

Policy Forum Proceedings

5th ANNUAL ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY FORUM



October 27-29, 2016
Coronado, California



Cover Photo, Left to Right: *Chris Hodge , Learn4Life, At Promise Awards Co-Sponsor; Dawn McKeel, Renaissance Learning, At Promise Awards Co-Sponsor; Linda Dawson, SIATech Superintendent/CEO, RAPSA Board President; Mark Kiker, SIATech, media technician; and California State Assembly Member, Eduardo Garcia, 2016 RAPSA Vision Award Winner.*

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PACE

RAPSA also thanks the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), an independent, non-partisan research center which shares our interest in defining and sustaining a long-term strategy for comprehensive policy reform and continuous improvement in performance at all levels of California's education system. We greatly appreciate the participation of PACE researchers Daisy Gonzales and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco who attended and documented the 2016 AAPF in this summary.

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Foreword

I am honored to have provided the Keynote address to the 2016 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum and so pleased to be able to present this Summary of Proceedings from committed, passionate advocates for at-promise students.

This report summarizes presentations at the fifth annual Alternative Accountability Policy Forum (AAPF) which was held on October 27-29, 2016 in San Diego, California. The AAPF is produced each year by the Reaching At-Promise Students Association which brings together education and community leaders to share best practices and policy needs of those who serve dropouts, opportunity youth and other critically at risk students; those RAPSAs calls “at-promise” students. Students re-engaged in programs that fit their actual needs are no longer at risk of eminent failure, but at-promise of success.

I’ve been to each of these annual conferences and find energizing that so many of the 225 attendees and presenters are here year after year. The presenters and attendees at the Alternative Accountability Policy Forum are the everyday heroes of public education. These education and community leaders unleash the promise of students that others have given up on. The 2016 Policy Forum celebrated some of our successes by joining together to recognize the heart, vision and courage of all of the attendees as we honored three people who exemplify the best in what we do.

The strength of this conference is that we have education leaders from across the country. In fact, the award winners themselves represent the geographic range of reaching at promise students. This year’s heart award went to Freddie Fuentes, an educator from Massachusetts, the courage award went to Isabel Chavez, a student from Wisconsin and the Vision award went to Assembly Member Eduardo Garcia, a legislator from California. What we do at the Policy Forum is collaborate, identify best practices and expand our impact by sharing advocacy strategies and policy successes. This report is the result of important work by the models of vision, heart and courage for the young people served. I value all of the work that these leaders do.

Alternative accountability policy is the measurement of success for reengaged dropouts; for students who enter our schools far below grade level; for students who are over-age and under-credit; and for students who need more time or more focus than a traditional high school provides. The Alternative Accountability Policy Forum is the platform for sharing practices and expanding networks. The leaders who gathered at the AAPF understand that without reaching at promise students we cannot grow the economy or establish justice in communities across the country. Without reaching at promise students we will not transform the lives, families and neighborhoods that are most in need of justice and growth.

By preparing this Summary of Proceedings, Dr. Daisy Gonzales and her colleagues at Stanford’s Policy Analysis for California Education are making sure that the success and wisdom of the presenters at the Forum are shared broadly. I want to encourage those serving at-promise students to invite your legislators out to see what you do. Sit down with an editorial board and explain why the traditional measures don’t work for untraditional students. Bring a news crew to your school to interview a student about where they’ve been and where they’re now going. Share this Summary with other educators and policy makers.

I’ve been doing this work for almost 30 years now, and each time I attend the Policy Forum I come away with an increased commitment that the attendees are making a difference in the lives of the youth that they serve, the communities where they live and to the nation as a whole.

Delaine Eastin

California Superintendent of Public Instruction (1995-2003)

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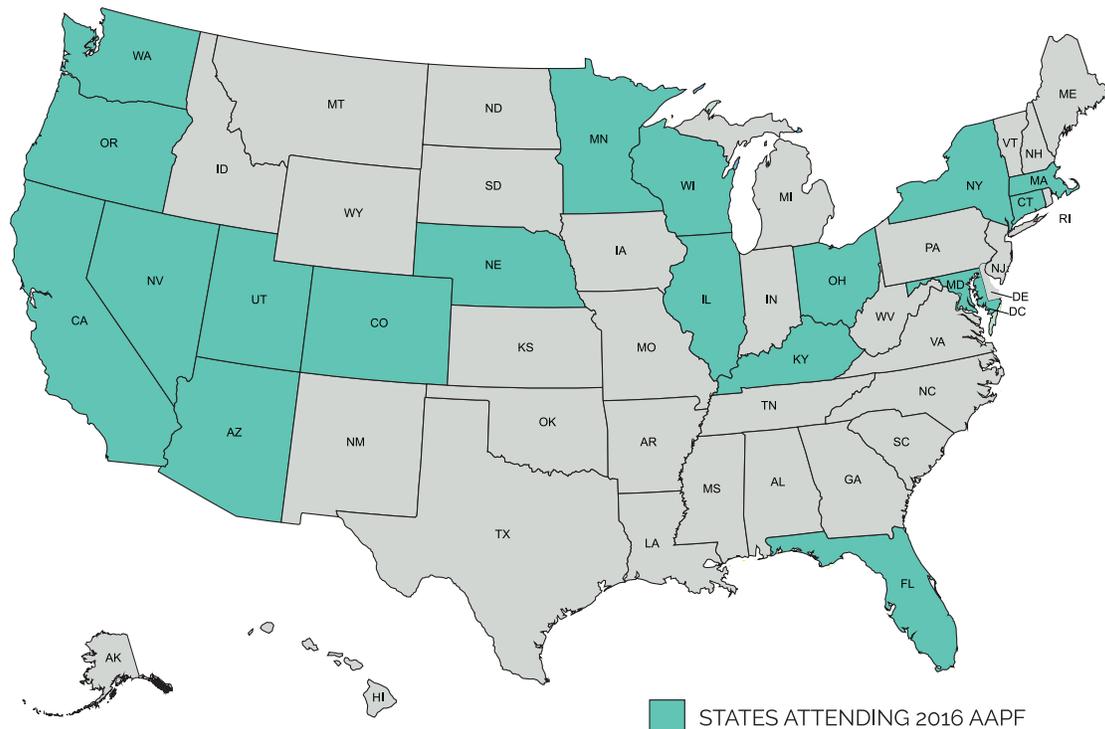
INTRODUCTION

The 5th annual Alternative Accountability Policy Forum (AAPF) convened over 225 educators, education advocates and policymakers that work with at-risk students (also referred to as at-promise students). Forum leaders, presenters and attendees from 18 states emphasized that despite obstacles, all students can succeed.

At-risk students, also known as at-promised youth, are students who are overage and under-credited for their grade; have dropped out or returned to school for another chance to earn a diploma; and/or face homelessness, family abuse, incarceration, gang involvement, or other personal circumstances that make regular attendance and academic learning extremely difficult. This year's AAPF was timely due to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and pending state direction to ensure equal opportunity for students in alternative school settings.

While there is growing research and practical knowledge about serving at-promise students and building alternative accountability approaches, the challenges in implementing these policies and practices are considerable. How to improve and strengthen accountability for schools serving at-promise students was central to every session. Participants selected from 26 sessions that addressed one of five session strands: Teaching and Learning Strategies for At-Promise Students; Implementing Effective Alternative Accountability Policies and Data; Workforce, Community and Post-Secondary Partnerships to Support Reengagement; Serving the Whole Student; and Conversation Sessions.

AAPF participants were resolute that now, more than ever, the education of at-promise students' needs to be the focus of attention at the national, state, and local levels. As a group, they called for a rethinking of policies, practices, and partnerships for building instructional and alternative accountability approaches that support excellence and equity in schooling as well as account for the difficult circumstances of many alternative students. What follows is a summary of the key points as presented in each session, along with policy and practice recommendations from the 2016 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum.





ON THE GROUND LESSONS AND PROMISING PRACTICE: KEY PRACTICES FROM 26 SESSIONS

A Comparison of Promising State Trends in Implementing ESSA

Jennifer Brown Lerner, American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF)

This session outlined the opportunities under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to support the development and growth of high quality alternative options to meet the needs of all students in a variety of school settings. In addition, it provided an overview of early trends from an ongoing effort to understand and catalogue how states are implementing accountability for alternative educational settings

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places a heightened importance on the use of research evidence as a critical tool for planning, collaborating, decision making, and continuous improvement. ESSA also includes both mandates and suggestions for states to incorporate research evidence into their interventions, programs, and funding patterns to ensure better outcomes for schools and students. As state education agencies (SEAs) begin to think about the implications of this new law, it is imperative that all parties fully

understand the requirements and opportunities under ESSA, as well as the barriers and challenges that may be encountered in carrying out these new requirements.

Before ESSA, states accounted for alternative schools through a range of approaches. Some states included alternative schools in their statewide system. While others created an entirely separate system or had no accountability for alternative schools.

AAPF participants support new ESSA regulations that mandate that all students receive an education that prepares students for college and or career readiness. ESSA regulations require states to use the same academic standards for all students, even alternative schools. ESSA academic measures for elementary and middle school education include academic achievement, academic progress, progress in English language proficiency and school quality/climate. Additionally, at least every three years, states must identify the lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools and high school with 4-yr graduation rates at or below 67% for comprehensive intervention. The regulations exempt schools under 100 students from interventions.

While ESSA regulations are still making their way to states, several questions remain. Do states have the flexibility to develop a separate system aligned with the requirements of ESSA? Can states adopt measures that focus on non-academic and school quality measures that are more appropriate to alternative school curriculum?

Accountability for California's Alternative Schools

Paul Warren, Public Policy Institute of California
Russ Rumberger, California Dropout Research Project

In this session, Public Policy Institute of California Researcher Paul Warren presented findings from his 2016 study, "Accountability for California's Alternative Schools." About 12 percent of all California high school seniors attend an alternative school, but far fewer than half graduate. To improve outcomes and promote the success of at-risk students, the state needs a new approach to measuring alternative school performance. This PPIC report compares California's efforts with those of Colorado, Florida and Texas to provide useful directions for the next phase of alternative school accountability. One of the key findings sure to resonate with alternative accountability advocates is that the "four-year graduation rate ... does not work as intended in the alternative school context."

