

OREGON ADULT BASIC
SKILLS CONFERENCE:
Point of View
2024



Biographies



Office of Community Colleges
and Workforce Development (CCWD)

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Ben Cannon, Executive Director, Higher Education Coordinating Commission, HECC

Ben is a distinguished leader in the field of education, with a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing our higher education system. He brings a wealth of experience as a teacher, legislator, and policy advisor to this role. As a teacher, Ben understands the importance of providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the 21st century. As a legislator, he has a proven track record of working collaboratively to find solutions to complex problems. As a policy advisor, he has a deep understanding of the policy landscape and the ability to navigate it effectively. Under Ben's leadership, the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission has made significant progress in its efforts to ensure that all Oregonians have access to affordable, high-quality higher education. He has been a strong advocate for student success, and he has worked tirelessly to make Oregon a leader in innovation and excellence in higher education.

Donna Lewelling, Director, Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, HECC

Donna has been a tireless advocate for state-level higher education policy since her transition From Executive Assistant to Policy Analyst to her current role as Director of the Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development at the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Donna is proud to lead a team dedicated to creating pathways to success for Oregon's students. Among various other awards, Donna's contribution to and advocacy for Oregon's Community Colleges led to her receiving the Howard Cherry Outstanding Community College Advocate Award from the Oregon Community College Association.

Celia Núñez, Deputy Director, Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, HECC

Celia Núñez is a passionate advocate for equitable access to training and education, entrepreneurial growth, and workforce development. Celia brings extensive experience in management, policy development, economic development, and public administration from her roles as a former elected official, senior community college administrator, corporate leader, and business owner. Celia leads her team in advancing key initiatives to ensure Oregon's rural, diverse, and underserved communities can thrive and achieve post-secondary education success. Celia holds an MBA from George Fox University, is a proud Harvard Kennedy School Executive Program graduate, and serves as a Trustee for Oregon Tech.

Tim Amaral, Founder Amaral's Social-Emotional Skills Training, LLC

Timothy Amaral is an award-winning adult educator, trainer, and peer mentor from Salinas, CA. He specializes in the teaching and application of social-emotional principles for adults in the classroom, in the workplace, and in the home. He has worked with at-risk adults in a multi-level, multi-lingual academic program since 1992. His wonderful students bring with them a broad spectrum of backgrounds, diagnoses, and disorders as well as issues of addiction, complex trauma, and incarceration. He applies trauma-informed practices and social-emotional principles in the classroom to produce an extremely safe and welcoming space, resulting in a graduation rate that is 4 to 5 times higher than the average. His students have gone from being called "challenged, traumatized, and resistant" to being called college graduates who are PhD candidates, counselors, executive directors, teachers, and really good parents whose own children go to college. For 32 years, Tim was also a martial arts instructor. In addition to running a small studio, he trained almost 2000 people in work-place safety and conflict resolution. For 10 years, he was the communications director for the Breakthrough Men's Community, a peer mentoring agency dedicated to healing, recovery, and support. It is this deep combination of academics, physical centeredness, and healthy connection that he brings to every training encounter.

Pamir Armany, Education Manager, Afghan Support Network

Pamir Armany is the Education Manager at the Afghan Support Network (ASN), overseeing educational initiatives across the Portland Metro area and Oregon state. With 16 years of diverse experience spanning financial institutions, education, and administration, Pamir brings a wealth of expertise to the role. He holds a Master's Degree in Administration, which further complements his leadership in developing impactful educational programs.

Amy Boehnke, Adult Education Instructor and Faculty Department Chair, Portland Community College

I have been working at PCC in Adult Education since 1998. I continue to be interested in growing my practice of fostering a culture of belonging in the classroom and with colleagues. I worked with a team of Adult Ed faculty to compose the Write to Express Meaning learning standards and co-led Writing Institutes to help colleagues across the state integrate the standards in our classrooms. Last year, I was able to take a two-term sabbatical where I studied Native culture, art, and culturally responsive and trauma informed pedagogy.

