

**2016 Advance CTE Spring Meeting  
Speaker Biographies**

**Laura Arnold**  
**Acting Associate Commissioner**  
**Kentucky Department of Education**

Mrs. Arnold has worked for the Kentucky Department of Education for 5 years. During her tenure at KDE, she has served as a Curriculum Branch Manager and Division Director for 53 state operated area technology centers. Prior to working at KDE, she was a Principal for an area technology center and classroom teacher for six years where she taught middle school family and consumer sciences.

**Dr. Charisse Childers**  
**State CTE Director**  
**Arkansas Department of Career Education**

Having spent all of her life in Arkansas, raised in Blytheville and now living in Little Rock, Dr. Charisse Childers is always working to make a difference in the lives of others. Her experiences, knowledge, and unwavering enthusiasm are demonstrated in everything that she does. With 30 years of years of work and personal experience in business, education, law enforcement, non-profits and economic development, she has built friendships and has contacts in all parts of the state.

After graduating from Blytheville High School, Dr. Childers worked her way through college at Arkansas State University earning a Bachelor of Science degree in business in 1988. Realizing that she wanted to continue her education and that additional education and training would open up greater opportunities, she later earned master's and specialist's degrees from Arkansas State University. Then at the age of 42, she graduated from the University of Arkansas with a Doctorate of Philosophy in Public Policy.

Dr. Childers' career began in secondary and post-secondary education – giving her an opportunity to work with students and demonstrate the importance of an education. In addition to serving on a national education board and being recognized for her exemplary work in post-secondary education, she has written and administered federal, state, and local grants and has been a federal grant reviewer for the U.S. Department of Education.

She served from 2006–2014 as the executive director of Accelerate Arkansas, an 80–member statewide group of business and education leaders dedicated to knowledge–based economic development in the state of Arkansas. She was appointed director of the Arkansas Department

of Career Education in January 2015. She will continue working with leaders around the state on education and economic development policy and career and educational services that prepare our youth and adults for jobs while meeting the needs of our businesses in Arkansas.

Most recently, Dr. Childers was recognized by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation as one of 40 non-profit leaders in the state and is featured in the publications that celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Foundation and The Year of the Non-profit Leader. The Foundation honors those whose accomplishments and strong leadership exemplify the legacy of Governor Rockefeller and who are contributing to moving the needle in Arkansas.

Dr. Childers served on the Arkansas State Police Commission for seven years and currently is the vice-chairman of the Arkansas State Police Foundation. She has been a finalist and received two nominations as non-profit executive of the year by Arkansas Business. She is currently vice president of the Arkansas State Alumni Association, a member of the EAST® (Environment and Spatial Technology) Initiative Advisory Council, the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce. And the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce.

**Dr. Phillip Cleveland**  
**Deputy Superintendent, Career and Technical Education/Workforce Development**  
**Alabama State Department of Education**

Dr. Philip C. Cleveland is the Deputy State Superintendent for Career and Technical Education/Workforce Development.

In this role, he manages the Alabama State Department of Education, Career and Technical Education (CTE) Section, Guidance and Counseling program, and other initiatives focused on preparing students for a lifetime of success after high school graduation. He is a key liaison between secondary and postsecondary education and works closely with Alabama's Workforce and Economic Development sectors.

Dr. Cleveland and his family believe in the power of education – the positive impact it can make in the lives of young people. His past experiences span both the secondary and postsecondary education systems.

In secondary education, he served as an Agriscience Education teacher, Career Technical Education Director, and High School Principal.

His postsecondary experiences range from serving as the Vice President for Learning and Dean of Applied Technologies at Wallace State Community College, to the position of interim Community College President of Chattahoochee Valley State Community College.

Dr. Cleveland holds a bachelor's degree from Auburn University in Agriculture Business and Economics, a master's degree from Auburn in Agriculture Education, an A.A. from Alabama A&M University in Agribusiness Education, and an Ed.D. In Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

**Rod Duckworth**  
**Florida Department of Education**  
**Chancellor for the Division of Career and Adult Education**

Mr. Rod Duckworth, joined the Florida Department of Education as the Chancellor for the Division of Career and Adult Education on March 12, 2012.