Under ESSA § 200.14(c), "a State would be required to ensure that each measure it selects to include within an indicator: Is valid, reliable, and comparable across all LEAs in the State; Is calculated the same for all schools across the State, except that the measure or measures selected within the indicator of Academic Progress or any indicator of School Quality or Student Success may vary by grade span; Can be disaggregated for each subgroup of students; and Includes a different measure than the State uses for any other indicator." This mandate is particularly complicated for California.

California has seven different types of alternative schools with targeted populations in over 1,000 different schools. Student data has been difficult to collect because the majority of students in alternative schools attend only for short-term enrollment. Eliminated due to budget constraints in 2009-2010, the California Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (ASAM) still collects data from alternative schools. However, this voluntary system only collects data for students that stay for more than 90 days. Further complicating things for California is the fact that the average stay of a student is four months—short-term enrollment makes annual data problematic for an accountability system.

A key part of the discussion in California is an accountability system that is not only compliant with federal regulations, but coherent with California's new school funding system—the local control funding formula (LCFF). A key challenge to this approach is that LCFF measures emphasize college and career readiness and the majority of California's alternative schools are not designed or intended to provide this type of programming.

To move forward, presenters suggest that California: (1) Adopt a definition of what alternative schools is. For example, Texas designates alternative schools as those with 75% at-risk students, while Colorado uses 90%. (2) Hold sending schools accountable by returning accountability data to the student's home school. This approach would create shared accountability, reduces incentives for pushing out students, and ensure that alternative schools don't dominate the bottom 5% of schools. (3) Collect a data collection system and measures that fit the student population. California should consider graduation rates based on enrollment, return rates or progress based on behavior and attendance while enrolled. Warren concludes, "to improve outcomes and promote the success of at-risk students, the state needs a new approach to measuring alternative school performance."

Alternative Accountability Measures for Transfer Schools in New York City

Lisa DiGaudio, New Dawn Charter High School

New Dawn is a charter school with alternative cohorts and reengagement strategies in the NYSED and the NYCDOE School Quality Snapshot. In this session, participants considered the consequences of working with alternative accountability measures that do not meet federal standards for graduation. New Dawn's approach to open enrollment and to delivering dynamic instruction and individualized support has led them to explore alternative accountability measures that measure how transfer schools give students better outcomes.

In this new accountability era, alternative schools like New Dawn Charter High School face many challenges. The challenge for New Dawn is that the average ninth grader is 18 years of age. Lisa DiGaudio shared how New Dawn Charter High School provides over-aged and under-credited students 15-21 years of age, including those who are English Language Learners and those with special needs, the opportunity to return to school and obtain a high school diploma through a rigorous NYSED standards-based education program. While New Dawn students have college and career goals, traditional accountability measures are problematic. New Dawn students have high persistence rates. According to the NYC DOE School Quality Snapshot for 2014-2015, 81% of our students persist in coming to our school, as compared to 59% of transfer students throughout New York City.

New Dawn has been thinking about accountability as it relates to its student population and curriculum. Unique to the New York Schools Education Department (NYSED) is their work to create an accountability system that is rooted in data shared with like schools. NYSED Schools are hoping that they will be able to develop an individual approach to their "off time" student

body. For New Dawn key measures and accountability priorities include:

- Year round enrollment;
Dynamic instructional practices rooted in relationship building;
- Mentorship;
- Advisory;
- Academic and Social-Emotional Supports; and
- Building wide adoption of The Three R's: Respect, Resilience and Responsibility

Alternative Accountability Toolkit

Christopher Mazzeo, Education Northwest

Mathew Eide, Education Northwest

Jacob Williams, Education Northwest

In this session attendees received access to an alternative accountability toolkit based on the research and work of Education Northwest with school districts and states in the Northwest. The toolkit includes templates and guidelines for developing and implementing accountability systems that reflect the complexity of alternative programs. The session also addressed considerations for measures under the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Session attendees provided feedback on the toolkit that will be used to inform and improve the next iteration.

Attendees also considered how to determine what quality looks like in an alternative program? Developing quantitative and qualitative accountability metrics for alternative schools requires that we define what an alternative school is and what success looks like in these educational settings. As states endeavor to implement accountability for alternative school, a suggested exercise for all districts or LEA's to discuss is the following quadrants that emphasize stakeholder engagements, quantitative and qualitative guidance and implementation.

<p>Engagement & Implementation Draft an engagement strategy for a hypothetical district or SEA, or...</p>	<p>Quantitative Metrics Create a qualitative framework for a hypothetical LEA or SEA, or...</p>
<p>Qualitative Guidance Identify qualitative data categories or data collection tools, or...</p>	<p>Or... Identify additional guidance or tools that potential users of the toolkit would need</p>

An Evidence Base for Expanding Services to Disconnected Youth

Jonathan Zaff, Executive Director, Center for Promise

As of 2010, more than one million 16-to-19 year-olds (6%) in the United States were classified as disconnected youth. Being disconnected places a burden on individual youth and on the broader society. The combined lifetime social and fiscal cost has been estimated to be equal to \$1 trillion for a single cohort of disconnected youth. The disconnection rate has declined from a high of 14% 40 years ago, with possible reasons for improvement including efforts to improve high school graduation rates and increases in funding and programming focused on disconnected youth, through programs like the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, Job Corps, and Youth Build.

America’s Promise Alliance researcher Jonathan Zaff provided a research-based alternative perspective for why the disconnected youth rate has improved: people. His research shows that the adult capacity in the community and the supports that these adults provide can put more young people on a positive pathway to adult success. Jonathan’s research is particularly relevant to advocates for the expansion and strengthening of youth-focused neighborhood assets – like dropout recovery

schools, job training – and increasing the overall community’s capacity to support its young people.

Focused solely on metropolitan areas throughout the United States, researchers examined the ratio of adults (age 25+) to school-aged youth (age 6 to 17) to understand whether the number of adults affects the number of young people who leave school before graduating.

Dr. Zaff summarized his research simply, disconnected youth need both an anchor and a web of support. “Young people need an array of social supports to get on and stay on a positive educational course. Without a sufficient number of adults in a community, young people might not have access to these supports.” The more adults in a community, the more young people stay on a path toward academic success, regardless of other factors that influence a young person’s educational trajectory. That web of support can consist of mentors, teachers, coaches, faith leaders, other school and nonprofit staff.

Zaff’s research looked at the variation of students leaving school in light of the ratio of adult support in Boston and other cities. He discussed research showing community capacity associated with positive youth development outcomes. Youth-focused neighborhood assets are substantive predictors of youth’s educational success. These assets are predicated on the adults within them.

He found that adult capacity in a community decreases the rate of youth leaving school. A 1 percent increase in the adult-to-youth ratio results in a 1 percent decrease in the rate of young people leaving school. In real-world terms, this result means that for every seven more adults in the neighborhood, one fewer young person leaves school.

The positive impact is amplified in predominantly African-American communities. The effect of the adult-to-youth ratio in neighborhoods that are comprised mostly of black residents, is increased by 10 percent. Since the average black resident lives in a neighborhood that is approximately two-thirds black in 11 of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in

the country, the potential benefits of this amplified effect cannot be underestimated.

Importantly, higher educational attainment among adults did not have a significant effect. Therefore, all adults, regardless of their educational attainment, can play a role in keeping young people on a path to graduation.

Collective Impact and Unique Partnerships to Address Opportunity Youth Re-Engagement

Linda Dawson, Superintendent /CEO SIATech, Inc.
Laurie Pianka, Executive Director of Program Development and Community Partnerships, SIATech, Inc.

Joe Herrity, Opportunity Youth Partnership, Santa Clara County

Nicky Ramos-Beban, Assistant Director of Alternative Education and Principal of Opportunity Youth Academy, SCCOE

This session featured a panel presentation describing a unique partnership between the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) and SIATech Charter High Schools to create a new charter to serve disengaged youth in Silicon Valley, CA. In 2013, leaders of local community-based organizations and public systems in Santa Clara County came together to form the Opportunity Youth Partnership, a Collective Impact initiative aimed at improving education and employment outcomes for disconnected young people between the ages of 16-24 who are out of school, out of work, not enrolled in college and in need of a high school credential (Santa Clara County uses the term: Opportunity Youth). Driven by the youth unemployment crisis that peaked in the wake of the great recession and the “siloiing” of systems, programs, and services that characterized the local social sector, these early discussions coalesced around the need for well-constructed pathways back to education and onward to career.

This community-driven process pointed squarely to an immediate need for robust secondary education options for Opportunity Youth as a critical first area for development. At the same moment the Santa Clara County Office of Education was exploring new options for dropout recovery education. Members of the OYP and the Santa Clara County Office of Education responded to the community mandate, accepting the responsibility for implementing a hybrid, blended learning option for Opportunity Youth in Santa Clara County. Opportunity Youth Academy opened in August of 2016.

The management and oversight of the charter, staff, teachers, facilities, food service, transportation, capital equipment, etc. are provided by the County Office of Education. SIATech Charter Schools, through a memorandum of understanding, provides the unique curriculum, instructional model, learning management system, enhanced professional development and technical assistance to the County Office of Education.

Community organizations such as Work 2 Future, Foster Youth, Santa Clara Opportunity Youth Partnership, Silicon Valley Children’s fund, Planned Parenthood, Santa Clara County Probation Department, Social Services Agency of Santa Clara County, Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, among others continue to support OYA through regular Opportunity Youth Advisory Committee meetings.

