MEET THE MOMENT:

FOCUS On The Gap(s)!

GLR WEEK 2025

GLR Week 2025's week-long collection of plenary events represented a call to action to "Focus on the Gaps" and confront the persistent learning, achievement, digital access, and opportunity gaps that have left far too many children stranded. Each session examined these disparities and spotlighted the innovative strategies and scalable solutions needed to close them.

Throughout the week, participants engaged in solutions-focused conversations about education technology, early childhood systems, high-impact tutoring, chronic absenteeism, and the recent surge in parents "curating" their children's K–12 education experience. Together, we continued "focusing on the gaps" with greater intentionality and resolve.

Thank you to all those who engaged in sessions throughout the week as attendees, speakers, and thought partners in our collective work to ensure more hopeful futures for our youngest learners.

draft

3,162+ **webinar attendees** (2,160+ unique individuals) participated in online learning sessions.

72 **panelists** spoke in **15** **online learning sessions** — including **8** **hosted by CGLR** and **7** **hosted by CGLR State and Community Lead Organizations**.

96% of **webinar attendees reported** the panelists provided **valuable resources** for their work.

94% of **webinar attendees reported** that they **learned new and relevant information** that can be applied to their work.

26 **additional events and activities** organized by CGLR State and Community Lead Organizations **engaged 4,270+ attendees.**

49 **states** and the **District of Columbia, Puerto Rico**, the **U.S. Virgin Islands**, and **three Canadian Provinces** (Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario) were represented among session attendees.

200+ **school districts** were represented in plenary sessions.

154 **CGLR Network communities** were represented among session attendees.

174+ **local funding organizations** attended plenary sessions.

121+ **program partner organizations** attended plenary sessions.

Please visit the **GLR Week 2025 site** to access the session summaries, plenary recordings, slide decks, panelist bios, and much more.

Highlights From 2025 Plenary Sessions

A VIRTUAL GRATITUDE RECEPTION — FROM A TO Z: CGLR SALUTES AQUARIUMS & ZOOS

This GLR Week Gratitude Reception continued CGLR's celebration of the institutions that undergird the aspiration for making accessible, affordable, and welcoming learning-rich environments community-wide, abundant, and ubiquitous. As important, this session highlighted how zoos and aquariums spark curiosity and support children's unconstrained skill-building. Panelists emphasized the importance of building community connections, creating "learning ecologies" that extend beyond books, and empowering communities to create meaningful, interactive experiences for children without waiting for formal approval.

> We like to think of zoos and aquariums as spaces of experiential learning. There are all different ways of learning, and all of them are important and all of them build together. But **this opportunity to connect with the world around us in a hands-on, in-person way can be so powerful.** Another beautiful thing we see in aquariums and zoos is intergenerational learning. They're spaces where children are coming with their parents and grandparents or aunts and uncles or family, friends, and neighbors and all of **these other people are building that experience for them, building what they're learning and helping them build their worldview.**
>
> **Kari Hart**
> *Association of Zoos and Aquariums*

GUARDRAILS & GUIDELINES ON TECH FOR WELL-BEING & LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

As the capstone to CGLR's Technology-Enhanced Teaching & Learning Summer Institute, this conversation among thought and practice leaders in child development, health, education, and technology explored the challenges and opportunities that digital tools present in children's lives. Panelists highlighted the need for child-centered design, robust privacy safeguards, and clear usage guidelines. They also advocated for developing systemic solutions, supporting greater research on implementation, turning existing evidence into practical guidance for educators and families, and ensuring technology supports learning without introducing new risks or harms.

We need a cautious, child-centered approach here, **even if it takes longer**, and **we must expect that these tools are able to demonstrate that they do actually deliver on their promises** to improve and support learning and do not introduce new risks or harms in the process.

Kris Perry, MSW, Children and Screens
Institute of Digital Media and Child Development

STARTING EARLY TO BOOST SCHOOL SUCCESS: STATE INVESTMENTS IN EARLY ALIGNMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

This discussion showcased early learning alignment and accountability efforts in Arizona, Hawai'i, Louisiana, and Oregon, and the impact those efforts are having on children's early school success. Panelists highlighted legislative actions, collective impact models, and local partnerships that strengthen early literacy and early childhood systems. They also stressed the importance of transparency; designing programs with children, families, and providers in mind; continuous improvement; and strategic collaboration as essential components to building robust and equitable early learning systems statewide.

When we talk about coherent state systems, we say let's flip it. **Let's talk about the experience of kids and families regardless of the funding stream that they are being served by.** A 3-year-old is a 3-year-old is a 3-year-old. Our job is to create systemwide outcomes for kids and families and leverage the funding streams that are available to us to make that happen.