Mr. Duckworth has extensive state and national experience in career and technical education having most recently served as the Interim Deputy Director for Career and Technical Education in the Arkansas Department of Career Education.

Mr. Duckworth began his career as a classroom teacher and student organization advisor; he managed several national programs for the National FFA Organization in Alexandria, Virginia. Mr. Duckworth served as the State Program Director for Agriculture Education in Washington State and was later appointed as State Director of Career and Technical Education, a position he held until he returned to his home state of Arkansas in 2007 to serve in various roles in the Arkansas Department of Career Education.

**Patricia Felder**  
**Executive Director of CTE**  
**Louisiana Community & Technical College System**

Patricia "Trish" Felder joined the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, as the Executive Director of Career and Technical Education, after nearly eleven years at the Louisiana Department of Education. Her state-level career continues to revolve around the field of Career and Technical Education and the management of Carl Perkins Grants. Before moving into management at the state-level, Ms. Felder enjoyed eighteen years of teaching at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Ms. Felder has a Bachelor's Degree in Family and Consumer Science, a Master's Degree in Secondary Mathematics, and an Industry-Based Certification as an EMT-Basic.

**Steve Gratz**  
**Senior Executive Director**  
**Ohio Department of Education**

As senior executive director over the Center for Student Support and Education Options, Steve oversees creative ways to help students in Ohio achieve success in school. This includes career-technical education, community schools, scholarship programs such as EdChoice, Cleveland Scholarship program, Autism and Jon Peterson Special Education. Additionally, he ensures that students receive food during the school day and throughout the summer through the Office of Child Nutrition.

Steve started his career as an agricultural mechanic after graduating from the Apollo Career Center and has devoted most of his professional life to helping students learn by doing. He champions the integration of rigorous academics with critical thinking and creativity to teach students through real-work situations and skills. Steve earned a Bachelor of Science, a Master of Science and a doctorate from The Ohio State University.

**Kimberly Green**  
**Executive Director**  
**Advance CTE**

For the past twenty-one years, Kimberly A. Green has worked extensively on federal policy impacting Career Technical Education (CTE). Working closely with Congress, the Administration and a broad range of stakeholders, she represents the interests of and seeks support for CTE. In addition to this policy work, Kimberly helped establish, implement and grow the national Career Cluster® Initiative, the Common Career Technical Core, the CTE: Learning that Works for America Campaign and the Career Readiness Partner Council – all of which are designed to build visibility and support for CTE, while also raising the bar for CTE by ensuring consistency in the delivery of high quality programs to students across the U.S.

Kimberly represents the state directors on a variety of boards and committees including the Board of Directors for the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council, the National Technical Honor Society, and the National Career Academy Coalition. She is also collaborating with the new National College and Career Readiness Center, the Great Teachers and Leaders Center and is partnering with multiple federally funded projects to expand the implementation of career pathways. She is an accomplished speaker, having presented in all 50 states and is considered a nationally recognized expert in CTE.

With the support of Pell Grants and the federal work study program, she is a graduate of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. A native of Buffalo, New York, Kimberly resides in Rockville, Maryland.

**Leanne Hotek**  
**Education Policy Advisor**  
**Senate HELP Committee, Ranking Member Murray**

Leanne Hotek is an Education Policy Advisor for Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. Her portfolio includes a range of K-12 and higher education policy issues, including school climate, student safety and health, well-rounded and rural education, and career and technical education. Prior to this role, she served as a Legislative Assistant for Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), former Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. She is a graduate of the University of Northern Iowa.

**Tamar Jacoby**  
**President & CEO**  
**Opportunity America**

Tamar Jacoby is president of Opportunity America, a Washington-based nonprofit working to promote economic mobility. A former journalist and author, she was a senior writer and justice editor at Newsweek and, before that, the deputy editor of The New York Times op-ed page.

Her articles have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The Weekly Standard and Foreign Affairs, among other publications. She is the author of “Someone Else’s House: America’s Unfinished Struggle for Integration,” and editor of “Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means To Be American.”