Conversation Sessions

AAPF conversation sessions provide an opportunity for attendees to engage with presenters and attendees from more than 18 states. This year’s AAPF featured the following timely conversations:

[An Interactive Dialogue About Meaningful Metrics for Schools Serving At-Promise Youth](#)

Leonard Paul, Pacific USA, AdvancED

Leonard Paul, of AdvancED, an international school improvement and accreditation organization, led an

interactive session on the needs of schools serving critically at risk students and how such organizations can support schools serving at promise students. AdvancED provides a range of services and programs for school improvement leading toward increased student engagement. Participants share their perspectives on how service providers can support schools and teachers who work directly with programs for critically at risk students.

[Orchestrating a Continuum of Partnership Voices so ALL Students Succeed](#)

Amy Schlessman, Arizona Alternative Education Consortium

Kathleen Chronister

Engagement to re-engagement is a continuum from dropout prevention to dropout recovery. From sound bites to sticky stories, presenters encouraged advocacy by sharing student successes and accountability data that leads to effective policy and equitable funding. Attendees received the National Alternative Education Association's (NAEA) and RAPSA's letters to US DoE about the proposed ESSA regulations. "Translations" of research data from previous AAPFs and national legal policy conferences illustrated how to communicate effectively our message to state boards of education, legislators, and other policy makers. Attendees brought their own effective advocacy pieces to share during this interactive session.

[Reengagement Citywide Strategies Spreading](#)

Andrew Moore, National League of Cities Director of Youth and Young Adult Connections

Andrew Moore, has captured many of the issues and challenges facing cities and their partners that strive to provide a portal to re-engage out of school youth. His session will focused on the dozens of coordinated citywide efforts to re-engage out-of-school youth on positive educational pathways. The session provided an understanding of results to date, as well as a sense of the variety and continuous improvement and innovation underway.

Andy covered the impressive early accomplishments of re-engagement efforts in several cities, provided practical advice for those seeking to launch or formalize local re-engagement programs, and described how re-engagement at scale could help solve the crisis of unfulfilled potential represented in America's millions of young people without high school diplomas.

[Training for Trauma Informed Care](#)

Amy Lansing, University of California, San Diego

Dr. Lansing expanded her Training For Trauma Informed Systems session by sharing how to provide sufficient support and professional development for all staff to address trauma among at promise youth. The conversation focused on how Trauma Informed Systems training can address professional attrition and support resources available to education systems.

[Deeper Learning](#)

Tony Simmons, High School for Recording Arts (HSRA)

Are drop-out recovery and deeper learning mutually exclusive? In this session attendees learned strategies to help students master core academic content, think critically and problem solve, collaborate, communicate effectively, self-direct learning and adopt an "academic mindset." These skills can re-engage, retain and prepare opportunity youth for college and careers. Presenters examined the High School for Recording Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota which was founded to re-engage students who dropped out with a deeper learning focus. HSRA became a mentor school of the Coalition of Essential Schools and works with the Hewlett Foundation to increase awareness and implementation of deeper learning for at-promise youth.

A key question asked during the session was, "How do you prepare learners for jobs that do not exist?" Across the U.S. manufacturing and unskilled labor

positions are declining while the need for employment with 21st century skills is increasing; skills such as creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration. At the High School for Recording Arts in St. Paul, MN students are learning deeper learning competencies that will prepare them to be competitive in the 21st century job market.

This session proposed that teaching deeper learning must engage students in creativity. Tony Simmons recommends assigning students to use creativity to spread a message, for example a 26 Seconds campaign on an issue. At the High School for Recording Arts, deeper learning Competencies include:

1. Master core academic content
2. Thinking critically and solving complex problems
3. Working collaboratively
4. Communicating effectively
5. Learning how to learn
6. Developing academic mindsets

“Our goal is to get students mad enough to want more and smart enough to get it in a whole different way,” Tony Simmons. As we begin to think about deeper learning for all students, Simmons reminds us of the benefits of deeper learning. Deeper learning has the potential to result in student re-engagement and increased student enrollment/retention.

Creating a Family Culture in an Alternative School Setting

Tessa Nicholas, Natasha Vinakor, Tramischa Cole,
Civicorps

This session emphasized the importance of wrap-around services, competency-based academic programs and an open entry/open exit enrollment or flexible school days, as the key to student academic success at Civicorps. Civicorps was established in 1983 and operates a charter school

within Oakland Unified School District since 1995. The program serves out-of-school youth between the ages of 18-26. Students receive cohort based job training, wrap around support services and alumni support. Wrap-around services include, counselors, transportation, food, legal, childcare and housing.

A current Walter S. Johnson funded 3-year study of their work with Foster Youth, has allowed further development of program components with a lens on supporting those impacted by involvement in the foster care system and other reengaged young adults. Alumni of the program discussed how the academic services and alternative model was effective for their learning. Civicorps utilizes portfolio based, year round, small class sizes and extracurricular activities to help youth excel.

Student alumni praised the programs model to help student get access to resources to learn driver’s education and how to apply for college scholarships. This wrap-around model of education fostered a family culture for students. At the staff and teacher level, session presenters stressed trauma-informed care professional development for staff, administrators and teachers at alternative schools upon on-boarding. Reaching out-of-school students requires additional investments in developing relationships with students and learning about needs and barriers for educational completion. This process means that staff and teachers learn that ‘they can’t do it alone, finding the appropriate and responsive partners is necessary.’

Early Warning Systems and Alternative Accountability

Carla Gay, Early Warning Systems for the PPS District

Korinna Wolfe, Multiple Pathways to Graduation at Portland Public Schools

“Dropping out is a process, not an event.”

This session addressed the intersection of an Early Warning System and dropout prevention/recovery accountability metrics. Participants left with a systemic understanding of how dropout prevention and recovery efforts should be a part of an overall Early Warning System rather than an isolated set of strategies removed from the traditional school system.

An Early Warning System in a school district provides opportunities to look at key indicators or 'signals' to identify students who are at risk of dropping out. Once students are identified, the EWS uses multi-tiered student supports and interventions to interrupt the progression of dropping out. In an ideal system only 5% of students require a different setting or an individualized approach as a part of the intervention options to drop-out prevention. That 5% (and in some cases 55%) of students need their own set of multi-tiered supports and accompanying accountability metrics to ensure they are on a path to a successful future.

Early Warning Systems uses data for accountability and student success. Data is used:

- To promote the systemic use of data: attendance, behavior and course performance indicators in school teams to identify students at risk of dropping out
- To use data to guide decisions on the most appropriate interventions for identified students, to monitor those interventions and to adjust them as necessary
- To intervene early in order to increase student academic success and keep students engaged, on track to graduation and prepared for college and career

Presented affirmed that the implications for policy and practice are significant. As it currently stands many states are grappling with how to fold in appropriate metrics for students in Tier 2 and 3 of a Multi-tiered System of Support. The practice implications center on the need for stronger and more appropriate intervention, services, and alignment of school based teams. State and local

policies could center on the differentiated metrics based on the level of intervention in each district. If districts and states can figure out systemic ways to recognize the differentiated need of students in these tiered levels, they are more likely to be accountable for serving their unique needs.

For those students who persistently remain above Tier 1 prevention efforts, schools should consider what type of existing accountability metrics are and where there is room for innovative metrics that better reflect the student population in each tier. As a part of the session Portland, Oregon's EWS Model was highlighted. Portland academic progress measured by skill growth and credit attainment; successful completion measured by one-year graduation rate, college ready GED attainment rate and post-secondary readiness test scores; and school connection measured by daily attendance, annual retention rate and school climate. These measures alignment with the designated student populations attendance, behavior and course completion goals.

Independent Study Can be a Successful Option for Alternative Students

Machele Kilgore, Pacific Coast High School, Orange County, CA

In this session participants heard about the different Independent Study models and how Independent Study programs and schools can be successful options for K-12 students who are at-risk. Machele Kilgore has been an administrator and involved in a variety of programs for at-risk students for the last 25 years.

In independent study, a student is guided by a teacher but usually does not take classes with other students every day. In California, "Independent Study shall not be provided as an alternative curriculum" EC Section 51745(a)(3). What this means is that school districts cannot force students into independent study programs; students and

parents choose this type of study on their own. Independent study has several benefits, flexible schedule, one on one instructor, curriculum focus on gaps or accelerate, minimum time on campus (with less stress, employed, attend to other issues), focused interaction on campus and attendance based on work accomplished, not seat time.

Independent study models in Orange County offer options for at-risk, probation, mental health, teen parents, credit recovery, support services and out-of-school age students. The district operates a home-school model Tk-8th grade with a parent-teacher partnership and curriculum. At the High School level, Pacific Coast High School, which serves students who are actors/athletes/musicians/medically fragile/social-emotional issues/need a change or unvaccinated, operates like a community college where students earn A-G requirements and get direct instruction. The session also featured hybrids where schools develop partnerships with community colleges and UC to align coursework. The presenters conclude that the opportunities for independent study require creativity, partnerships and adherence with state law.

Personalizing Instruction for At-Promise Students

Jan Bryan, Renaissance Learning

SIATech continues to lead the way in changing the conversation about schooling from assessment for the purposes of sorting students to assessment for purposes of personalizing instruction; and from assessments that lead students to proficiency toward standardized benchmarks to skillfully using assessment data to guide students to drive their learning. In this session, Jan Bryan presented a new way to explore student data—finding the jagged edges of talent within each learner’s data.

Certainly distinctions among differentiation, individualization and personalization remain nuanced; however, some points of clarity are

finding their way through the ongoing discussions. Bryan affirmed that personalization is neither a new concept, nor is it one that is described in terms of multiple assignments, unique furniture arrangements, or cutting edge software.

Personalization is a uniquely human enterprise. Each learner receives instruction through the filters of his/her experiential lens. Thus, educators must access and respond to those experiential filters as they design instruction.

“Personalization is not the end; it is a means to the end—for the end is each student a competent, confident learner with the skills require to succeed beyond schooling,” Jan Bryan.