Kellie Blair Hardt, GED Math Tutor & Adult Education Advocate, Hardt2Heart Tutoring Service

Kellie Blair Hardt's impactful journey in education led her to join the GED Testing Service Board of Directors in 2021. She founded Hardt2Heart Tutoring Service, a dedicated program for adult learners in GED math, leveraging her over 20 years of experience teaching math and science at middle and high school levels. Kellie fosters a supportive GED classroom culture that encourages learners to uplift each other, emphasizes integrity, and inspires learners to set and reach higher personal goals. Kellie's path to becoming a celebrated educator and leader was filled with adversity, including overcoming parental abandonment, homelessness, and high school expulsion. Her pivotal moment came with earning her GED in 1994, which set her on a transformative educational journey, culminating in Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees. Recognized for her exceptional contributions to education, Kellie received the National Education Association Award for Excellence in Teaching and the GED Testing Service Cornelius P. Turner Award in 2013, acknowledging her significant impact at local, state, and national levels. More recently, in 2023, she was awarded the inaugural GED Testing Service Molly Broad Award for her leadership and service in education. A Washington, DC native, she resides in Northern Virginia with her husband, Jason, and daughter, Katrina.

Curtis Buell, Director, Adult and Pre-college Education and Tutoring, Southwestern Oregon Community College

Curtis has been working in the Adult & Pre-College Education program at Southwestern Oregon Community College since 2010. He has served as a GED instructor, database administrator, and has been the director of APCE for the past 4 years. With an intense passion for equity and opportunities for ABS students, Curtis plans to finish out his career with APCE.

David Cohen, Instructor

David has taught Language Arts, Social Studies, and GED prep to a diverse population of high school students. He has created a series of 120+ videos available through his YouTube channel, @mrcohensclass, aimed at helping students pass the GED.

Alondra Esquivel, ESL Support Specialist, Rogue Valley Community College

Alondra Esquivel is currently the ESL Support Specialist at Rogue Community College under the GED & Pre-College Education Department. Alondra is from the Rogue Valley and received B.A.'s in Anthropology & Sociology - Social Welfare focus and minors in Spanish and Outdoor Leadership & Recreation from Eastern Oregon University. After graduation she served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Peru as a Youth Development Facilitator. She's worked in roles as a mentor, family advocate and now support specialist in Southern Oregon with focus on assisting international populations integrating into local communities.

Wayne Fanno, Education and Workforce Specialist, Office of Workforce Investments, HECC

Wayne has served as an Education and Workforce Specialist for HECC for the past 16 years. In his role, he provides leadership for distance education programs, facilitates the Oregon NCRC initiative with partners throughout the state, works with employers and apprenticeship programs to provide job analysis to ensure appropriate alignment to Workkeys, and provides general strategic thinking to bolster career development programs. Wayne has been a high school teacher and a professor at OSU.

Ashely Garrigan, Adult Basic Education State Leadership Coordinator, Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, HECC

Ashley's responsibilities include statewide professional development and assessment. Her background is in ESOL and instructional design. She holds an M.Ed. TESOL and has taught ESOL in a variety of domestic and international settings.

Kathy Harris, PhD

Kathy Harris, PhD has been interested in adult learning for more than 20 years, especially adults learning English as a second language. She teaches ESL teacher education pedagogy courses in the Department of Applied Linguistics at Portland State University, where she is also a member of the Literacy, Language, and Technology Research group. She conducts trainings and creates professional development materials for adult education teachers in national projects such as LINCS ESL Pro, Digital Resilience in the American Workforce, and Teaching Skills That Matter. Her current research focuses on the importance of digital skills and access for adults for purposes of work, health, and education.

Julie Hiefield, Literacy Specialist, Edison Highschool

Julie Hiefield is a Literacy Specialist with the nonprofits Language and Literacy Fund and Language Skills Therapy and at Edison High School in Portland. Edison supports students with learning differences such as dyslexia, ADHD and other complex learning challenges. The Language and Literacy Fund supports post-secondary students through classes offered at Portland Community College. The classes "Foundational Literacy Skills" are open to all students who struggle with reading, spelling and writing.

