



## What Parents Want: Innovative Ways to Improve Communication and Build Trust in Schools

Co-Sponsored by New America  
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Moderator and Presenter Bios

### MODERATOR



**Lisa Guernsey**  
**Co-Founder, LSX**  
**Senior Director of Education Policy**  
**New America**

Lisa Guernsey is the senior director of Birth to 12th Grade Policy and the co-founder and director of the [Learning Sciences Exchange \(LSX\)](#). Guernsey's writing and editing sits at the intersection of literacy (including digital and media literacy), equity in education systems (including libraries, schools, and digital environments), and the science of learning.

Guernsey led the Teaching, Learning & Tech team at New America from 2014 to 2021, and before that, from 2010 to 2015, she directed New America's Early Education Initiative (now the Early & Elementary Education Policy program). In 2017, Lisa co-founded and continues to lead the [Learning Sciences Exchange \(LSX\)](#), a problem-solving platform with a fellowship program developed with Kathy Hirsh-Pasek at Temple University, Roberta Golinkoff at the University of Delaware, and the Jacobs Foundation.

Guernsey is co-author, with Michael H. Levine, of *Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens* (Jossey-Bass, 2015) and author of *Screen Time: How Electronic Media—From Baby Videos to Educational Software—Affects Your Young Child* (Basic Books, 2012). Guernsey has contributed to multiple books on technology and learning, including *A Librarians' Guide to Engaging Families in Learning* (Libraries Unlimited, 2021), *Exploring Key Issues in Early Childhood and Technology* (Routledge, 2019), *Family Engagement in the Digital Age* (Routledge, 2016), and *Technology and Digital Media in the Early Years* (Routledge, 2014).

Guernsey has served on several national advisory committees on early education, including the Institute of Medicine's committee that led to the seminal 2015 *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*; the FIRST LEGO League advisory board; and the advisory board for the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. She is currently on the CPB-PBS Ready to Learn advisory board, the University of Michigan Learning Sciences advisory board, the advisory board for the Maryland Center for Media Literacy and Education, and the board for ACT for Alexandria, a community foundation in Virginia.

## PRESENTERS



**Susana Beltrán-Grimm, Ph.D.**

**LSX Fellow**

**Assistant Professor, Applied Developmental Psychology & Education**

**Portland State University**

Dr. Susana Beltrán-Grimm is an Assistant Professor of Applied Developmental Psychology and Education at Portland State University. She holds an Ed.D. in Educational Psychology with a specialization in learning technologies from Pepperdine University. Prior to coming to PSU, she was a postdoctoral research associate in Human Development and Family Science at Purdue University. Her research focuses on asset-based approaches to examine the home math environment, explore children's digital media and tools, identify Latine families' social and cultural contexts, and center co-design approaches to promote equity in research methods. Dr. Beltrán-Grimm received the Outstanding Dissertation Award from the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Latina/o/x Research Issues Group and has been honored with the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Early Career Transdisciplinary Fellowship. Dr. Beltrán-Grimm's research has thrived both in applied settings, as the Early Learning Director for the PBS Station in Los Angeles, and in academic settings, acknowledging her dedication to advancing translational and transdisciplinary research that is deeply connected to community needs. Dr. Beltrán-Grimm is currently engaged in research in her native Mexico, working with the Indigenous Tsotsil families to explore math practices distinguished by cultural traditions, codes, and linguistic narratives. Dr. Beltrán-Grimm also works as an education consultant with several nonprofit organizations to translate research into effective and enduring evidence-based interventions and resources that are connected to the community and have a practical impact on children and families.



**Yu-Ling Cheng**

**Director**

**Kidsburgh and Parents as Allies  
Pennsylvania**

Yu-Ling Cheng is a community connector, marketing strategist and entrepreneur. She serves as the director for Parents as Allies, director for nonprofit media site Kidsburgh, co-producer for the learning festival Remake Learning Days, and CEO of handbag company Sandra Cadavid. Her work includes advocating for relevant and equitable learning opportunities for kids, supporting women from under-resourced communities and creating compelling stories that celebrate the inspiring work happening across communities. Her work has led to presenting at various conferences such as SxSWedu, the HundrED Summit, the Rural Summit, and National Center for Families Learning Conference. Prior roles include adjunct professor at Carnegie Mellon University and VP of marketing at the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Yu-Ling currently serves on the Avonworth School Board and holds degrees from University of Washington, New England Conservatory and The Wharton Business School at University of Pennsylvania.



