with a Marketing certificate from East Carolina University (ECU). With nearly 15 years of health insurance experience, Naomi currently serves as Chief of Staff – Government Markets for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina.

An avid public speaker, Naomi has been invited to speak at various industry conferences nationwide on an array of topics including embedded compliance programs, effective oversight programs, brand and marketing compliance, leadership, and relationship building. In addition to speaking, she also chairs conferences and participates on conference committees and advisory boards.

When not working, Naomi enjoys spending time with her kids (Josh, Hayley, and Milena) and pup (Juliet Bean). One of the most rewarding things Naomi does with her family is volunteering with the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle and

KABOOM!. A devourer and collector of books, Naomi retreats to her home office and packed bookshelves when she needs a break.

**Randolph Keaton** *Columbus*

Executive Director

Men and Women United for Youth & Families, CDC

[rkeaton@1csa.net](mailto:rkeaton@1csa.net)

Randolph Keaton was born and reared in Riegelwood, NC. He received his early education in the Bladen County school system before graduating from Acme-Delco High School in 1979. He attended North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University where he received a degree in Political Science. While serving in the United States Air Force, Randolph obtained his Master's in Human Resources Development in 1988. He has over 30 years of experience working in the Human Services field. His passion is with the people who reside in our rural communities. He currently serves as the Executive Director of Men and Women United for Youth & Families, CDC in Delco, NC as well as Councilman for the Town of Sandyfield, NC. He and his wife Angela have 3 children and 7 grandchildren.

**Dr. Heather Miller, Session Co-Chair** *Union*

Senior Vice President & Chief of Staff

Wingate University

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Heather Miller grew up in Rockingham, NC, but calls Indian Trail, NC, her home now. Other than teaching college students in Yangzhou, China, for three semesters, she has lived in North Carolina her entire life. A lover of NC, Heather's favorite pastimes include sipping coffee (hopefully at a local shop), frequenting the Union County Farmers Market, visiting Ocean Isle Beach, and enjoying casual hikes in the NC mountains. She jokes that during the COVID-19 pandemic, she and her family went on every walking trail in Union and Mecklenburg counties.

Heather believes in the power of education and how it can potentially transform an individual's path in life. She is a product of the public schools in Richmond County, and she furthered her education at Wingate University, Appalachian State, and North Carolina State University. For a decade, she has worked at Wingate University, her undergraduate alma mater. In her current position as the senior vice president & chief of staff, she provides leadership for the undergraduate and graduate admissions, athletic, financial aid, strategic planning, and marketing and event functions of the university.

She finds great satisfaction when her daily work intersects with making her local community better. Heather is married to a UNC-Chapel Hill alumnus who was raised in Rockingham, NC, as well. They have a five-year-old son who she goes on a date with almost every Saturday (Satur-date-day) morning.

**Dr. Connie Newsome** *Johnston*

Registrar, Campbell University School of Law

Campbell University

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Dr. Connie enjoys the study of leadership and the opportunity to impact the lives of others. During her career, her main focus has been on process improvement, managing teams, and creating professional development opportunities that lead to proper team and organizational fit. Her recent professional passions include the study of behavioral and communication drivers, leading to a recent certification in the John Maxwell D.I.S.C. Method of Behavioral Analysis.

Connie is also passionate about volunteerism. With that, she has served as a Guardian Ad Litem for over 20 years, advocating for children who have been temporarily or permanently removed from their homes due to abuse and/or



neglect. She is also active in professional organizations within education and leadership. She was elected and serves(d) as Assistant Executive Director of the National Network of Law School Officers and as the Vice-Chair for the Nominations and Elections Committee for the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers. She also is a "JMTER," committed to study and development from leadership expert Dr. John Maxwell. Finally, she is involved in various opportunities for impact at her church, annually co-hosting a meal packaging event for Rise Against Hunger. She is a lover of quotes, and one of her favorites is, "The best way to find yourself, is to lose yourself in the service of others." Gandhi

Dr. Newsome holds a B.S. and an MPA, both from East Carolina University. She also holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, with a focus in Higher Education Administration, from Argosy University.

Dr. Newsome loves to wear hats, blog periodically, watch action movies with her husband, and write poetry.

**Luisa Santiago** *Out-of-State*  
Unit Chief Immigration Judge  
US Department of Justice  
[ltslaw@aol.com](mailto:ltslaw@aol.com)

Luisa retired from the military in Dec 2020 after over 30 years of service. In service, she was an Army Judge Advocate and served around the world, including in Germany, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bosnia Herzegovina. For the last seven years in the military, she was stationed at Fort Bragg, NC, where she also retired from service. Luisa is passionate about learning and encouraging others to excel. She has a passion to help others and when not in service to our country, she loves to support church missions overseas. An active member of her church and community in Harnett County, she loves the people and culture of North Carolina. She is a recent and proud graduate of the UNC Chapel Hill Kenan Flagler Business School EMBA '21.