Dr. Shalee Hodgson, Policy Advisor, Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, HECC.

In this role, she provides policy advice and guidance to Oregon's Community Colleges, Public Universities, Local Workforce Development Boards, and Agency Partners on topics including Career and Technical Education, Career Pathways, Credit for Prior Learning, Competency Based Education, Integrated Education and Training, Open Educational Resources, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Dr. Hodgson collaborates with the Oregon Department of Education to align Career and Technical Education programs from secondary to postsecondary and coordinates multiple teams and projects. In addition to her experience, she is a Marano Fellow of the Aspen Institute's Sector Skills Academy and holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from North Dakota State University as well as a Master of Business Administration from Marylhurst University. In 2023 she completed the Doctor of Education Program in Education Leadership from Concordia University St. Paul with a focus on assessment and evaluation of higher education organizational structures.

Kelly Holt

A lifetime word-nerd and voracious reader, Kelly has taught mostly English-Language Arts for longer than she cares to count. She is originally from Texas, where she taught 7th grade -university level students in rural, urban, and suburban settings. Since moving to Denver she has served at Emily Griffith High School as a Language Arts and SocialStudies teacher for 17-20-year-old students seeking their GED.

Kristin Hovenkotter-Greco, ABE/GED Instructor, Southwestern Oregon Community College

Kristin is SWOCC's lead ABE/GED teacher who designed their program's Science, Social Studies, Reading, and Writing/RLA curriculum. Before becoming an adult ed teacher, she was an Oregon State Parks Interpretive Ranger for nearly 2 decades, leading naturalist programs in Sunset Bay, Shore Acres, and Cape Arago State Parks. Kristin loves tidepooling, hiking, traveling, knitting, theater, and helping students achieve their goals.

Sventlana Karpe, ABE/GED Coordinator, Multnomah County Library

Svetlana Karpe is a Bilingual Adult Basic Skills educator and GED Coordinator for Multnomah County Library. She has been tutoring GED in Spanish and English and working in Adult Basic Education since 2019 at various organizations in Portland. She holds a PhD in Spanish and has over 15 years of experience in higher education both teaching college level classes as well as working in student academic affairs. She also works as a Student Resource Specialist in ABS at Mt. Hood Community College.

Suzanne LaGrande, Executive Director, Blosser Center for Excellence in Dyslexia Education

Suzanne LaGrande taught adults in community colleges for thirty years and is now the Executive Director of the Blosser Center for Excellence in Dyslexia Education.

Miranda LaBatt, Regional Manager, BurlingtonEnglish

Miranda LaBatt serves as the Regional Manager of the BurlingtonEnglish West Coast team. She has a Master's degree in TESOL and Linguistics and has been working in Adult Education for the past 11 years. She has worked directly with Administrators, Coordinators, and Instructors to focus on the adoption, implementation, and usage of digital curriculum and technology to support learner success! Miranda worked on the adoption of BurlingtonEnglish into the first correctional facility in the US in Ventura, CA in 2017 and has since supported the West Coast team in serving correctional facilities across the Oregon DOC as well. Her specialty is BurlingtonEnglish, and student, instructor, and program success are always the primary goals!

Daphne Lagios, Teacher/Trainer, BurlingtonEnglish

Daphne is a Teacher Trainer with BurlingtonEnglish. She has 15 + years of classroom experience and has taught all levels of ESL from literacy to advanced, and also worked in both computer lab and family literacy settings. Daphne loves visiting classes and seeing how teachers and students make BE their own. In addition to the schools she supports, she also devotes time and energy to helping instructors implement BE within the Oregon Department of Corrections and working directly with instructors and tutors on site to make sure they have the tools they need to support their students. When she isn't working, Daphne can be found by a body of water either dragon boarding, swimming or stand up paddle boarding. She lives in Vancouver, WA with one husband, 2 dogs and 5 chickens.