We have moved from a time where assessment data were used to make predictions about how students might do in school, to a time when assessment data are used to make a difference in their lives via improved instruction that enhances their competency and leads them to positive outcomes. In doing so, data now fuels, rather than drives, instruction.

One of the measurements of data is the Student Growth Percentile (SGP), a relative metric that describes each students’ growth over time, as compared to the growth of students with similar achievement histories. As described by Policy and Practice recommendations from the 2014 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum, growth measures are a better gauge of the progress of alternative students. Accordingly, the growth metric describes the promise of the at-risk student, and not only what this student has learned, but the progress on how to learn.

Proposed Practices for Long-Term Engagement of At-Promise School Alumni

Matthew LaPlante, Department of Journalism and Communication at Utah State University

One of the biggest challenges to understanding longitudinal outcomes of alternative educational pathways is long-term engagement. But the same life challenges that push students away from mainstream schools can make it hard to maintain stable contact after they leave a program — even if their lives are much better off as a result of their participation. There has been little research dedicated specifically to the question of how to best facilitate long-term engagement of former participants of schools and programs for at-risk students. There is a tremendous wealth of knowledge, practice and research, however, that can be gleaned from other programs aimed at providing a social benefit to individuals and maintaining longitudinal contact. The lessons that have been learned and practices that have been implemented by these organizations and researchers can be instructive. Matthew LaPlante, an assistant professor in the Department of Journalism and Communication at Utah State University and a Reaching At-Promise Student Association board member, presented seven strategies for the long-term engagement of students.

In this session, LaPlante used qualitative interviews with individuals serving at-risk and interviews with at-risk students to outline seven strategies for improving long-term engagement of these students.

Long-term engagement of at-risk and at-risk youth is challenging due to multiple barriers that face the student and their family all at once. Financial stability, mobility, addiction, illness, traumatic stress and time to name a few. To serve this population of students the presenter made several recommendations for programs and charters to use for long-term engagement if at-risk school students and alumni.

1. Framing is everything—your mission must reflect a long-term commitment to your students.
Ex: ‘Here for our students-today and every day to come.’

2. Build your contact files. Explain to your new student why you are collecting information. Show them you won’t give up.
3. Build a Culture of Reciprocity
4. Conduct an exit interview. Your data is a living document that will help you.
5. Make alumni relations a priority. Stay connected with your graduates.
6. Embrace smart social media to celebrate your students and reach former students.
7. When you can’t reach a student, use multiple tools (i.e. different search engines, white pages, etc.)

Results from the Colorado Alternative Education Campus Accountability Working Group, Recent Policy Changes and Next Steps Under ESSA

Jessica Knevals, Colorado Department of Education

Colorado is ground zero for alternative accountability. The Colorado Department has learned to develop new policies for Alternative Education Campuses (AECs) in Colorado and recently concluded an Alternative Education Campus Accountability Working Group. Not all workgroup recommendations were adopted in the 2015-16 legislative session, but Colorado’s AEC policy will be modified going forward based on the recommendations and on the implications of new ESSA regulations.

Colorado is at forefront of accountability for alternative schools. Unlike other states, Colorado has had an established definition for alternative education campuses (AEC) since 2002 and in 2009 determined that alternative education campuses could no longer be exempt from accountability. And in 2015, Colorado created an AEC accountability workgroup to refine and update the current AEC accountability system. One of the recommendations from the workgroup (adopted in 2016) modified the minimum percentage of high-risk students from

95% to 90% high-risk students to make more schools eligible for AEC status.

Colorado is also a state that runs a separate system of accountability for alternative schools. Traditional schools in Colorado measure Growth Gaps, Achievement and Growth at the Elementary and Middle School Level. At the high school level they add postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR) as an indicator. Alternative Education Campuses receive a School Performance Framework annually, similar to traditional schools. The main exception is that AEC's are measured on Student Engagement measure, rather than Growth Gaps. All schools receive a rating on each performance indicator (4 points for exceeds, 3 points for meets, 2 for approaching, 1 point for does not meet). The rating is then rolled up to an overall evaluation of the school.

As of 2014, Colorado had 84 AECs which serve just over 16,000 students. AECs in Colorado are measured similarly to traditional schools, but the weightings are lowered to take into account the high-risk population served. Without allowing additional measures and revised cut-points in the AEC SPF, 86% of AECs would be on priority improvement or turnaround plans, whereas, now only 24% were. AECs in Colorado are gradually improving over time. In 2011, 39% of AECs were on priority improvement or turnaround plans, and in 2014, only 24% were.

Under proposed ESSA regulations Colorado policymakers are concerned that their accountability system is not acceptable.

"§200.14(c): state must ensure each measure "(2) is calculated in the same way for all schools across the State." Colorado will keep a close eye on proposed regulations and they encourage other states to do the same.

Literacy for Access to College and Texts: Utah Alternative High Schools College Readiness Partnership

Dr. Nicole Pyle, Utah State University
Sally Brown, Teacher Education & Leadership

Participants heard about a state-funded project to support alternative high school students to become college ready. The Utah Alternative High Schools (AHSs) College Readiness Partnership is a collaboration between Utah State University and three AHSs in Utah to increase the number of underrepresented juniors and seniors who achieve ACT college-readiness benchmarks, read more proficiently, apply for college, and complete FAFSA by participation in ACT online tutorials, reading/content intervention sessions, college application and FAFSA events, and a college tour. The creation of an AHS State Leadership Team aims to improve AHS students' college readiness by recommending effective strategies to prepare for and enroll in college, and developing an effective model for AHSs to implement for program sustainability. In Spring 2016, we implemented this project at one pilot AHS. In the Fall, the project will be implemented at three AHSs.

The presenter asserted that for the U.S. to have the highest proportion of college graduates with an associate's degree or higher by 2020 we must focus on access, quality, and completion. The Utah AHS College Readiness Partnership focuses on the K-12 to postsecondary education pipeline to ensure access by prioritizing college preparation and college readiness. This focus comes from a shortage of alternative high schools in Utah that offer the same college readiness activities as comprehensive high schools.

The Utah AHS College Readiness Partnership is a collaboration between Utah State University and three AHSs in northern Utah. The program targets 10th graders and provides students support by

offering 6 ACT online tutorials, 6 reading intervention sessions, 2 college application, FAFSA events and 1 college tour. A key part of the success of the program is their partnership with local districts, teachers and psychology students from Utah State University and the Alternative High School Administration. Preliminary findings from the 3 pilots show increased graduation rates, increased grade level reading as measured by the TABE and increased numbers of students applying to postsecondary education.

SDUSD Reconnections: Helping Students Stay Connected

Mia Funk, Gretchen Rhoads

Andy Trakas, Jennifer Coronel, San Diego Unified School District

San Diego Unified School District's newest department, the Department of Reconnection, is comprised of Dropout Prevention, Children, and Youth in Transition, SANDAP, Adult Education, and ALBA Community Day School. This innovative new team has been charged with creating and supporting all students find their most successful learning environment. By partnering with community agencies and providing specialized learning environments which focus on building strong relationships and meeting a young person at their "point of need," we are able to ensure stronger connections to school. It is that strong connection to school and to caring adults which allows students to thrive.

San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) identified over 7,500 homeless students, 750 foster youth, 8,000 military dependents and 700 refugee students in the 2015-2016 school year. These students have higher rates of suspension, higher rates of grade retention, higher dropout rates and increased school changes due to housing placements and active duty deployment. As a result, these students were identified as "in transition" and in need of intensive direct support. The Department

of Reconnection supports Children and Youth in Transition with:

- Mentoring
- Student Enrollment Assistance
- Obtaining Educational Records
- Links to District and Community Resources
- Collaboration with Educational Agencies
- Referrals for food, clothing, school supplies, and mental health services
- Transportation to and from school of origin for qualified homeless and foster students

The Reconnection Center operates as one stop center for these students and their family. The center provides reaches students in K-12 by offering intake support, high school and educational options, connections to work experience and training and additional embedded supports including, transportation and wellness. Through this new department, SDUSD hopes to provide all students will graduate with skills, motivation, curiosity, and resilience to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow

Seizing the Moment - Student Centered Learning for At Promise Youth

Bob Rath, Linda Dawson

Tony Simmons, RAPSA

RAPSA Board Members Bob Rath, Linda Dawson, and Tony Simmons presented their study, "Seizing the Moment" at a Congressional Briefing in Washington, DC, on May 3, 2016. Attendees absorbed how a student centered learning is a powerful tool for serving at promise students. Presenters also offered ideas on how to implement this approach and advocate for policies that will expand the success of competency-based learning.

Student centered learning requires that we reimagine and renew the ways in which we educate and prepare our students. In particular, how we can

implement student-centered learning, which engages students and their teachers in powerful experiences that inspire a passion for learning and understanding. The panelist affirmed that a student centered learning includes:

- Nurturing and supporting innovative teachers and administrators who are actively promoting student-centered practice in their schools even in today's standardized test-driven environment
- Helping people re-imagine and repurpose educational tools and techniques being used today—e.g. technology, performance-based assessment, and blended learning strategies
- Engaging a variety of interested parties and building a shared agenda – e.g. community leaders and employers who understand that students need more than traditional academic skills to succeed and foundations
- Building public demand for nurturing education as a public good and personalize learning— e.g. by using various forms of communication to bring attention to front-runner schools and programs which can serve as role models and evidence proofs for this work.

In their Washington D.C. presentation, the panel urged Congressional education committees, as well as others with interests in and jurisdiction over education-related issues, to use oversight hearings on implementation of the recently-enacted Every Student Succeeds Act to examine how states and local school districts are beginning to organize themselves to develop and adopt new standards, assessments and accountability systems, and to design innovative approaches to intervene in low-performing schools. They also called on state responsibility, governors, chief state school officers, state boards of education, and state legislatures to take advantage of these expanded responsibilities to promote true educational change. In particular, student-centered strategies should be considered as integral components of reform efforts aimed at re-engaging off-track and out-of-school students, especially those who are unlikely to succeed in

traditional schools (e.g. those who are over-age with few credits toward graduation). Similarly, student-centered approaches can be effective in addressing the needs of students in low-performing schools (i.e. those in the bottom 5%, those with low graduation rates, and those where subgroups are struggling).

