

## SPEAKER BIOS

### **RITA PIN AHRENS**

#### ***Director of Education Policy, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center***

Rita directs SEARAC's education policy work, highlighting disparities and obstacles in access to high quality education, and finding policy solutions to education equity. Previously, Rita served as a senior policy analyst for the Campaign for High School Equity, a coalition of national civil rights organizations that advocated for historically underserved and disadvantaged students, including students of color, English language learners, Native students, and low income students. Rita has also served as Director of Policy for the National Board for Professional Teaching standards, where she focused on research in teacher effectiveness, teacher compensation, improvement of NBPTS programs, and the equitable distribution of effective teachers. Before moving to Washington, D.C., Rita was a middle school math teacher in Connecticut. Rita holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Yale University and a Masters in Education from the University of New Haven. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in Education Policy. Prior to her career in education, Rita worked in the technology sector analyzing online behavior. She was active in the international campaign to ban landmines, as a co-founder of the Connecticut Coalition to Ban Landmines, and also helped establish the first Buddhist chaplaincy at Yale University. Rita is a refugee from Cambodia and grew up in Twin Falls, Idaho with her parents and two brothers. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening, writing poetry, painting, drawing, and learning Khmer classical dance.

### **KIM ANDERSON**

#### ***Senior Director, Center for Advocacy & Outreach, National Education Association***

Kim Anderson currently serves as Senior Director of the Center for Advocacy & Outreach at the National Education Association (NEA). In this role, Ms. Anderson oversees the organization's Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy Department, Government Relations Department, Human and Civil Rights Department, and Minority Community Organizing and Partnerships Department. The Center is responsible for advancing the NEA's mission, vision, and core values through federal and intergovernmental advocacy, collective bargaining and representational advocacy, social justice advocacy and leadership development, as well as outreach to and advocacy with external partners. During Ms. Anderson's tenure at the NEA, she previously directed the Government Relations department and was responsible for advancing policy on behalf of NEA's over 3 million members at the federal level and within intergovernmental organizations. Prior to that, as Manager for Issue Advocacy in the Campaigns and Elections Department, Ms. Anderson oversaw the execution of over \$23 million of NEA independent expenditure projects, issue advocacy work, ballot measure efforts and helped represent NEA in numerous national coalitions and partnerships, including serving as a Board member or holding leadership positions in many.

## **ROBERT BALFANZ**

***Director, Everyone Graduates Center, and Professor, Center for the Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University School of Education***

Robert Balfanz, PhD, is a research professor at the Center for the Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, where he is co-director of the Talent Development Secondary reform model and director of the Everyone Graduates Center. He is a leader and a co-founder of Diplomas Now, an evidence based school transformation model for high needs middle and high schools which combines whole school reform with enhance student supports guided by an early warning system and winner of a federal Investing in Innovation (I3) validation grant which is currently being implemented in forty schools across twelve school districts. He has published widely on secondary school reform, high school dropouts, early warning systems, chronic absenteeism, school climate, and instructional interventions in high-poverty schools. He focuses on translating research findings into effective school interventions. He is also a frequent speaker on dropout prevention and early warning indicators and has consulted with numerous state education associations through partnerships with the National Governors Association and Jobs for the Future. Dr. Balfanz is the first recipient of the Alliance For Excellent Education's *Everyone a Graduate Award* and the *National Forum's to Accelerate Middle Grade Reform Joan Lipsitz Lifetime Achievement award*. In 2013 he was named a Champion for Change for African American Education by the White House. He holds a B.A. in history from Johns Hopkins University and a PhD in education from the University of Chicago.

## **KISHA DAVIS-CALDWELL**

***Director, Outreach and Engagement, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards***

Kisha Davis-Caldwell is responsible for NBCT mobilization and engagement focusing on teacher leadership through collaboration with government agencies and education organizations. Most recently, Davis-Caldwell was an elementary mathematics coach for Howard County Public Schools in Maryland. Davis-Caldwell has taught at the elementary level for over 15 years. Her leadership involvement includes curriculum development, instructional mentoring, professional development facilitation and support for National Board candidates. Davis-Caldwell served as an Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow for the National Science Foundation working on The White House's Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. She gained a global perspective on the teaching profession as an observer in diverse school settings in Australia, Italy and New Zealand, as well as in Japan, where she taught for the public school system, and in China, where she was a Freeman Teacher Fellow. Davis-Caldwell serves on the Board of Directors for EdReports and is a member of NEA's Common Core Working Group. She is an adjunct professor for National University and holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree from the University of Pittsburgh.