Nick Lambe, Professional Speaker

Nick has had the pleasure of speaking at over 100 events both inside and outside of the fitness industry. He hosts many of his own events including the Recovery & Sleep Summit, The More Than A Trainer Summit, Raise the Bar Conference (co-host), The Storytelling Virtual Summit, the Impact Health & Fitness Summit & Impact Education Week. In addition to Nick's time spent presenting and hosting events, he has spent the last 3 years diving into his obsession of how to become more effective as a speaker. His approach combines his own experience with the study of over 500 public speakers, time spent with theatre performance, storytelling principles from novelists and script writers, signing lessons & adult learning theory. Nick now teaches public speaking skills and shares his approach while competing in speaking and storytelling competitions. Proximity is power. Nick's network includes high performing educators and speakers in the health and fitness space. Working with Nick will teach you their secrets to success and reveal hidden opportunities unknown to most of us.

Chris Marston, Data and Technology Coordinator, Oregon Department of Corrections

For the last 20 years, my role in Oregon Corrections Education has been to coordinate the Federal WIOA Title II reporting and the required assessments to administer the basic education program. I oversee the education data systems for the Education and Training Unit. Our data resides in a networked SQL Server database. Education users use a front-end user interface designed in Microsoft Access to view information for Adults in Custody (AIC). A scripting application is used to automatically email action reports, monitoring reports, and data sets to education staff, and to place data files in networked folders specific for each of our sites. My early days were in Production Planning of high dollar electronic test equipment for the manufacturing industry. To manage the mass amount of data involved, I refined my database management skills and learned to develop automation code to simplify work tasks. Getting data to move accurately between computer systems automatically became my area of expertise. Also, I provide administrative support for the online applications used by AICs in the basic education program: Aztec, Burlington English, EdReady, Reading Horizons, and Rosetta Stone.

Tracie Memmott, College Success Coach- Portland Community College

For 25 years, I have worked at Portland Community College in the Yes to College program. I have had the honor of supporting hundreds of 16-20 year-olds through the process of getting their GED and helping them transition on to what they want to do next.

Philip Metz

Philip is a former Southwestern Oregon Community College GED graduate who went on to get his associate degree at SWOCC and work in the Adult and Pre-College Education department as a Teaching Assistant and the GED Navigator, as well as SWOCC's Future Ready Oregon Grant Navigator. He is a talented photographer who has taken some amazing shots of sea creatures on guided tidepool walks with Ranger Kristin.

Cheryl Miller, Interim Director, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement, Oregon Department of Human Services

Cheryl brings 24 years of experience in county and state government and currently serves as the Interim Director of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement at the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS). Previously, as the ODHS Director of Strategic Partnerships, she led the Humanitarian Mission, delivering vital support to new arrivals seeking to make Oregon their home. This initiative was carried out in collaboration with ODHS programs, state and county agencies, public schools, community colleges, local partners, and culturally specific community-based organizations. For nearly 18 years, Cheryl served as the Executive Director of the Oregon Home Care Commission, supporting older adults, individuals with disabilities, and the state's homecare workforce. Her mission is to advance social justice and uphold human dignity, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable populations, including immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. She is passionate about fostering positive change and empowering others.

Liliana Monje , Adult Literacy Coordinator, Multnomah County Library

Lilia Monje is the Adult Literacy Coordinator at Multnomah County Library where she coordinates the English language classes, GED, Citizenship and basic literacy learners through volunteer-based one-on-one tutoring, classes, programs and referrals. Prior to this role, she was the programming coordinator, where she developed, oversaw, managed, and coordinated the events and programs offered systemwide. For five years, Lilia worked as the selector for the Spanish language collection. Lilia has worked in higher education, nonprofit, and public libraries. Lilia earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in public affairs from Washington State University. Lilia has recently completed her master's in library science.

Peggy L. Murphy, Program Director, Portland Literacy Council

Peggy L. Murphy is a retired technical writer and an active adult literacy advocate. She has served on the Board of Directors of Portland Literacy Council since 2010 and is the recent Past President of the Council. She manages their GED scholarship program and is the Program Director of PLC's new foundational literacy skills program that serves native-English speakers. A graduate of Portland State University, she holds an Oxford Certification in TESOL/TESL/TEFL Teacher Training.