Teaching Student Safety in CTE Programs

Robin Dewey, Labor Occupational Health Program, UC Berkeley

Preparing students for successful careers is an important role schools have played through their career technical educational programs. But often first jobs are hazardous and consequently youth are injured at work at a higher rate than adults. Gaining health and safety skills before entering the world of work can help give youth the tools they need to protect themselves. This session provided an overview of the essential health and safety skills all workers need to stay safe. Participants completed activities that are part of a free curriculum for schools that was created by the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at UC Berkeley and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

In the United States, approximately 1.6 million teens (ages 15-17) work—about 50% of 10th graders and 75% of 12th graders. On average each year, 59,800 workers younger than 18 are sent to the ER for job-related injuries. These statistics framed the discussion lead by Robin Dewey who advocates for teaching basic occupational safety and health skills to young workers. Teaching these skills starts with teaching working students their labor rights and how to identify hazards and react in emergency situations. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, providing students in alternative school settings with this information is a part of teaching career ready skills such as: critical thinking and problem

solving; commutation and collaboration; and creativity and innovation.

The State of Disconnected Youth in Los Angeles

Robert Sainz, Economic and Workforce Development Department

In 2012, Los Angeles Unified School District and the City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department implemented a new systematic partnership approach called the Los Angeles Performance Partnership Pilot (LAP3), with the goal of reengaging the city's 100,000 out of school youth. The Youth Source System utilized a number of promising practices including LAUSD Pupil Service and Attendance counselors to review students' academic history and develop a referral and re-enrollment plan; co-locating educational assessment and referral with workforce supports and training, and in some cases with alternative schools; and piloting co-location of education assessment and referral at city-run Family Source centers designed to connect families to wrap around benefits and supports. Los Angeles has been thoughtfully collecting data and following student outcomes.

The Los Angeles Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) is an unprecedented effort in Los Angeles to coordinate and integrate the delivery of education, workforce and social services to disconnected youth ages 16 to 24. Performance Partnership Pilot status gives agencies added flexibility in the use of discretionary funds across multiple federal programs. The multi-agency partnership will map out ways to bolster collaboration between the Economic and Workforce Development Department, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles Community College District, and Los Angeles County. P3 designees have better alignment of resources, increased flexibility through approved federal waivers, and the identification of new opportunities to improve service delivery

outcomes to disconnected youth. In the last five years of implementing LAP3, LAUSD has learned how to engage its disconnected population for which state and federal funds for attendance are non-existent. Last year, 19,646 high school students were chronically absent. Fully 6,950 LAUSD students did not graduate on time with their classmates as part of the Class of 2015. The district also has a high number of populations that are at high risk of dropping out, including 14,000 homeless youth and 9,000 Foster youth; only 45% of whom graduate from high school.

Using flexible funds including federal waivers (WIOA Title I Youth and Transitional Living Program grants), city agencies, county agencies, community based organization and the philanthropic community LAP3 has reached 8,000 disconnected youth. The youth have experienced enhanced outcomes in education, employment and social health (e.g. mental services, housing). The pilot has shown that with coordination and increased advocacy to use federal waivers, disconnected youth can receive the services they need to continue their education. Cities and districts looking to create a similar pilot should

- Develop a Strategic Plan that develops the Vision, Mission, & Goals for partner communities to facilitate alignment and goal achievement for servicing discounted youth in years to come
- Develop a robust Asset / Fiscal Map of services, funding, contacts, how to access services, and more
- Seek Waiver authority and flexibility by focusing on special populations (i.e. foster youth, probation youth, homeless) and coordinating with partner organizations
- Develop and implement an application/web portal that will host and direct key stakeholders and partners to the right information and services related to servicing disconnected youth, rather than relying solely on phone calls and email

Training for Trauma Informed Systems

Amy Lansing, University of California, San Diego

A range of stressful situations impact our students' school readiness and academic functioning (e.g., homelessness, parental incarceration, teen pregnancy, truancy). Data from education systems and government commissions illustrate that insufficient support for principals; professional development for all staff; and rewards for skills are core issues underlying professional attrition, with students' stress-related needs and behaviors posing challenges to the resources available to education systems. Trauma Informed Systems have the potential to address many of these student, teacher and staff needs but may also be perceived as burdensome or met with resistance. This presentation addressed three key topics: 1) the key elements required to develop and maintain a Trauma Informed System; 2) why "soft skills" matter as much for educators as students; and 3) what types of knowledge transfer are most beneficial for professional development.

- "Schools need to be compassionate, safe and supportive." Amy Lansing

Dr. Lansing presented on the importance of a trauma informed approach when working with students.

All students and particularly students in alternative education settings face a ranged of stressful situations that impact their learning. A trauma informed approach means that we understand triggers (e.g. loud voices, police presence). Teachers and staff who understand this approach are able to interact with students in a way that is informed about triggers and "sensitive to trauma-related issues present in survivors." As a result, educators and staff have to exert additional labor that understands the interconnectedness of neurological, biological, psychological and social

effects. At times this may mean that educators and staff have to be vulnerable.

In order for a trauma informed approach to succeed, relationships are key. Student and educator relationships, as well as educator and administrator relationships are the core to a trauma informed approach. "It will never be effective unless you have buy-in from the top and trust," Lansing. Administrator support includes self-care and self-compassion for teachers and staff. Modeling this care to students helps destigmatize mental health services for students at schools. Support, self-care and patience is critical to working with a student population that faces more challenges that regular students.

Values and Decisions: A Blended Learning Approach

Janice Delagrammatikas, Theresa Swickla, Dr. Debra Sacks, Riverside County Office of Education

Faced with the urgent need to address the social emotional learning (SEL) needs of their students, Come Back Kids (CBK) developed a unique comprehensive independent online study course for their students. CBK's Values and Decisions Course for students was modeled and key implementation findings were shared with participants.

CBK is a dropout recovery and prevention charter school operated by the Riverside County Office of Education. Over 90% of students are between the ages of 18 and 24 and virtually all have experienced multiple educational, social, and emotional challenges that have affected their educational success.

In 2014-15, the CBK staff experienced professional development in social emotional learning (SEL). Staff developed a sense of urgency to develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing the social-emotional needs of students that was echoed by stakeholders during regional Local Control and Accountability Plan meetings. In response to SEL needs, CBK developed Values and Decisions Course

for students, an online learning platform with a blended learning model. Values and Decisions is a two-semester elective course comprised of ten online learning modules. It is a school-wide intervention funded through the LCAP process to address three State Priorities: Student Engagement, School Climate, and other Student Outcomes.

Students complete assignments that are typically a month long allowing students time to practice and see results applying new strategies, behaviors, and attitudes to their everyday life. In each module, students are asked to watch videos, write and respond to prompts, and evaluate their growth along the way. Module activities are aligned to Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels. Students are asked to complete a pre and post wellness survey at the beginning and end of the course allowing us to measure the impact of the course on student's self-perception of their SEL skills. In this course, students learn how their brain works, ways to learn better, how to grow emotionally and socially, how to improve their happiness, how to develop best character strengths, how to learn to be empathetic and compassionate, how to improve their responses to unfavorable situations, how to find forgiveness, learn about giving back to their community, and identify their "spark."

The 2015-16 year was a pilot year, and further research will include the CBK Student Wellness Pre-Survey in Module 1 and the Post-Survey at the end of Module 5. For the 2016-17 school year, the staff will evaluate the effects of student growth from pre/post surveys and compare student attendance rate, retention rate and enrollment in advanced courses by students who have completed the Values and Decisions online SEL course.

What Should Legislators Spend for Effective Dropout Recovery Programs?

Russ Rumberger, California Dropout Research Project

Robert Miyashiro, School Services of California

This presentation included two of California's highly regarded education experts in an exploration of what can be done to support adequate dropout recovery efforts. This interactive session described the costs to individuals and states of those who drop out of high school; explored how California funds high school programs and the limits on at risk populations; the needs of opportunity youth beyond a high school diploma; and a look at the practical and political implications of developing programs with significant impacts on state budgets.

In this workshop, Dr. Rumberger presented on the benefits and cost of dropout recovery programs and the need for accurate data to hold programs accountable. In comparison to high school graduates, students who dropout are have a lifetime earning of half a million dollars lower, six times more likely to be incarcerated, have shorter life expectancy of nine years, 2 to 3 times more likely to receive Medicaid and be poor. Using dropout figures from U.S. Census American Community Survey 2014, Dr. Rumberger concluded that the fiscal loss of inaction (addressing dropout rates) resulted in \$103 billion in aggregate loss for California in 2014.

A key feature to address this issue is engaging disconnected youth (ages 16-24). Dr. Rumberger found that the benefits of Dropout Recovery Programs outweigh the cost. Legislators should focus on collecting data that addresses the challenges of these programs including a broad range of agencies operating these programs (i.e. districts, counties and charters), the short-term attendance that highly skews annual data; and the inapplicable nature of 4-year cohort graduation rates. In implementing effective accountability for alternative education schools and programs legislators may consider:

1. Defining what an alternative school is (i.e. Texas does 75% at risk; Colorado 90%)
2. Returning accountability data to the student's home school. This would create shared accountability; reduce incentive for pushing students out; and ensures that

alternative schools don't dominate the bottom 5 %

3. Invest in data systems for continuous improvement (e.g. graduation rate based on enrollment and/or a return rate and/or track progress based on behavior and attendance while enrolled)

Robert Miyashiro mapped out options for how a new dropout recovery program can be established in California. Champions of a dropout recovery program include the governor, key legislators, activist and special interest and operational departments. A new program could be established through a stand-alone bill or the annual budget process, and be funded through a new categorical program or a new adjustment to the base grant, similar to the 2.6% adjustment for CTE programs. Because every bill, including the budget bill has to be signed by the governor, the best champion for a new program starts and ends with the governor. While the state Superintendent of Public Instruction can propose additional funding for the California Department of Education, the Budget Change Proposal would have to be evaluated by the Department of Finance, who would then send it to the Legislature in the budget bill and that bill would ultimately require the governor's signature.