**Tabitha Marino, Ph.D.**  
**LSX Fellow**  
**Assistant Superintendent**  
**New Castle School District, Pennsylvania**

Dr. Tabitha Marino is a dynamic and accomplished educational leader with a Ph.D. in Organizational Learning and Leadership, complemented by advanced certifications in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Curriculum and Instruction, and both Principal and Superintendent letters of eligibility. With a deep commitment to fostering inclusive learning environments, Dr. Marino is passionate about ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students.

A firm believer in the power of collaboration, Dr. Marino actively engages parents and the broader school community to create a partnership that supports student success. Known for visionary leadership and a student-centered approach, Dr. Marino is dedicated to nurturing a school culture where every learner can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.



**Tara García Mathewson**  
**LSX Fellow**  
**Investigative Education Reporter**  
**CalMatters and The Markup**

Tara García Mathewson is an investigative education reporter for *CalMatters* and *The Markup*. She has been writing about schools for more than a decade, first as a local reporter in Chicago’s northwest suburbs and then nationally. Before joining the staff of *The Markup* in 2023, Tara worked at *The Hechinger Report*, a nonprofit newsroom focused on innovation and inequality in education, where she explored the “Future of Learning” in K-12 schools and helped establish Hechinger’s investigative team, primarily covering punitive school discipline. Tara has been recognized for her beat reporting as well as features and investigations into the educational technology industry, school discipline, and other topics. Her work has appeared in a variety of regional and national news outlets, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe Magazine*, *USA Today*, and *Wired*. She grew up in rural western New York and studied journalism and sociology at Northwestern University.



**Scott Miller, Ph.D.**  
**LSX Fellow**  
**Principal**  
**Avonworth Primary Center (K-2), Pennsylvania**

Dr. Scott Miller is the principal at Avonworth Primary Center (K-2) located in Pittsburgh, PA. With a deep expertise in early childhood education pedagogy, he is passionate about fostering creativity in elementary school settings through innovative lesson design, the development of maker spaces, and community partnerships. Dr. Miller’s approach emphasizes hands-on learning experiences that inspire curiosity and problem-solving in young learners.

In addition to his role at Avonworth, Dr. Miller holds a leadership position on Allegheny County's Hi5 Kindergarten Transition Committee, where he collaborates with educators and community stakeholders to support smooth transitions for early learners into kindergarten. He is also an active member of several organizations, including Trying Together, Remake Learning, and #bethekindkid, which all promote high quality learning experiences, educational equity, and kindness in school environments.



**Miroslava Rodríguez**

**LSX Fellow**

**Co-Founder**

**Erandi Aprende**

Miroslava Rodríguez is a social entrepreneur and co-founder of Erandi Aprende, a bilingual educational venture dedicated to closing the gender gap in STEM by empowering Latina girls aged 8-12 in the US and Mexico. With a background in computer science and a passion for education, Miroslava's work sits at the intersection of educational technology, gender equality, and cultural inclusion. Erandi Aprende uses AI to deliver personalized, culturally-relevant learning experiences, fostering creativity and critical thinking while promoting parental engagement to enhance student success.

Since its inception in 2020, Erandi Aprende has impacted over 25,000 children through its software platforms, as well as workshops, courses, and events, addressing the underrepresentation of Hispanic women in STEM. The venture has earned global recognition, including accolades such as the UNICEF Youth Challenge Global Winner and MIT Solve Finalist. In collaboration with important STEM organizations like AWS and Cisco, Erandi Aprende continues to expand its impact. Miroslava's commitment to transforming education has also garnered her recognition from prestigious programs like One Young World, the Halcyon Incubator Fellowship, Rising Leaders of Mexico by Watson Institute, and the Nasdaq Milestone Makers Program.