Since 2008, she has been president of ImmigrationWorks USA.

**Erica Kashiri**  
**Director, Policy & Programs**  
**US Chamber of Commerce Foundation**

Erica Kashiri is director of policy and programs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s (USCCF) Center for Education and Workforce. Kashiri leads USCCF’s youth employment and higher education programs to ensure that businesses have the talent necessary to strengthen America’s long-term competitiveness.

Before joining the Chamber, Kashiri was director of policy and corporate innovation at the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF), a nonprofit organization of Fortune 500 CEOs, college and university presidents, and other stakeholders joining together to advance education and workforce solutions. Kashiri was responsible for facilitating business engagement with higher education through developing and implementing regional projects.

This work included supporting degree attainment under BHEF’s College Readiness, Access and Success Initiative, as well as managing partnerships to meet emerging talent needs in data science, cybersecurity, and risk management for the financial services industry in New York City.

Kashiri has performed a number of consulting projects for K–12 and higher education clients, including a faculty labor market analysis for the University of California Office of the President. She also has experience in the California State Legislature, with a particular focus on education and workforce development.

Originally from Georgia, Kashiri holds a bachelor’s degree in public policy and law from the University of Virginia, a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of California-Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy, and a Master of Business Administration degree from The George Washington University School of Business, where she also received a certificate in business analytics.

**Erin Larsen**  
**Assistant Director, Division of Career & Technical Education**  
**South Dakota Department of Education**

Erin Larsen serves as the Assistant Director of the Division of Career & Technical Education at the South Dakota Department of Education, leading efforts around secondary Career Technical Education (CTE). From 2008-2014, Erin worked as a curriculum specialist and training, grants & initiatives specialist at the South Dakota Department of Education.

Prior to her time at the South Dakota Department of Education, Erin was a classroom teacher in both traditional and online schools.

Erin received her bachelor's degree in Physical Education & Exercise Science from Augustana University, and her master's of educational administration from the University of South Dakota.

**Donna Lewelling**  
**Director, Education Division**  
**Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission: Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development**

Donna’s journey with higher education began in 2006 when she was hired as the Executive Assistant to the Commissioner for the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development. In that position she served as the point person for multiple areas including legislative coordination, the Commissioner’s Office and media requests. In 2010,

Donna was promoted to the position of Education and Workforce Coordinator where she worked on the Oregon Community College Student Success Initiative, coordinated and managed the FTE Audit, served as the agency point of contact for student complaints and noncredit course approval. In 2012, when the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) was assigned its first legislative tasks, Donna was on the ground floor working in the area of Credit for Prior Learning (CPL).

In 2014, Donna was offered a permanent position with the HECC as the Academic and Student Affairs Policy Specialist within HECC's Office of University Coordination. One of Donna's primary focuses has been the expansion and coordination of Oregon's CPL efforts and university program approval and coordination. In addition, Donna has served as the University Academic Team Lead.

In January 2016, Donna began her new role as the Education Division Director for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development. In addition, she serves as the Vice President of Summer Conference for the Oregon Chapter of the American Association for Women in Community Colleges. She lives in Sweet Home with her husband, Todd. They have three adult children and three grandchildren. Their furry canine child, Furball "Furby" Lewelling is actually in charge of the house, but don't tell him, he is already too spoiled.

### **Sonja Wright-McMurray**

#### **Associate Director for Career and Technical Education - Special Projects Arkansas Department of Career Education**

Sonja Wright-McMurray is the Associate Director for Career and Technical Education - Special Projects. She has devoted her career to addressing the college and career planning needs of students and adults. Mrs. Wright-McMurray has previously served as Director of Minority Student Services for the University of Central Arkansas. Other previous positions includes a Career Development Instructor for Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.), Career Services Program Coordinator for the University of Central Arkansas and Academic Advisor for Simpson College Upward Bound, where she also served as Director.

Mrs. Wright-McMurray has delivered numerous workshops and presentations on college and career planning opportunities for students, especially from under-resourced populations. In addition, she has authored successful grants to fund programs and services to support the needs of under-served students in high school and postsecondary education.