2015 NWEA Norming Study for Alternative Schools

Jody Ernst, Momentum Strategy & Research (MSR)

Dr. Jody Ernst presented findings from an updated norming study on student performance and growth, using NWEA assessments. Dr. Ernst analyzed the first ever school-level norms for NWEA RIT growth. Schoollevel norms will help alternative schools to set rigorous and realistic targets for both internal and external accountability purposes. The study found RIT scores and growth for students attending alternative schools nationwide. Dr. Ernst received over 300 school matches along with de-identified student data. This included:

- Math: 337 schools, 71,900 students
- Reading: 321 schools, 74,203 students
- Language use: 213 schools, 29,800 students

The findings revealed larger gains for AEC students in upper grades, particularly 10th grade. Dr. Ernst explained that this could be because traditional students tend to grow in reading skill early on, whereas, AEC students' early growth may be smaller. The AEC students had more room to grow in the later years than the NWEA norming sample. Despite having data on hundreds of schools and thousands of students, these results are limited in number and should be used as informational. In particular, these findings support the appropriateness of measuring student growth rather than point-in-time achievement.

Can an Alternative Accountability Framework be Customized, Rigorous, and Mutually Agreed Upon?

Jim Griffin, Jody Ernst, Momentum Strategy & Research (MSR); Seth Schoenfeld, ROADS Charter Schools

Great outcomes result when stakeholders are committed to rigorous, customized accountability and policies give them the latitude to make it happen. Momentum works with alternative schools, districts and authorizers to develop accountability frameworks in a culture of collaboration and consensus combined with the best available data to inform and support the parties' objectives.

Momentum outlined how to 1) identify where schools and authorizers have latitude to make change; 2) assess data and accountability systems; 3) set priorities and focus resources; 4) identify appropriate comparison schools; and 5) set rigorous and relevant student goals. Seth Schoenfeld explained how this process played out in his authorizer interactions.

ROADS was concerned about the ability to compare student progress to their prior schools. Change in attendance rates and problem behaviors were important measures for the students ROADS targets: middle school students from homelessness, foster care, and juvenile detention centers.



SERVING EVERY STUDENT: INFORMED POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2016 ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY FORUM”

Policy and Practice Recommendations from the 2016 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum

Forum participants brought expertise and innovation to proposals for rethinking accountability and building more responsive federal, state, and local systems. Based on the research and practices presented and the facilitated discussions in the sessions, the participants identified 10 policy and practice priorities to improve outcomes for at-risk students and the alternative schools that serve them. Creating a system that adequately measures alternative school performance can improve the outcomes and success of all students.

Federal and State Policy Recommendations

Policymakers should consider the following accountability and funding strategies for alternative students and schools:

1. ALLOW THE USE OF MULTIPLE METRICS TO MEASURE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PROGRESS.

In creating an accountability system that can serve to improve the education of all students, policymakers should ensure that metrics are specific to the school mission and appropriate measures of continuous progress. In addition to measuring academic growth, measuring student progress is essential for at-risk students getting on track to graduate. States with accountability systems for alternative education programs have found these measures to be more useful to measuring progress and growth: attendance, credit accumulation, behavior, social and emotional skills, community engagement and civic responsibility, high school completion other than a standard diploma, and college and career readiness.

2. ALLOW AN ALTERNATIVE COHORT FOR DROPOUT RECOVERY.

One of the key findings that resonate with the majority of alternative accountability advocates is that the four-year graduation rate does not work as intended in the alternative school context. The standard four-year cohort on-time graduation rate does not reflect the circumstances of reengaged dropouts who are behind in credits and require additional years to graduate. Instead of measuring a cohort based on when a student is expected to graduate, the rate should measure the real number of reengaged students who actually graduate each year.

3. ADOPT REENGAGEMENT RATES WITHOUT PENALTIES.

State and federal accountability metrics should include a reengagement rate. A reengagement rate can serve to assess school climate and student engagement, valuable variables to state accountability and social emotional learning. Traditional cohort calculations should be adjusted so that a student who reenrolls is not counted adversely toward a school's graduation, dropout, or any other accountability rate. Including the number of reengaged students in comparison to a similar school would help to level the playing field between alternative and traditional high schools.

4. EQUITABLY FUND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS AND THE TEACHERS THAT SERVE AT-RISK STUDENTS.

Equitably funding alternative schools requires funding individualized student needs and investing in professional learning and supports for the staff and teachers that educates them. Federal and state education funds should be weighted so that students who require dropout recovery services, such as extended learning, wraparound

supports, and individualized instruction can receive additional per-pupil funds to cover any additional costs. These funds should follow each student to the school, district, or community-based organization that is educating them. Federal and state funds should also set-aside funds for professional development of teachers and staff who help at-risk students. The teacher and staff capacity and the supports that these adults provide can put more young people on a positive pathway to adult success.

5. INVEST IN INFORMATION, DATA SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY.

States that have built data systems to track alternative school populations have a head start in implementing accountability. Federal and state policymakers should encourage data systems for continuous improvement and develop strategies to ensure that information is shared with those who can make best use of it, including teachers, parents and the broader community. Developing a pilot program or ways to evaluate and share innovative programs among states could be rewarding to best serve at-risk students.

Local Promising Practice for Schools and Districts

School and district leaders and charter school authorizers should consider using the following practical and promising practices:

6. ACTIVELY KEEP POLICYMAKERS INFORMED AND ACCOUNTABLE.

In order for state and federal policymakers to promote true educational change for all students, schools and districts must actively keep policymakers informed and accountable. With limited funding for programs like dropout recovery programs, federal leaders, governors, legislators and state education departments must become

champions for the educational success of these students. Information about social and emotional needs, promising programs/partnerships and social benefits of helping each at-risk student become at-promised can help increased support and funding.

7. ADOPT A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL DAY AND CALENDAR.

Programs with an open entry/open exit enrollment allow students to begin instruction at any point in the calendar. Open entry and exit enrollment limits additional barriers to complete high school coursework. Additionally, to help reengage students who have employment or family caretaking responsibilities or transportation challenges programs can consider expanding learning time by lengthening the school day, school week, or school year.

8. PURSUE CITY, COUNTY AND PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIPS TO PROVIDE WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS.

Serving at-risk students necessitates attention and support to help them manage a wide-range of personal struggles with poverty, family dysfunction, trauma, health, mental health, legal, and other issues that impede their school success. Providing access to comprehensive supports requires schools to establish firm partnerships with locally based service providers and delivery systems that are accessible for students. Housing, employment, health/mental

health and education must go hand-in to help at-risk students succeed.

9. OFFER DIFFERENTIATED AND INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION.

Alternative school student populations differ by attendance, behavior and course completion goals. To reengage out of school youth in academic learning and to accelerate the pace of credit recovery, content and instruction should match the individual learning needs, abilities, and interests of each student. A curriculum focus on gaps and strategies to accelerate with a focus on accomplishments can be beneficial to individualized education. An individualized approach to instruction must also include flexible ways to earn credits through classroom instruction as well as online, blended learning, independent study, dual enrollment, project-based learning, and credit recovery programs.

10. DELIVER A RELEVANT CURRICULUM.

To engage at-risk students in deeper learning, curriculum must be relevant and include college and career readiness skills. Teaching and learning should focus on applying concepts and skills in real-world contexts, and should also connect to the cultures, communities, and aspirations of students. Deeper learning has the potential to result in student re-engagement and increased student enrollment/retention.



PRESENTERS

Sally Brown

Sally Brown is a graduate assistant and doctoral student in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University. With eight years experience as a classroom teacher working with at risk students and seven years experience in a supervisory role she has successfully developed curriculum for students with disabilities, youth at risk in an alternative high school, and culturally diverse student populations. Sally received her Master of Education degree in Special Education with endorsements in learning disabilities and emotional disturbance from the University of Virginia. Her current research focuses on interventions designed to improve outcomes for struggling readers in secondary education.

Jan Bryan

Jan Bryan's educational tenure includes K – 8 music teacher, primary classroom teacher, university professor at the undergraduate and graduate levels, Director of the America Reads program at North Texas University, and curriculum author for the Texas Department of Education career tech division. Jan now serves as VP and National Education Officer for Renaissance Learning where she researches educational trends and initiatives and writes about her passion; the well-being of students. She has authored papers on the Power of an Effective Educator and RTI: The Next Generation of Data-Fueled Decision Making and has been privileged to work with education professionals across the United States and internationally.

Kathleen Chronister

Kathleen Chronister is the Alternative Education Principal in Davis School District, UT. Davis School District is located 20 miles north of Salt Lake City Utah and has a K-12 student enrollment of over 70,000 students.

Tramicsha Cole

Tramicsha Cole took the opportunity at Civicorps and graduated in December 2015. She is now an intern with Oakland Housing Authority Family and Community Partnership Department. In addition to being a mom and working full-time, she also attends Laney College. Tramicsha left school prior to graduation and was involved in the foster care system. After having her son, her determination to create a better life grew even stronger. When she and her son found themselves homeless, she reached out to Civicorps and found the community support and resources she needed to gain stability, become employed, and pursue her educational goals.

Jennifer Coronel

Ms. Coronel has worked in San Diego Unified School District for the past ten years. Her background is in Special Education. She was a special education teacher, vice principal for Home Hospital and is currently the Program Manager for the district's Children, Youth in Transition department, serving foster, homeless, students on probation, hospitalized and homebound students, and military students and their families.