Jenni Newbi, Consortium Director, U.S. Department of Labor Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grant, Mt. Hood Community College

Jenni Newby has 23 years of experience in Oregon community colleges. She has broad post-secondary teaching, leadership, credit, non-credit, workforce education, and project management experience. She has extensive experience with WIOA, having worked with Oregon Adult Basic Skills programs since 2001. She has broad experience with grant writing, development, and implementation for regional, state, and federal grants. She is a champion for equity in education, an advocate for ensuring that all students have equitable access to education and the basic need supports in place to achieve their educational and personal goals.

Christine Nieto, Education and Workforce Development Consultant

Christine is an experienced education and workforce development consultant and has worked alongside adult educators; workforce developers; and community college professionals for over 25 years helping to implement workforce readiness programs to help skill and upskill career seekers for gainful employment opportunities.

Katie Nollenberger, Lead ESL Faculty for the GED & Pre-college, Rogue Community College

Katie has a BA in French from the University of Oregon and a master's in TESOL from Gonzaga University. When

not in the classroom, Katie is plotting her next adventure, spending time with family and friends, and being outdoors.

Shelbe Park, Mentor and Tutor, International Dyslexia Association

Shelbe Park is a native Portlander and now lives in Vancouver Washington with her husband. She has two grown children. She became active in the Oregon branch of IDA when her daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia at age nine. Shelbe has served on the Board of Directors, as Vice-President, and two terms as President. Her daughter is now a successful engineer and Shelbe contributes that to the support she received from IDA. Shelbe is a full-time tutor for students with Dyslexia and believes that it is important to teach students with dyslexia to advocate for themselves. She is the mentor of the IDA Oregon Student Empowerment Group. She is in awe of the amazing students she has met and mentored.

Oscar Pena, Trainer and Tech Support, CASAS

CASAS tech support and certified trainer for 9 years

Tangela Purdom and David Roth, Advocates, International Dyslexia Association

Tangela Purdom and David Roth have established a scholarship to offer tutoring to high school and college students with dyslexia. Their generous donation to the new partnership between the Blosser Center, the Portland Literacy Council and the Language and Literacy Fund has made this pilot program in how to teach foundational literacy skills possible.

Lisa Pool-Osorio, State Relationship Manager, Pearson Vue

Lisa's entire career has been in the educational publishing arena. Early in her career she started her own company, Global Village, providing anti-bias and multicultural books and curriculum materials to educators. She continued to serve educators as a Publisher Representative with several companies including Pearson, serving the needs of students and teachers in the K-12 market many years ago. Lisa returned to Pearson in October 2022 as a State Relationship Manager supporting Adult Education students and educators in CA, ID, UT, OR, WA, AK, NV & GUAM. She has helped expand GED Testing Service Professional Development into bilingual offerings in Spanish as well as English. She resides in Los Angeles County with her family

Misty Schoene, Community Engagement Manager, The Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement

Misty Schoene is a second-generation refugee, born in the U.S. to a refugee from Vietnam. She is passionate about working with immigrant and refugee families in need. She advocates and strategizes for culturally specific services that create equitable services for all. Misty joined The Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement (OIRA) in January 2024 as the Community Engagement Manager. She brings extensive knowledge from her prior work in ODHS Self-Sufficiency Programs (SSP) and her personal experience as a child of a refugee. She began her career with ODHS in 2002 in the Portland area and has since held numerous roles. She most recently served as the Lead Analyst for the SSP Refugee Program and worked on the program for over seven years

Catherine Sylstra, Customer Manager, BurlingtonEnglish

Catherine is a longtime ESL educator who has spent more than two decades in classrooms with teens and adults of all language levels, both domestically and abroad. Starting with BurlingtonEnglish as a Teacher Trainer, and now in the role of Customer Manager, she enjoys working with a wide variety of educators and schools in her Southern California territory to implement BurlingtonEnglish in unique ways that address the academic and educational needs of their specific learners. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her dogs at the beach, solving word puzzles, reading, and competitive equestrian sports.