Mrs. Wright-McMurray holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Education in Higher Education Administration from the University of Arkansas, where she was a recipient of the Academic Achievement Scholarship and Benjamin Lever Fellowship for Graduate Studies.

She also holds a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from Drake University. She is married to Dr. Julian McMurray, and they have one son, Jace.

**Sharon Lee Miller**

**Director**

**Division of Academic & Technical Education (DATE), Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education**

**U.S. Department of Education**

Sharon Lee Miller serves as Director of the Division of Academic and Technical Education (DATE) within the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). DATE is responsible for administering one of the Department's largest formula grant programs, which currently distributes about 1.2 billion annually to states under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV). The division also administers discretionary grants to improve the quality of career and technical education for Native Americans, Native Alaskans, and Native Hawaiians; gathers data for national accountability and for state and local program improvement; and conducts national initiatives that improve the rigor and relevance of career and technical education programs.

A native of Schenectady, New York, Sharon holds a Ph.D. in Educational Theory and Practice from the University at Albany in New York State. Her OCTAE work experience includes oversight of research, development, and evaluation studies on issues pertaining to career and technical education. Prior to coming to the Department, she worked for the New York State Education Department on a range of initiatives, including administering school-to-work grants, conducting statewide evaluations, and gathering performance accountability data. She has formerly taught at the both the Kindergarten and college level.

**Roxana Moussavian**

**Editorial Fellow**

**New America Foundation**

Roxana Moussavian believes that everyone has the potential to be successful, and has spent the past eight months traveling across the country to meet people who are finding success through non-traditional routes. Her travels inspired her to co-found The xPonent, sharing the stories of how people have overcome systemic barriers to success through a combination of effective civic initiatives, visionary community leaders, and collective action. As a New America editorial fellow, she is also researching the ever-evolving role of career-and-technical education in American society.

Previously, Moussavian was an economic policy advisor at the White House, where she focused on labor market, education, and job training policies as well as public-private partnerships to



streamline inbound travel and tourism as the U.S.'s largest services export. Before the White House, Moussavian co-founded The School Fund, an international nonprofit that helps successful primary school students from developing countries share their stories online and crowd-fund the resources they need to attend secondary school.

She is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania.

**Eleni Papadakis**  
**Executive Director**  
**Workforce and Education Coordinating Board**  
**Washington State**

Since 2007, Eleni Papadakis has served as the Executive Director of the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board in Washington State.

Prior to this, Papadakis was the Vice President for Planning and Advancement with the Commonwealth Corporation in Boston, where also served as the Vice President and Director for the Center for Workforce Innovation and as the Director for Program Services.

Papadakis also owned and operated a small business, a restaurant and entertainment venue in Worcester, Massachusetts. She began her career as a therapist, career counselor, and Adult Basic Education instructor.

Papadakis earned her BA in Psychology from Clark University in 1980, and her MA in Counseling Psychology from Assumption College in 1982.

**Michael J. Petrili**  
**President**  
**Thomas B. Fordham Institute**

Mike Petrilli is president of the [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#), research fellow at Stanford University's [Hoover Institution](#), and executive editor of [Education Next](#). An award-winning writer, he is the author of [The Diverse Schools Dilemma](#), and editor of [Education for Upward Mobility](#). Petrilli has published opinion pieces in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg View*, and *Slate*, and appears frequently on television and radio. Petrilli helped to create the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement, the Policy Innovators in Education Network, and, long, long ago, Young Education Professionals. He serves on the advisory boards of the Association of American Educators, MDRC, and the Texas Institute for Education Reform. He lives with his family in Bethesda, Maryland.

**Rayna Reid**  
**Education Policy Council**  
**Ranking Member Robert “Bobby” Scott**  
**U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee**

Rayna Reid is a Virginia native with a passion for social justice and education. Rayna serves as Education Policy Counsel for Ranking Member, Robert C. “Bobby” Scott, who leads the Committee on Education and the Workforce. She attended Cornell University for her Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial & Labor Relations. Shortly after graduation, she joined Teach For America, and worked at Strawberry Mansion High School in Philadelphia where she taught 9th grade math, served as the cheerleading coach, and simultaneously earned her Master of Science degree in Education. Rayna is also a graduate of Columbia Law School.

