



Supporting School Attendance in a Time of Changing Norms

A CGLR Week Webinar

July 22, 2024 | 3:00-4:30 pm ET/12:00-1:30 pm PT

Panelist Bios

MODERATOR



John Gomperts

Executive Fellow

Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

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John Gomperts is a long-time leader in non-profits and government organizations devoted to civic engagement and to creating greater opportunity for children and youth. From 2012 – 2020, John served as President & CEO of America’s Promise Alliance. Prior to that, John served as the Director of AmeriCorps in the Obama Administration. Earlier in his career, John worked in the US Senate (Sens. Wofford, Kerry, Daschle), practiced law and served as a judicial clerk. John earned his JD from Georgetown University Law Center and his AB in History from University of California, Berkeley. John has served on a wide range of boards including FoodCorps (Chair), Points of Light, Presidio Institute, News Literacy Project, and others.

PRESENTERS



Hedy Chang

Executive Director

Attendance Works

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Hedy Nai-Lin Chang is the founder and Executive Director of Attendance Works, a national and state level initiative aimed at advancing student success by addressing chronic absence. A skilled presenter, facilitator, researcher and writer, she co-authored the seminal report, Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades, as well as numerous other articles about student attendance. Deeply committed to promoting two-generation solutions to achieving a more just and equitable society, Hedy has spent more than three decades working in the fields of family support, family economic success, education and child development. She served as a senior program officer at the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund and as co-director of California Tomorrow, a nonprofit committed to drawing strength

from cultural, linguistic and racial diversity. In February 2013, Hedy was named by the White House as a Champion of Change for her commitment to furthering African American Education.



Denise Forte

President & CEO

The Education Trust

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Denise Forte (pronounced “fort”) is the president and CEO at The Education Trust. Named one of the Washingtonian’s 500 Most Influential People two years running, she is one of the country’s leading voices on education equity, Denise is a fierce advocate for employing evidence-based strategies to create high achieving learning environments that turn barriers and gaps into bridges and pipelines for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Denise joined Ed Trust in 2019 as senior vice president for Partnerships and Engagement, guiding the organization’s expansion by developing robust working relationships with legislators, education advocates, traditional and emerging civil rights groups, parents, students, and the business community. She was named president and CEO in January 2023.

A mom of two school-aged boys, Denise understands the importance of teacher diversity, resource equity, and parent engagement. “Everything I’ve done in the past has led me to Ed Trust,” she said. Prior to Ed Trust, Denise was a senior fellow and director of public affairs for The Century Foundation, a progressive think tank. She also has served as the Vice President for Policy Leadership at Leadership for Educational Equity, a nonprofit organization supporting current and former teachers in public leadership.

Her lifetime of public service includes 20 years in senior congressional staff roles on Capitol Hill, and a stint in the executive branch, serving in the Obama administration as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary and Acting Assistant Secretary in the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development in the Department of Education. Denise holds a B.S. in Computer Science from Duke University, and an M.A. in Women’s Studies from the George Washington University. She lives with her family in Washington, D.C.



Johann Liljengren

Director, Dropout Prevention & Student Reengagement

Colorado Department of Education

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Johann is a leader in school improvement and dropout prevention with a focus on helping schools organize efforts to keep kids engaged and connected to learning. He is currently the Director of the Dropout Prevention office at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). Prior to CDE and after working in schools and programs in Washington state and Philadelphia, Johann worked on two national projects dedicated to high school

improvement and redesign at the Everyone Graduates Center. Their work was focused on translating research into practical solutions for schools and districts, designing new models, and supporting individual schools and districts.



Nat Malkus, Ph.D.

**Senior Fellow and Deputy Director, Education Policy Studies
American Enterprise Institute**

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Nat Malkus is a senior fellow and the deputy director of education policy at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he specializes in empirical research on K–12 schooling. He is a national expert on a range of educational issues that affect students across the country—including Career and Technical Education, school choice, Advanced Placement, standardized testing, and how the nation’s schools responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before joining AEI, Dr. Malkus was a senior researcher at the American Institutes for Research, where he led research teams analyzing national education data on topics including how many college students take remedial courses, the comparisons between charter and traditional public schools, and student achievement and graduation rates in schools undergoing turnaround reforms. Earlier, he spent four years as a middle school teacher in Maryland.

Dr. Malkus has a PhD in education policy and leadership from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a BA in historical studies from Covenant College.



Sonja Brookins Santelises, Ed.D.

CEO

Baltimore City Public Schools

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Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises has spent close to 30 years focused on building high-quality teaching and learning to help students excel. She first came to City Schools as chief academic officer, serving in that role from 2010 to 2013. She returned to City Schools in July 2016 after three years as vice president for K-12 policy and practice at The Education Trust, a nonprofit organization focused on closing the achievement gap experienced disproportionately by African American, Latino, and Native students and students from low-income families.

Dr. Santelises came to Baltimore in 2010 from Boston, where she was the assistant superintendent for a network of 23 "pilot schools" with broad autonomy and a track record of successfully meeting students’ needs

and improving the achievement of low-income students, particularly students of color. Prior to holding the pilot schools post, she was assistant superintendent for teaching and learning/professional development in Boston.

Dr. Santelises began her career in education as director of professional development and teacher placement with Teach for America (New York). She then served as a teacher and curriculum specialist at Decatur Clearpool School, a year-round school in Brooklyn, where she oversaw the founding of the middle school. Before joining Boston Public Schools, Dr. Santelises lectured on urban education for two years at Harvard University and spent six years as a senior associate with Focus on Results Inc., where she coached superintendents and trained school leaders in five major urban districts. Prior to that, she served as executive director of the New York City Algebra Project, the local site of the acclaimed national math reform program.

Throughout her career as an educator, academic, and administrator, Dr. Santelises has been steadfast in her belief that excellence in urban education is achievable at scale. “Our students have the same capacity for success as any other students,” she says. “We must communicate and demonstrate our complete confidence in that capacity, by charting a pathway to success for each individual child. The real challenge is ours — as educators — to hold ourselves and our students accountable for their achievement.”

Dr. Santelises is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Brown University. She holds a Master of Arts degree in education administration from Columbia University and a Doctor of Education in administration, planning, and social policy from Harvard University. She has lived in Baltimore with her husband and three daughters since 2010.