Dr. Linda C. Dawson

Linda is the Superintendent and Chief Education Officer of SIATech, Inc., a network of charter schools focused on dropout recovery. Linda has been recognized twice as the Outstanding Secondary Administrator by the Association of Poway School Managers, and Teacher of the Year for her exemplary work at Bernardo Heights Middle School. Most recently, Linda was honored as a finalist in the James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award. She earned her Doctorate from United States International University, her Master of Science degree from Eastern Kentucky University, and her Bachelor's Degree from the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Janice Delagrammatikas

Janice Delagrammatikas is Principal of The Come Back Kids Charter with Riverside County Office of Education. Come Back Kids is an independent study drop-out recovery charter school serving students age 16-23 at 23 sites throughout Riverside County. Her interests include using technology to make learning more engaging and relevant for teachers and students. She develops innovative practices that adapt interventions and activities to meet student needs. Janice is the co-author of two articles about Social-emotional learning and regularly contributes to TBLOGICAL, a blog about education and technology. She earned a B.A from Cal State Fullerton and M.A. in Public Policy from Rutgers University.

Jennifer DePaoli

Jennifer DePaoli is the Senior Education Advisor at Civic Enterprises and co-author of the annual Building a Grad Nation report. She served previously as an education policy researcher at Policy Matters Ohio where she authored *Misleading Measurements* and co-authored *Avoiding Accountability*, a report on charter school closure law in Ohio. Jennifer also brings with her nearly a decade of experience teaching at the university and elementary/middle school levels. Jennifer earned her Ph.D in Education Policy from Ohio State University. She also holds a Master's in Middle Childhood Education and a B.A. in Communications from the University of Dayton.

Robin Dewey

Robin Dewey is a program coordinator for the Labor Occupational Health Program at the University of California at Berkeley's School of Public Health. She serves as the Northern California Project Coordinator for the Worker Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program and as coordinator of California's School Action for Safety and Health project. Robin conducts training programs around the country teaching young workers and workers with developmental and intellectual disabilities basic occupational safety and health skills. Robin has more than 25 years of experience in the field of occupational health education after receiving her Masters' in Public Health degree from UC Berkeley in 1985.

Lisa DiGaudio

Lisa DiGaudio is the Founding Principal at New Dawn Charter High School and a doctoral candidate at Walden University. She provides an "on the ground" perspective about creating, running and teaching in effective charter schools for the Network of Independent Charter Schools. Lisa served for 13 years in the classroom as a lead teacher, data coach and summer school leader. For the last six years Lisa has been an administrator and contributed to the New Dawn application charter. Lisa was also a New York Educator Voice Fellow with America Achieves for 2015 and serves as a Policy Fellow with America Achieves for 2016-2017.

Mathew Eide

Matthew Eide is a Senior Advisor at Education Northwest. His work focuses primarily on technical assistance related to American Indian and Alaska Native education, rural education, school and system improvement, and alternative education. Prior to joining Education Northwest, Eide developed and ran an alternative school that served youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Portland, and chaired the Social Studies department in a large urban high school in Los Angeles. He holds a M.Ed. from UCLA and is pursuing an Ed.D at the University of Oregon.

Jody Ernst

Jody is the Vice President of Research and Policy Analytics for Momentum Strategy & Research, a non-profit conducting collaborative research across the country to inform schools, districts, state education agencies, and

authorizers on appropriate benchmarks for schools serving high-risk populations. Previously, Jody was the Senior Director of Research & Evaluation for the Colorado League of Charter Schools where she began pioneering research on the growth of high-risk students and assisted the Colorado Department of Education and charter school authorizers across the country develop frameworks to hold alternative education campuses accountable in a way that was both rigorous and relevant.

Mia Funk

Ms. Funk is a new addition to San Diego Unified School District, as the Director of the Reconnection Department. She has seventeen years of educational experience and joins us from the San Juan Unified District in Sacramento. In San Juan Unified, she was Director of Career Technical Education, K-Adult Counseling, Adult Education, College and Career, and Adult Education. Over the course of Ms. Funk's career, she has been a teacher, a vice principal, and a principal before she moved to the district office to work on creating systems that work to support all students.

Carla Gay

Carla has 20 years of experience working with students who have disengaged from school before completing secondary education. She is passionate about building equitable and engaging education systems for ALL students. Carla spent the last nine years working on the outreach, re-engagement, and alternative school options for disconnected youth in Portland Public Schools. She has led local and statewide efforts to create systems for alternative accountability, reengagement, and early interventions. She was recently appointed Director of Early Warning Systems for her District. Carla holds a Master of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis, MO and an Administrator's License from Portland State University.

Jim Griffin

Jim Griffin is the founding President of Momentum Strategy & Research, a non-profit dedicated to conducting collaborative research among the many organizations serving charter schools across the country. Mr. Griffin has been involved in the advocacy of charter schools and alternative education campuses (AEC) in Colorado since the early 1990's. Mr. Griffin was the founding president of the Colorado League of Charter Schools, where he developed policies that provided special consideration for AECs under the state accountability system. Mr. Griffin has launched MSR where quantifying AEC success with quality data to shape effective policy, across the country is the focus of his work.

Joe Herrity

Joe serves as the "backbone" staff for the Opportunity Youth Partnership, a collective impact initiative in Santa Clara County to improve the education and employment outcomes of Opportunity Youth. He oversees the implementation of Opportunity Works, a Social Innovation Fund project, which enhances re-engagement education options by embedding support and guidance functions in dropout recovery institutions. Joe began his career with two terms of service in AmeriCorps, and spent 6 years working with court-involved youth prior to

transitioning to his current role. He is currently wrapping up a master degree in public administration with a focus on effective collaboration in the social sector.

Joelle Hood

Joelle is an advocate for Positive Youth Development and a certified trainer for the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, 40 Developmental Assets, Understanding the Culture of Poverty, and 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens. As a teacher and administrator working with at-risk students, Joelle has implemented numerous Social Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives and activities. She is the founder of Hood's Kindness Revolution Experiment. Joelle was named "2014 Principal of the Year" for the Riverside County Office of Education. She is a credentialed Life Coach and graduate of University of California, Berkeley's Greater Good Summer Institute for Educators.

Machele Kilgore

Machele Kilgore is the Past President and Executive Director for the California Consortium for Independent Study. (CCIS) She has also worked with at-risk students in group homes, home school, and Independent Study for the last 25 years. She is currently the principal for Pacific Coast High School in Orange County Ca.

Jessica Knevals

Jessica is Principal Consultant at the Colorado Department of Education's Accountability and Data Analysis Office. Jessica manages policy and data analysis associated with the Colorado Education Accountability Act, including district and school performance frameworks. Jessica previously worked in New York with New Visions for Public, the Academy for Educational Development, the Citizens Committee for Children, and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Jessica received her M.P.A. in Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy from the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University and a dual B.A. in Public Affairs and Sociology from Syracuse University.

Amy Lansing

Amy is Director of the Cognitive and Neurobehavioral Studies in Aggression, Coping, Trauma and Stress, University of California, San Diego. Amy is a licensed clinical psychologist who provides direct mental health and cognitive rehabilitation service to incarcerated youth in San Diego County. Her work includes a focus on academic issues, cognitive deficits, and unmet mental health needs of youth. Amy is a founding member of Humane Smarts, an organization that seeks to enrich the minds of young people through a variety of community engagement, artistic, and academic experiences. Amy was awarded the CANCER in CYTES Scholar Spotlight Award specifically for her contribution to public health and social justice.

Matthew LaPlante

Matthew D. LaPlante is a journalist, author and assistant professor in the Department of Journalism and Communication at Utah State University. A member of the board of the Reaching At-Promise Students Association, he has been engaged in the fight for equity in educational opportunity for nearly a decade. He lives with his wife and daughter in Salt Lake City, where he spends most winter mornings snowboarding in the Wasatch Mountains.

Jennifer Brown Lerner

Jennifer Brown Lerner is a Deputy Director of the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), providing learning opportunities about youth and education issues at the national, state, and local levels. Jennifer began as a middle school math teacher and was active in the creation of a program to put low-income middle school students on a path to college. She's held teaching and administrative positions at Boston area schools before transitioning to educational policy in Washington, DC. Jennifer received her BA from the University of Pennsylvania and her MA from Columbia University. She participated in the Education Policy Fellow Program at the Institute for Educational Leadership in 2005-06.

Judith Martinez

Judith Martinez is Director of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). Her work is dedicated to reducing Colorado's dropout rate and increasing credential attainment. This work involves analyzing data trends, to support best practices and viable options for all students, especially those who face unique challenges and barriers. She previously served as Director of the National Center for School Engagement and Deputy Director of Family and Community Education and Support to support positive parenting and prevention of child abuse. Judith received her Bachelor of Arts and master's degree from Colorado schools and institutions.

Christopher Mazzeo

Christopher Mazzeo is the Director for Evidence Use at Education Northwest and is the Director of REL Northwest. Mazzeo previously spent three years with the University of Chicago Consortium where he managed nationally focused policy and capacity-building initiatives. There he advised state and national policymakers, states, school districts, and funders on developing and using indicators of high school graduation and postsecondary readiness, enrollment, and success. Mazzeo has served as an evaluation consultant and project partner with philanthropic organizations, including the Joyce, Lumina, James Irvine, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundations. He earned his Ph.D. in Social Sciences, Policy, and Educational Practice at Stanford University.

Robert Miyashiro

Robert Miyashiro is a School Services of California, Inc., (SSC) Vice President. Since becoming a member of the firm, he has worked on numerous consulting projects, including budget reviews, efficiency studies, district

reorganizations, retirement system analyses, tax delinquency financing, and Chief Business Official searches. In addition, he provides consulting services on state mandate issues. Robert also monitors the condition of the State Budget and evaluates economic developments in the state and national economies. He tracks General Fund revenues for the company and projects Proposition 98 funding levels and Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) implementation issues.

Andrew Moore

Andrew O. Moore is a Senior Fellow with the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families, a foundation-funded "action tank" that helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. Earlier, Moore spent 15 years building the nationwide network of service and conservation corps, and has consulted on strategic program development with the National League of Cities' YEF Institute and other clients in the youth development field in the U.S. and United Kingdom.