## **LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND**

***Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, Stanford Graduate School of Education, and Faculty Director, Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education***

Linda Darling-Hammond is currently Charles E. Ducommun professor of education at Stanford University, where she founded the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, which conducts research and policy analysis on issues affecting educational equity and opportunity, including curriculum, assessment, and teaching policy and practices. She also founded the School Redesign Network and the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, and served as the faculty sponsor of the Stanford Teacher Education Program, which she helped to

redesign. Darling-Hammond has conducted research on a wide range of policy issues affecting teaching and schooling and has advised policymakers and practitioners at all levels of government. From 1994–2001, she was executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, whose 1996 report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future*, led to sweeping policy changes affecting teaching and schooling and was named one of the most influential reports affecting U.S. education. In 2006, Darling-Hammond was named one of the nation’s ten most influential people affecting educational policy over the past decade, and in 2008, she served as the leader of President Barack Obama’s education policy transition team. Darling-Hammond is past president of the American Educational Research Association, a two-term member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and a member of the American Association of Arts and Sciences, as well as the National Academy of Education.

### **MAVIS ELLIS**

#### ***Pupil Personnel Worker, Montgomery County, Maryland***

Mavis Ellis is a career educator with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, education evaluator, and providing support to students. Currently, Ms. Ellis is a pupil personnel worker with Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, where she has developed materials and implemented intervention strategies for truancy and dropout prevention. Ms. Ellis served as president of the International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention from 2013 to 2014. Ms. Ellis is actively involved as a member of the Board of Directors for NEA and MSEA, and as chair of the NEA Board Black Caucus. Ms. Ellis received an M.Ed in Administration & Supervision from Bowie State University, an MEQ in Educational Psychology from the University of Wisconsin, and a BA in Psychology from Fisk University. She was also a 1997 National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship recipient.

### **MELISSA J. ERICKSON**

#### ***Executive Director, Alliance for Public Schools***

Melissa began her teaching career as a Fellow for the National Science Foundation. In that role she conducted research on teaching and learning with a specific focus on programs designed to attract women and minority students to STEM classes. She has held numerous professional positions in teaching and other areas of education. She has worked with National PTA and the Council of State Governments educating parents, teachers and legislators about the Common Core State Standards Initiative and with the National Council on Disabilities on the impact implementation of the new standards will have on ESE students. Currently, Melissa is the Executive Director of the Alliance for Public Schools and organization she co-founded. The Alliance utilizes innovative strategies to engage parents, teachers, students and other community stakeholders in the education policy discussion. Most recently, the Alliance has been engaged in supporting student led work dedicated to closing the achievement gap and raising high school graduation rates in Hillsborough County, Florida. In March 2011 she was chosen by The White House as a “Champion of Change” working in the field of education and in September 2014 PBS selected Melissa as an American Graduate Champion for work that has contributed to raising local high school graduation rates. Melissa is a Navy Spouse, Married to Commander David Erickson and together they have a child Daniel who attends a public high school in Tampa.

## **NICK FABER**

### ***Vice President, Saint Paul Federation of Teachers***

Nick Faber is a National Board Certified elementary science specialist in Saint Paul where he has taught for the last 29 years. He is currently the vice-president and bargaining team member of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers, where he has served previously as secretary, executive board member, and building steward. Nick is the Board President of the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project and brought the project to Saint Paul where SPFT has become a regional training hub for the national organization.