**Erica Slobodnik**

**LSX Fellow**

**Principal**

**Duquesne City Elementary School, Pennsylvania**

Erica Slobodnik is the Principal at Duquesne City School District, located just outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Prior to transitioning into school leadership, she taught second grade for four years and has remained a committed and passionate educator throughout her career.

Erica has played an active role in driving school improvement and instructional innovation, serving on various committees and leadership teams. Her contributions include the Instructional Leadership Team, PBIS Team, Just Discipline Project, Community Engagement Events, and Parents of Allies Team. She has also supported educator development as a Mentor Teacher and Cooperating Teacher, and served as a Pilot Teacher for the World of Work initiative, where she helped embed career exploration into early learning.

She has shared her expertise on national platforms, including presenting at the AI K12 Deeper Learning Summit in Anaheim, California (February 2025), where she worked with other educators on a session titled *Outsmarting AI: Strategies to Maintain Integrity and Foster Critical Thinking*. In March 2025, she joined fellow Western Pennsylvania leaders to present at the League of Innovative Schools Spring Convening, highlighting Duquesne City School District's work in *World of Work and the Framework of the Future*. Additionally, in January 2025, she served as a panelist on a national LinkedIn Live session hosted by Digital Promise, *Unlocking Career Readiness through STEM and Student Agency*.

Her earlier professional engagements include presenting at the Three Rivers Educational Technology Conference (TRETTC) in January 2023. Erica holds a Master's in Education and a Certificate in Educational Leadership with Principal Certification from Carlow University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



**Sheila R. Thomas, Ed.D.**

**LSX Fellow**

**Founder**

**Thomas Educational Consulting and Training**

Dr. Sheila R. Thomas is the founder of Thomas Educational Consulting and Training and Great Day Publishing, where she focuses on empowering parents of Black boys by providing essential tools and resources for their development.

As an accomplished author, Dr. Thomas has written several children's books, including *J.R.'s Biggest Fan*, *Mommy's Little SONshine*, and the coloring book *Yes, I Can*. She also authored the motivational book *W.A.I.T.: Women Anticipating Incredible Turnaround*, which explores personal struggles and transformative moments, emphasizing the power of faith and resilience. Her latest works, *E.P.I.C. Empty Nesters* and *SONshine Affirmation Cards*, are valuable resources for *parents and teachers*, addressing life after children leave home and instilling positive affirmations in children, respectively. She also published *Raising Brilliant Black Boys*, a research-based journal offering strategies to support Black boys' social, emotional, and academic success.

Dr. Thomas's academic journey includes a Bachelor's and Master's in Early Childhood Education from Albany State University, a Specialist in Curriculum Instruction, Management, and Administration, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from NOVA Southeastern University. With over thirty years of experience, she has held roles in teaching and college professorship. She served as a Georgia Bright from the Start Trainer and Child Development Associate specialist, demonstrating her deep knowledge and skills in the field.

She has shared her expertise at conferences such as the Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children, the Professional Family Childcare Alliance of Georgia, HeadStart, and the Professional Association of Georgia Educators. She serves as an Educator Coach with the Black Child Development Institute and a College Supervisor for Valdosta State University student teachers. Dr. Thomas is also a member of the Learning Sciences Exchange (L.S.X.) Fellow with New America.

Dr. Thomas is not just an educator but also a devoted wife, mother of three sons, and grandmother. She actively participates in her community through organizations like Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the National Council of Negro Women, and Jack and Jill of America. Her life is

deeply grounded in faith, and she is guided by her motto, "If I can help someone along the way, my living won't be in vain." Her dedication to her family and community is truly inspiring.

To contact Dr. Thomas, visit her website at [www.drsheilathomas.com](http://www.drsheilathomas.com) or email her at [drsheila.thomas1@gmail.com](mailto:drsheila.thomas1@gmail.com). You can also connect with her via Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/drsheilathomas>.