Danielle Thompson, Board Member, The International Dyslexia Association - Oregon Branch

Danielle Thompson, MAT, C-SLT, is a certified teacher with over twenty-five years experience teaching language-arts, reading, and social studies in public schools, and is nationally certified as a Structured Literacy teacher from the Center for Effective Reading Instruction. She also works as a private dyslexia evaluator, a tutor, and serves on The Board of Directors of The International Dyslexia Association - Oregon Branch, also known as ORBIDA.

Danielle's journey with navigating dyslexia and other common learning differences comes from teaching high school, from personal experience with loved ones, and from tutoring students of all ages with a variety of learning differences. Danielle strives to improve the life of the next struggling student, empower teachers and parents with information, and transform our collective practices in education to better meet the needs of our neurodiverse learners.

Karen Taylor, College Success Coach

Karen Taylor (MEd, Oregon State; BA, Cal State, Chico; TESOL Certificate) teaches newcomer, beginner, and intermediate adult ESL students at Southwestern Oregon Community College (SOCC) in Coos Bay. Her background includes being a Family Advocate for Head Start and GED Tutor Coordinator for Shutter Creek Correctional Institution. Karen incorporates real-life scenarios, cultural elements, and technology to make language learning more relatable. Her background in social services fosters a supportive environment that promotes students' emotional well-being.

Marlo Urbina, ESL Instructor

College Success Coach by day and crafty Mom of special needs child by night. The best part of my 25 years at PCC has been developing relationships with GED students by building trust to help launch them into college feeling supported.

Donald Walker, Trainer, Cast Inc.

Donald Walker is a national CTE/UDL trainer who delivers instruction at the secondary and post-secondary levels working in collaboration with the CAST postsecondary and workforce development team. He delivers in-person and remote professional learning, technical assistance, coaching, guidance, and support in a variety of contexts across the country. Donald is a doctoral student in Teacher Education at Wayne State University, an Advance CTE Postsecondary Leadership Fellow, Farmington Public Schools Board of Education trustee, former Director of Education and Instructor Specs at Howard School of Media Arts. He also spent 21 years in Detroit Public Schools Community District in a variety of positions including Director of Multimedia for Detroit School of Arts. Donald is a believer, encourager and supporter of people who dream of something better.

Jesse Watson, Director of Pre-College Education, Rogue Community College

Dr. Jesse S. Watson, the Director for GED & Pre-College Education, is a Southern California native, first-generation college student, community college graduate, United States Navy Veteran, husband, and father. Jesse served on the USS Frank Cable (AS 40), a forward-deployed submarine tender that continues to service naval vessels in the Pacific with a home port of Naval Base Guam. He received an A.A. in Social Science from the College of the Canyons, a B.A. in Psychology from San Diego State University, an M.Ed. in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs (PASA) from the University of Southern California, and a Ph.D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University.

Callista Weatherford

Callista is in her second year as the APCE coordinator at Southwestern Oregon Community College. In her role, she is the front-line point of contact for all APCE students as well as the database administrator. Equity and access for ABS students is extremely important to Callista's work in the community college.

Lorie Wigle, Executive Director, Portland Literacy Council

After 36 years in high tech, Lorie Wigle (pronounced WHY-GULL) is dedicated to non-profits. She is the Executive Director of Portland Literacy Council, which is focused on adult literacy in the metro area and beyond. She is also on the Board of Directors for the State Forest Trust of Oregon, a non-profit that supports recreation and learning on state forests. And as President of the Community Horse Sanctuary, she provides retirement pasture homes for horses in need. Lorie is a native Oregonian with degrees from U of O and PSU.

Kelly Zinck, Education Team Research Analyst, Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, HECC

Kelly Zinck holds a master's degree in public policy and is responsible for federal reporting for both WIOA Title II and CTE Perkins. She also manages the Title II performance-based funding model.