**Ryan Reyna**  
**Advisor**  
**Education Strategy Group**

Ryan joined ESG in 2016 to support ESG's overall college and career readiness strategy. He leads the organization's efforts to help states build stronger, more effective K–12 college and career-ready accountability systems to ensure that those systems measure and value students' readiness for the 21st century postsecondary world.

Prior to joining ESG, Ryan served as Director of the Office of Accountability and Data Management at the Delaware Department of Education. In that role, he led the state's efforts to develop a new multi-measure accountability system, centralize the data reporting and analysis functions within the Department, develop its ESEA Flexibility Waiver renewal application, and annually report on Pre–K through higher education outcomes.

Prior to his time in Delaware, Ryan served as a Program Director in the Education Division at the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center). At the NGA Center, Ryan led the division's support of governors' offices on numerous issues, including college and career ready standards, assessment, accountability, and transitions into postsecondary education and training. He also previously held Senior Policy Analyst and Policy Analyst positions at the NGA Center and worked as a Research Associate at the Data Quality Campaign.

Ryan earned a Masters of Public Affairs degree from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas and a Bachelor's degree in American Politics from the University of Virginia.

**Andrew J. Rotherham**  
**Co-Founder and Partner**  
**Bellwether Education Partners**

Andrew J. Rotherham is a co-founder and partner at Bellwether Education Partners, a national nonprofit organization working to support educational innovation and improve educational outcomes for underserved students. Rotherham leads Bellwether’s thought leadership and policy analysis work. He is also the executive editor of *Real Clear Education*, part of the *Real Clear Politics* family of news and analysis websites, a contributing editor to *U.S. News & World Report*, writes the blog *Eduwonk.com*, teaches courses on education policy at universities including The University of Virginia, and is co-publisher of “Education Insider,” a federal policy analysis tool produced by Whiteboard Advisors. Rotherham previously served at The White House as Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy during the Clinton administration, as a former member of the Virginia Board of Education, and was education columnist for *TIME*. In addition to Bellwether, Rotherham has founded or co-founded two other education organizations and served on the boards of several other successful education start-ups.

Rotherham is the author or co-author of more than 300 published articles, book chapters, papers, and op-eds about education policy and politics and is the author or editor of four books on educational policy. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Curry School of Education Foundation at the University of Virginia, *The 74*, and the International Board of Directors for Classroom Champions, a Canada-based nonprofit that pairs Olympic and Paralympic athletes with high-poverty classrooms and schools. Rotherham is a fellow and moderator in the Aspen Global Leadership Network and serves on advisory boards for a variety of organizations including Education Pioneers, the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, the Center for Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, and The National Young Farmers Coalition.

Rotherham believes dramatic improvements in America’s education system are integral to increasing social mobility and building a more equitable and just society.

He lives in Virginia with his wife and two daughters.

**Leslie Slaughter**  
**Executive Policy Advisor**  
**Kentucky Department of Education**

Leslie's passion for Career and Technical Education began as a student, having also served as a state CTSO president. Her professional experience began as a CTE educator, then expanded into a state leadership role as a CTE state program supervisor. She currently works as the Executive

Policy Advisor for the Office of Career and Technical Education at the Kentucky Department of Education, where she has been extensively involved in the strategic planning, implementing, and evaluating of the state's College and Career Readiness (CCR) accountability system.

**Dr. Scott Smalley**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**South Dakota State University**

Scott Smalley is an assistant professor in agricultural education at South Dakota State University. He teaches, advises and conducts research as part of his responsibilities. In addition, he provides outreach and service to career and technical education educators through workshops and professional development opportunities.