## **RON FERGUSON**

### ***Adjunct Lecturer in Education and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Research Fellow, Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy Faculty Co-Chair and Director of the Achievement Gap Initiative, Harvard University***

Ronald F. Ferguson has taught at Harvard since 1983, focusing on education and economic development. His research and writing for the past decade have focused on racial achievement gaps, appearing in a variety of publications. His most recent book is *Toward Excellence with Equity: An emerging vision for closing the achievement gap*, published by Harvard Education Press. He is the creator of the Tripod Project for School Improvement and also the faculty co-chair and director of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University. After 31 years as full-time faculty, he has recently moved into an adjunct position and will focus the majority of his time on research and writing. Ferguson earned an undergraduate degree from Cornell University and PhD from MIT, both in economics. He is the father of two and very happily married to Helen Mont-Ferguson.

## **RICHARD GRAY**

### ***Director, Community Organizing and Engagement, Annenberg Institute for School Reform***

Richard Gray serves as director of AISR's Community Organizing and Engagement group. His work includes providing strategic support on community organizing and engagement to community and school reform organizations in cities across the country. He also directs AISR's Center for Education Organizing, which helps expand the power of education organizing through building strategic alliances among organizations and with strategic partners such as teachers unions, reform support organizations, civil rights organizations, and research/policy institutes. Previously, he was Director of National Technical Assistance with the Community Involvement Program at New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP), where he assisted community groups in New York City and across the country in developing strategies to improve local schools and shape more effective and equitable education policies. He was also the co-executive director of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS), a nationwide network of child advocacy organizations that work to improve the access of quality public education to student populations who have traditionally been underserved by public schools. Richard received a B.A. in History from Brown University and a J.D. from Boalt Hall School of Law at the University of California at Berkeley.

## **DONNA M. HARRIS-AIKENS**

### ***Director, Education Policy & Practice Department, National Education Association***

Donna Harris-Aikens is the Director of the Education Policy and Practice Department at the National Education Association. The Education Policy and Practice Department is NEA's primary policy center on elementary and

secondary education issues, as well as early education, higher education, and career technical education. EPP focuses on analysis and advocacy related to administrative grant programs, regulatory guidance, and federal legislation (such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Higher Education Act), as well as helping state affiliates, policymakers, and other organizations understand the requirements and implications of statutory and regulatory language. EPP also helps leaders and members understand the implications for educators' practice of a variety of educational initiatives and movements, including the implementation of the common core state standards, digital learning, and initiatives that support equity and excellence in public education. Donna works with a variety of partners to advance NEA's agenda, and is the Association's primary liaison to the U.S. Department of Education. In 2008 and again in 2012, she also helped NEA achieve its electoral goals by serving as the Association's policy liaison to the Democratic presidential campaigns. Donna also was selected to serve as a member of the Democratic Party's Platform Drafting Committee. Prior to joining NEA in 2006 as the ESEA Policy Advisor, she served as the Policy Manager for Service Employees International Union's Public Services Division. Before joining SEIU, she served as Director of Government Relations for the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium and as an Attorney in an education boutique law firm in Washington, DC. A Virginia native, Donna graduated from James Madison University cum laude with a bachelor of science in Public Administration, a minor in Economics, and a concentration in Statistics. In addition, she earned her law degree from Howard University School of Law, and is an active member of the District of Columbia Bar.

### **DAMON HEWITT**

#### ***Senior Advisor, U.S. Programs, Open Society Foundations***

Damon Hewitt is a senior advisor for U.S. Programs. He guides the Open Society Foundations efforts on school discipline policies and improving the life outcomes of boys and men of color. Hewitt is on leave from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), where he is director of the Education Practice Group and works on school integration, fiscal equity, affirmative action, and school discipline. Prior to LDF, Hewitt served as deputy assistant attorney general at the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. Over the years, Hewitt has taken on a variety of special assignments including, representing people displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and directing the *New York Police-on-Police Shootings Task Force*. Hewitt is co-author of *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Structuring Legal Reform* (NYU Press 2010). He received a BA in political science from Louisiana State University and a JD from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. The Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus has honored his work with the Avery C. Alexander Civil Rights Award.