Tessa Nicholas

Tessa Nicholas has been serving urban youth through alternative education and job training for over 20 years. With a background in Environmental Studies and a Master's degree in International Service and Non-profit Management Tessa has worked with youth from Los Angeles, California to Senegal, West Africa to Kingston, Jamaica. The majority of her time and career, however, has been spent with Civicorps in West Oakland, California where she has promoted over the years to Deputy Director and has her dream job of working with young adults and overseeing the charter school, the support services department, and the job training activities of the full-service community program.

Leonard D. Paul

Leonard Paul currently serves as the Regional Vice President for the AdvancED Pacific USA Region. His office oversees the Operations Offices management in the Pacific Region states and territories. His work includes supervision of the implementation of the AdvancED Accreditation protocol, training, and delivery of services by the Operations offices. The regional office also oversees the management of the NW Partners program with six agencies accrediting faith based and private school Commissions in the NW states.

Laurie Pianka

Laurie has been part of the SIATech leadership team since 2005, starting as the principal of SIATech, San Jose, and becoming Director of Education Services in 2007. In 2016 she moved to the position of Executive Director of Community Development and Career Pathways. Laurie taught High School Physics, Biology and Integrated science before moving to Middle School education where she taught Physical and Earth Sciences. She was recognized as teacher of the year by Evergreen Elementary School District and a finalist in Intel's Innovation in Teaching Award Program. Laurie Pianka received her BS in Biochemistry and MS in Nutritional Sciences from San Jose State University.

Nicole Pyle

Nicole Pyle is an Assistant Professor of Adolescent Literacy and Secondary Education in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University. Her research includes interventions for youth at-risk in secondary education, adolescent literacy, dropout prevention, college readiness, effective instructional practices, and multi-tiered interventions. She received the 2009-2011 IES Postdoctoral Fellowship with Dr. Sharon Vaughn at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Pyle serves as an Institute Fellow in The Dropout Prevention Institute at The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk. She has more than 8 years of experience as a middle school and high school special education teacher.

Nicky Ramos-Beban

Nicky Ramos-Beban, Ph.D., is the Assistant Director of Alternative Education and Principal of Opportunity Youth Academy at the Santa Clara County Office of Education. Nicky has been a teacher and charter school principal for over 25 years and is the co-author of *Be the Change: Reinventing School for Student Success*.

Bob Rath

Bob is the President/CEO of Our Piece of the Pie. Bob led the transformation of OPP into a youth development organization intently focused on helping urban youth, ages 14-24, become economically independent adults. Bob is committed to providing access and opportunity to help young people succeed in data-driven community- and high school-based programs throughout Connecticut. Bob was recognized as a “Local Hero” by Bank of America in 2006, served as Chair for the CT Children’s Council, served as Treasurer and Board member for the National Youth Employment Coalition, and was awarded Hartford Public Schools’ 2010 State of Schools Award, for positively impacting Hartford’s education system.

Gretchen Rhoads

Ms. Rhoads is a twenty-five year veteran of the San Diego Unified School District. She has served as a teacher, head counselor, vice principal, and principal in the district’s most challenging schools. Currently, Ms. Rhoads is working as the principal of Dropout Preventions and Reconnection. In this capacity, Ms. Rhoads is able to support students, families, staff, and community as they redesign systems designed to meet the needs of the whole child.

Russell Rumberger

Russell is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Education, UC Santa Barbara. He has published widely in education. His book, *Dropping Out: Why Students Drop Out of High School and What Can Be Done About It* was nominated for the AERA Outstanding Book Award. He directs the California Dropout Research Project, which reports about California’s dropout problem. Rumberger received a Ph.D. in Education and a M.A. in Economics from Stanford University and a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Carnegie-Mellon University. He has received the Elizabeth G. Cohen Distinguished Career in Applied Sociology of Education Award. In 2016 he was elected to

the National Academy of Education.

Debra Sacks

Debra has been an educator for over 35 years and has a passion for improving the lives of at-risk students and has served as a school principal and administrator for Riverside County Office of Education, and provided oversight of State and Federal grants. Debra worked with the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools on the initial blueprint and implementation of the nationally-recognized Come Back Kids Dropout Recovery School as well as the development of the College Connection mentoring program for youth in Riverside County, including court, community, YouthBuild, foster youth, and adjudicated youth. Both programs have received the California School Board Association Golden Bell Award.

Robert Sainz

Robert is Assistant General Manager in charge of Operations for the City of Los Angeles where he has been instrumental in reinventing the Workforce Development System, establishing FamilySource, and founding the L.A. Youth Opportunity Movement. He previously served as Executive Director of the Los Angeles Youth Opportunity Movement which provides opportunities for young people in the most economically disadvantaged areas of Los Angeles. He is past president of US Conference of Mayor's Workforce Development Council. His awards include the Durfee Foundation's Stanton Fellowship. He received his BA degree from UC Santa Cruz, MPA from Columbia University, and post-graduate work from the University of Southern California.

Amy Schlessman

Amy Schlessman's interests include the development intelligence in learners from diverse backgrounds. Her publications and presentations illustrate a range of contributions from theory to practice. Amy's recent research, policy analysis, and advocacy focus on education for overaged and under-credited youth. Dr. Schlessman's peers have elected her to leadership positions internationally, nationally, and at the state level. She has served as President of an international education association, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL); Chair of Research and Evaluation with the American Educational Research Association; and founding President, Arizona Alternative Education Consortium.

Seth Schoenfeld

Seth Schoenfeld is the CEO of ROADS Charter Schools, a network empowering disconnected youth. He previously served as Deputy Chief for the Office of Innovation at the New York City Department of Education. He was the founding principal of Olympus Academy, serving over-age and under-credited high school students, and New York State's first asynchronous high school. He started his career through the New York City Teaching Fellows at a high school where he was dean of students and baseball coach. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Massachusetts–Amherst, his Masters in teaching from Pace University, and is a graduate of the New York City Leadership Academy.

Ernie Silva

Ernie is the Executive Director of External Affairs for SIATech where he works with governmental, business and community organizations to build support for dropout recovery. He has developed a national network of school leaders who advocate for at-risk youth. Ernie has worked with charter and district school administrators on alternative education and accountability issues. His publications include analysis of alternative graduation rates for reengaged dropouts. Ernie is a registered lobbyist with the Secretary of State's Office since and earned his Juris Doctor from King Hall, the U.C. Davis School of Law.

Tony Simmons

Tony Simmons is the Executive Director of High School for Recording Arts (HSRA). Tony co-founded Studio 4/High School for Recording Arts and Another Level Records, the first national student-operated record label. Tony mentors the student operated commercial radio show entitled studio4allaccess. Tony has served as board member and/or provided technical assistance to national school reform organizations including Edvisions, Inc.; the Black Alliance for Educational Options; and the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools. He was part of the development team for EdVisions Online Academy. Tony attended Howard University and Pace University where he graduated with a BA in Political Science and from Rutgers University School of Law.

Theresa Swickla

Theresa Swickla is a principal for the Come Back Kids (CBK) Riverside County Office of Education charter school. CBK is a drop out recovery program for students 16-23 years old. Theresa is the testing coordinator for CBK and is active in curriculum development and expansion. Theresa provides independent study expertise and has been instrumental in training staff and stream lining independent study procedures. She is a Leading Edging Certified Administrator and developed a targeted marketing and outreach strategy for CBK. Theresa has a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Masters of Arts in Management with a GIS emphasis.

Andy Trakas

Mr. Trakas has been in San Diego Unified School District for the past nineteen years. During his tenure, Mr. Trakas has served as a mentor, teacher, and administrator at a large comprehensive high school as well as leading ALBA Community Day School, supporting our districts neediest students. Mr. Trakas is committed to student success, providing innovative learning opportunities, and building strong connections with life beyond school.

Natasha Vinakor

Natasha Vinakor has been with Civicorps for over 10 years, first as a job training supervisor, then as a Case Counselor, and in her current role as Lead Counselor. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker specialized in transitional age youth, and trained in psychodynamic therapy, as well as EMDR. Like many counselors, Natasha is in the field trying to give back the support and guidance given to her in difficult times. She believes in social justice and the importance of micro and macro approaches to achieve it.

Paul Warren

Paul Warren is a research associate at PPIC, where he focuses primarily on K–12 education finance and accountability. Before he joined PPIC, he worked in the California Legislative Analyst’s Office for more than twenty years as a policy analyst and manager. He also served as deputy director for the California Department of Education, helping to implement the state’s testing and accountability programs. He holds a master’s degree in public policy from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.

Jacob Williams

Jacob facilitates school and system improvement initiatives for Education Northwest. Jacob previously served at The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at the University of Texas at Austin. There he collaborated with federal, state, and district educational professionals, including Texas Juvenile Justice Department staff, to implement a legislative literacy and teacher improvement initiative. He also worked on implementation of the Texas Education Agency’s federal Striving Readers grant and served as assistant director of the George W. Bush Institute’s Middle School Matters program. Jacob earned his Master of Education at Murray State University–Kentucky and his Ph.D. at the University of Texas.

Korinna Wolfe

Korinna is a social worker and educational administrator. She is currently the Senior Director of Multiple Pathways to Graduation at Portland Public Schools. She received both her Masters in Social Work (1994) and Educational Administrative credential (2011) from Portland State University.

Jon Zaff

Jonathan is executive director of the Center for Promise, America’s Promise Alliance. He is also a research associate professor in the department of child development and a senior fellow at Tufts University, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service. His research focuses on creating the conditions within which youth thrive. The results of his work appear in numerous peer-reviewed journals and books and are presented at national and international conferences. Prior to joining America’s Promise, Jonathan was a research associate at Child Trends and founder of the youth voice organization, 18to35. Jonathan received his Ph.D. in lifespan developmental psychology from the University of Georgia.



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