**Kathi Turner**  
**Deputy Director for Career and Technical Education**  
**Arkansas Department of Career Education**

Kathi Turner assumed the position of Deputy Director of Career and Technical Education in July 2015. She comes to the agency after serving twenty-nine years as the Coordinator for Career and Technical Education at Crowley's Ridge Educational Service Cooperative. In this role, Turner designed and implemented the Carl Perkins program for twenty-one school districts, developed new programs of study, and supported initiatives outlined by the Arkansas Department of Career Education. She also served as a part-time grant writer.

Turner's career in education began in 1978 as she taught in Wynne Public Schools, the same district in which she was educated. She is a recipient of a host of awards, including the National Association of Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences and the Arkansas Association of Career and Technical Education's Jean McEntire Outstanding Service award. Turner sits on a number of boards and offers her expertise in an effort to creating opportunities for Arkansans when it comes to careers. She received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Education from Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tenn., and a Master of Science in Education from the University of Arkansas. Turner is married with two adult children.

**Robin Utz**  
**Chief, College and Career Transitions Branch**  
**Division of Academic and Technical Education**  
**Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education**  
**U.S. Department of Education**

Robin Utz serves as the chief for the College and Career Transitions branch in the Division of Academic and Technical Education (DATE) for Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) at the US Department of Education. That branch administers national discretionary programs and initiatives that support program development and innovation in Career and Technical Education (CTE). These programs and initiatives are geared toward increasing student achievement, closing the achievement gap, and preparing all students for transitions to college and careers.

Prior to joining OCTAE, Utz served as assistant director of the Career, Standards and Assessment Services Team at the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). Her responsibilities included providing leadership for K-12 schools to develop and implement a system of quality career and technical education. She worked to develop and implement policy initiatives that reflected a progressive agenda to ensure all students achieve challenging academic and technical standards to be prepared for college and careers. She worked collaboratively with other CTE state directors and leaders on important initiatives, such as technical skill assessments and rigorous programs of study.

Utz's professional career includes positions as a family and consumer sciences teacher, FCCLA advisor, and KSDE education program consultant for CTE programs. Nominated by colleagues, peers, and students, Utz is a past recipient of professional association awards. She has served on numerous committees and held elected offices in professional associations at state and national levels. Her bachelor's degree is in home economics education and her master's degree is in secondary education. Both were earned at Kansas State University.

**Steve Voytek**  
**Government Relations Manager**  
**Advance CTE**

Steve Voytek is the Government Relations Manager for Advance CTE. In this role Steve advances the organization's federal policy priorities on Capitol Hill and cultivates advocacy relationships in support of Advance CTE's national goals and objectives. Prior to this Steve was a Research Associate for the National Association of Workforce Boards, focusing primarily on economic and workforce development policy and legislation. Steve has also worked in the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) where he focused on science and technology

policy. A Maryland native, he has also served as a state and local government affairs advocate for the National Aquarium in Baltimore.

Steve holds an M.A. in History from West Virginia University and an M.A. in International Relations from Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, Poland. He also graduated with a B.A. in Political Science and Economics with high distinction from Hiram College.

**Randi Weingarten**  
**President**  
**American Federation of Teachers**

RANDI WEINGARTEN is president of the 1.6 million-member American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, which represents teachers; paraprofessionals and school-related personnel; higher education faculty and staff; nurses and other healthcare professionals; local, state and federal government employees; and early childhood educators. The AFT champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for students, their families and communities. The AFT and its members advance these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through members' work.

Prior to her election as AFT president in 2008, Weingarten served for 12 years as president of the United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2, representing approximately 200,000 educators in the New York City public school system, as well as home child care providers and other workers in health, law and education. In 2013, the *New York Observer* named Weingarten one of the most influential New Yorkers of the past 25 years. *Washington Lifemagazine* included Weingarten on its 2013 Power 100 list of influential leaders.

Weingarten has launched major efforts to place real education reform high on the nation's and her union's agendas. She created the AFT Innovation Fund, a groundbreaking initiative to support sustainable, innovative and collaborative education reform projects developed by members and their local unions. At Weingarten's direction, the AFT developed a model to transform teacher evaluations from a way of simply rating teachers to a tool for continuous improvement and feedback, and is using this model to align tenure and due process so that tenure serves as a guarantee of fairness, not of a job for life. Weingarten led an AFT committee that called for all prospective teachers to meet a high entry standard—as in medicine or law—so that they're prepared from the day they enter the classroom.