### **ROCÍO INCLÁN**

#### ***Director, Human & Civil Rights Department, National Education Association***

Rocío grew up in Mexico—in San Luis Rio Colorado, in the state of Sonora, near the U.S.-Mexico border. Every school day she crossed that border to attend school in the United States. Her family was convinced that an American education was the key to a better life. She graduated from Gadsden Elementary School, in Gadsden, Arizona, and from Kofa High School in Yuma, Arizona. Rocío earned her bachelor's degree in Bilingual Education from Arizona State University. As a bilingual teacher, she taught for several years at Heard Elementary School in the Phoenix School District. Rocío earned a master's degree in Administration, Planning and Social Policy from Harvard University. She then went on to become an Assistant Principal and Title VII Director in the Isaac School

District. She worked for the National Association for Bilingual Educators. There she focused on assessments, curriculum and professional development for ELL educators—and she served as an advocate for ELL students and educators. Since joining the NEA staff, Rocío has taken on a number of different assignments. In her current role as Director of NEA Human and Civil Rights, Rocío has emphasized social justice activism. She has increased the focus on human and civil rights issues throughout the association. Rocío directs NEA’s work on immigration reform, LGBTQ rights, school to prison pipeline, social justice, cultural competence, diversity, English language learners, minorities, women, and social justice advocacy. She also launched NEA’s Bully Free: It Starts With Me campaign which has engaged thousands in bullying prevention. Rocío brings a deep and abiding passion for improving the education of poor children to her work at NEA. Growing up in Mexico and going to school in the U.S., she learned first-hand that education is indeed the key to a better life.

### **RON “DUFF” MARTIN**

#### ***Vice President, Wisconsin Education Association Council***

Mr. Martin is a middle school teacher at South Middle School of the Eau Claire Area School District in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. In addition to his teaching duties, he serves as head volleyball coach at Altoona High School and is the Middle School Student Council Advisor. Mr. Martin has a strong record of advocating for better accountability systems. He is a member of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Coordinating Council for Educator Effectiveness, where he collaborates with state officials, school district administrators and others to bring the teacher's voice to discussions of school improvement and educator evaluation. He is a member of the NEA Board of Directors and is the Chair of the NEA American Indian/Alaska Native Caucus. He was a leader in the Wisconsin Education Association Council student program, and later in the Eau Claire Association of Educators. He now serves as vice president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council.

### **WILLIAM MENDOZA**

#### ***Executive Director, White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education***

William (Bill) Mendoza was appointed as Executive Director of the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education in December 2011. Bill, Oglala-Sicangu Lakota, grew up on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Sioux reservations in South Dakota. Bill has experienced, firsthand, through his professional and life experiences, the multitude of challenges facing American Indian students, educators, and tribes. In addition to being a teacher and principal, Bill has worked at the school, professional and community level to help foster leadership development and civic engagement among American Indians. Integral to his professional and academic capacity has been his experiences as a tribal college student at Haskell Indian Nations University, Sinte Gleska University, and Oglala Lakota College. Bill previously served as the Deputy Director and Executive Director for the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges. Since his appointment in January 2011, he has provided leadership to key administration initiatives including: Executive Order 13592, Tribal Leaders Speak – The State of Indian Education 2010 Report; State-Tribal Education Partnership Pilot; and 2012 ED-DOI Memorandum of Understanding. Before coming to Washington, DC, Bill was working towards a Doctorate in Education Leadership at Montana State University (MSU). He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Humanities from Fort Lewis College in 2005 and a Master of Education from MSU in 2010.

## **JOAN MURRAY**

### ***Teacher, Reiche Elementary School, Portland, Maine***

Joan Murray has been a teacher for 30 years, 21 of those at Howard C. Reiche Community School in Portland, Maine. She obtained her Bachelor's degree at the University of Maine and her Master's in Special Education at University of Southern Maine. She has taught all grades from preschool to grade 5. During her free time she enjoys spending time with her husband and teenage son and reading.

## **MARIA PACHECO**

### ***Executive Director, The Education Alliance, Brown University***

Maria Pacheco is the executive director of The Education Alliance at Brown University, a support organization that provides services to states and schools nationwide. She is also the director of the New England Equity Assistance Center and adjunct assistant professor of ESL and Crosscultural Studies at Brown. She has worked extensively as a practitioner and researcher in the areas of school reform, civil rights, culturally responsive practices, and English language learner education. As a practitioner/scholar she has authored and co-authored multiple publications, proposals and reports on bilingualism, second language acquisition, culture and learning, and equitable instructional practices. Dr. Pacheco holds a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Massachusetts.

## **ANDREA PREJEAN**

### ***Director, Priority Schools Department, National Education Association***

Andrea Prejean is Director of the National Education Association's (NEA) Priority School's Campaign (PSC). The PSC supports struggling schools across the country. She received her Ed.D. from the University of Central Florida after a twelve-year career as a public school teacher. Currently she serves on the Parent Teacher Home Visit Program's Board and represents NEA on the Coalition for Community Schools Steering Committee.

## **DAVID SCIARRA**

### ***Executive Director, Education Law Center***

David Sciarra oversees and directs ELC programs and activities. A practicing civil rights lawyer since 1978, he has litigated a wide range of cases involving socioeconomic rights, including affordable housing, shelter for the homeless, and welfare rights. Since 1996, David has litigated to enforce access for low-income and minority children to an equal and adequate education under state and federal law and has served as counsel to the plaintiff students in New Jersey's landmark Abbott v. Burke case. He also conducts research, writes, and lectures on education law and policy in such areas as school finance, early education and school reform. He received his B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley, and graduated magna cum laude in 1978 from Temple University School of Law.

## **ROBERT T. TERANISHI**

***Professor of Education, Morgan and Helen Chu Endowed Chair in Asian American Studies, and Co-Director, Institute for Immigration, Globalization, and Education, UCLA***

Professor Teranishi is the inaugural Morgan and Helen Chu Chair in Asian American Studies at UCLA, where he also serves as co-director for the Institute for Immigration, Globalization, and Education. Previously a faculty member at New York University, Teranishi has received NYU's Martin Luther King, Jr. Faculty Award and the Daniel E. Griffiths Research Award. In 2011, he was appointed by Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan to the U.S. Department of Education's Equity and Excellence Commission. Professor Teranishi's research examines the causes and consequences of the stratification of college opportunities, with a particular interest on the impact of higher education practice and policy on the mobility of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities. He is author of numerous publications including the critically acclaimed, *Asian Americans in the Ivory Tower: Dilemmas of Racial Inequality in American Higher Education* (Teacher's College Press, 2010). Teranishi's research has influenced federal, state, and institution policy related to college access and completion. He has testified before Congress on the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, the College Cost Reduction and Affordability Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. His research has been referenced in U.S. Supreme Court cases on desegregation and affirmative action, and he recently provided strategic planning and restructuring consultation for the Ford Foundation. Professor Teranishi received his B.A. from UC Santa Cruz in Sociology and his M.A. and Ph.D. from UCLA in Higher Education and Organizational Change.

## **JOHN WRIGHT**

***Director of Strategy, National Education Association***

John Wright is the Director of Strategy for the National Education Association. In his role, he leads the Association's work to forecast and plan for the future and align its work with its mission, vision, and core values. Wright began a career as an elementary and middle school teacher in Fairfield Connecticut in 1985, but the majority of his teaching experience was in the Window Rock school district on the Navajo Nation in northeast Arizona. In Window Rock he served as local association president. Wright was elected treasurer of the Arizona Education Association in 1996 and went on to serve as an AEA officer for 14 years, including 6 years as the Arizona Education Association president. During his time as AEA president, Wright also served two terms as the president of the National Council of State Education Associations representing all 51 state-level NEA affiliates. He has been on NEA staff since early 2011.

## **KEN ZARIFIS**

***President, Education Austin***

Ken Zarifis is president of Education Austin, a merged local in Austin, Texas. He was an 8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts teacher for 12 years at a high needs campus before being elected to office in 2010. At his middle school, Ken witnessed the economic disparities that he believes are the primary drivers of the achievement gap. His work in the union has focused on social justice unionism that expands union power through community relationships and coalitions. It is his belief that the Community Schools model is one of our best options to meet the needs of our struggling communities and close the achievement gap.