Weingarten oversaw the development of the AFT's Quality Education Agenda, which advocates for reforms grounded in evidence, equity, scalability and sustainability. She promotes what she calls "solution-driven unionism"—an approach to collective bargaining and collective action

that unites the interests of union members and those they serve in the pursuit of solutions that benefit students, schools and communities.

The AFT and a broad array of parent and community partners have collaborated on events across the country to advance a community- and educator-driven agenda for public school reform. Parents and many others have joined the AFT's efforts to end the overuse and misuse of standardized tests, and to fix—not close—struggling schools, something Weingarten has advocated since her involvement in the creation of New York City's Chancellor's District, which dramatically improved achievement in what had been some of the city's lowest-performing schools.

Weingarten spearheaded the development by the AFT and British partner TES Connect of Share My Lesson, the United States' largest free collection of educational resources created by teachers, for teachers, with an emphasis on resources aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

Weingarten and the AFT were asked to lead a partnership to transform McDowell County, W.Va., one of the poorest counties in the United States. The AFT has assembled close to 100 partners not only to improve the quality of education provided to children in the county, but to focus on jobs, transportation, recreation, housing, healthcare and social services. The AFT also has developed a partnership with First Book to provide free and reduced-price books to children, with a goal of distributing 5 million books in one year.

Under Weingarten's leadership, the AFT continues to grow and expand its voice as a union of professionals. In 2013, the National Federation of Nurses, representing 34,000 nurses, voted to affiliate, making the AFT the second-largest union of nurses in the country. The AFT has also expanded its higher education and public employee membership as well as building strength in the South and Southwest.

In 2012-13, Weingarten served on an education reform commission convened by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, which made a series of recommendations to improve teaching and learning. She was appointed to the Equity and Excellence Commission, a federal advisory committee chartered by Congress to examine and make recommendations concerning the disparities in educational opportunities that give rise to the achievement gap.

For 10 years, while president of the UFT, Weingarten chaired New York City's Municipal Labor Committee, an umbrella organization for the city's 100-plus public sector unions, including those representing higher education and other public service employees. As chair of the MLC, she coordinated labor negotiations and bargaining for benefits on behalf of the MLC unions' 365,000 members.

From 1986 to 1998, Weingarten served as counsel to UFT president Sandra Feldman, taking a lead role in contract negotiations and enforcement, and in lawsuits in which the union fought for adequate school funding and building conditions. A teacher of history at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn’s Crown Heights neighborhood from 1991 to 1997, Weingarten helped her students win several state and national awards debating constitutional issues.

Elected as the local union’s assistant secretary in 1995 and as treasurer two years later, she became UFT president after Feldman became president of the AFT. Weingarten was elected to her first full term as UFT president in 1998 and was re-elected three times.

Weingarten’s column “What Matters Most” appears in the *New York Times’* Sunday Review the third Sunday of each month. You can follow her on [Twitter at @rweingarten](#) or on [Facebook](#).

Weingarten holds degrees from Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Cardozo School of Law. She worked as a lawyer for the Wall Street firm of Stroock & Stroock & Lavan from 1983 to 1986. She is an active member of the Democratic National Committee and numerous professional, civic and philanthropic organizations. Born in 1957 and raised in Rockland County, N.Y., Weingarten now resides on Long Island and in Washington, D.C.

**Dr. Bryan Wilson**  
**State Policy Director**  
**National Skills Coalition**

Bryan Wilson is the State Policy Director at the National Skills Coalition (NSC). Bryan leads NSC’s efforts to assist state-based coalitions and policymakers in the development of policy proposals. He also provides assistance with policy implementation and measuring the impact of policy changes.

Prior to joining NSC, Bryan was the deputy director of Washington state’s Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, which oversees both the state’s workforce development and career and technical education programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels. He also held policy posts in the Washington state governor’s office and in the state House of Representatives. Bryan holds a doctorate degree from Rutgers University.