Nasha Patel
Watershed Advisors

BUILDING THE WORKFORCE FOR TUTORING: EMERGING OPTIONS & STRATEGIES

High-impact tutoring's growth and the need for a sustainable workforce were the focus of this discussion. Panelists shared evidence of tutoring's academic benefits, especially post-pandemic, and noted bipartisan support for this research-based intervention. In the face of reduced public funding and tight education budgets, they discussed how emerging tutoring workforce pipelines — including education schools, Federal Work-Study programs, and tutor apprenticeships — could be leveraged to scale tutoring affordably while ensuring quality, consistency, and equitable access for students across diverse communities.

We know that tutoring — when it's consistent, personalized, and aligned to what students are learning in the classroom — **is one of the most effective ways to accelerate learning.** And while the past few years have seen unprecedented investments in tutoring, particularly through ESSER funds, **the momentum we built is at risk unless we solve some of the field's most pressing challenges** like building a scalable, sustainable pipeline of well-prepared tutors. This isn't just a workforce issue, it's a student success issue.

Pete Lavorini
Overdeck Family Foundation

REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENCE: PROMISING SIGNALS FROM COLORADO & VIRGINIA

This session spotlighted promising state- and district-level strategies to reduce the persistent spikes in post-pandemic chronic absence. State chiefs from Colorado and Virginia shared how data, positive incentives, and relationship-based approaches are improving attendance. District leaders and local partners from the two states highlighted efforts to support early identification of at-risk students and address barriers such as mental health challenges. Panelists emphasized creating a culture of belonging, ensuring stakeholder alignment, and leveraging philanthropy to sustain efforts that keep students engaged and consistently in school.

I really loved the emphasis [Hedy Chang of Attendance Works placed] on **relationships and how important it is for kids to feel connected both to their teachers — having meaningful adult relationships — and to their peers in class.** And so [we're] making sure that sense of belonging is in place, making sure that we've got the ability to address students' physical and mental health needs, and then working really closely with our family and community partners.

Education Commissioner Susana Córdova, Ed.D.
Colorado Department of Education

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT MAGNIFIED: RURAL AMERICA'S CHILDREN & FAMILIES AS COLLATERAL DAMAGE?

Rural children and families face heightened challenges from recent federal policy changes and funding cuts, including reduced health care access, economic hardship, and disproportionate impacts on Indigenous and migrant farming communities. Leaders and advocates in rural health and education discussed ways to safeguard essential programs like Medicaid and Head Start, stretch limited resources, and foster innovation within rural education systems. The dialogue highlighted the urgency of advocacy, the power of community leadership, and the importance of solutions tailored to rural needs.

I want to be clear that **blending funds is not a solution for inadequate funding, but it is a strategy** to stretch insufficient dollars as far as they'll go. And it is **a testament to rural innovation and determination.**

Melissa Sadorf, Ed.D.
National Rural Education Association

FROM STRUGGLING TO STABILITY: ELEVATING THE PROSPECTS OF ALICE (ASSET LIMITED, INCOME CONSTRAINED, EMPLOYED) FAMILIES

Disrupting the cycle of poverty to enable children and families to thrive continues to define the partnership between the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, United Way Worldwide, and Ascend at the Aspen Institute. This co-sponsored session highlighted ALICE families — those earning just above the poverty line who struggle to meet basic needs. Panelists shared data-driven strategies for improving financial stability, from advocacy and community partnerships to innovative local programs. They emphasized the importance of addressing structural barriers, inspiring action, and highlighting where coordinated efforts have produced measurable progress, providing both hope and practical models for breaking cycles of economic hardship.

It's important to recognize that through recovery, recession, COVID, post-COVID, with different presidential administrations, in different economic times and political times, **we have not been able to change the trajectory of this [ALICE] trend line.**

Stephanie Hoopes, Ph.D.
United Way of Northern New Jersey

PARENTS AS CURATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: BALANCING CHOICE, EQUITY, & ACCOUNTABILITY

This conversation explored how increased parental involvement in school choice — through charters, microschools, homeschooling, and more — is reshaping education. Panelists discussed the need for equitable access, comprehensive information for parents, and policies addressing barriers like transportation. They examined the growth of open enrollment, the role of supply in meeting demand, and the implications of new federal tax credits for scholarships, calling for a balance between expanded options and accountability.

We should be focusing at the bare minimum on making sure that there is as much information available as possible so that parents can make an informed decision about the kind of school that they want to send their kids to. And in doing so, **we have to acknowledge that this is a complicated, emotional, messy process.** Trying to find the right match between what the parent likes and values, what the kid aspires to be, what the school is set up to do, and what the teachers and the leaders want to make happen…**that is a complicated human process. And we should respect that.**

Derrell Bradford
50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now

A Virtual Gratitude Reception: CGLR Salutes Children's Museums

The 12th annual Gratitude Reception celebrated the vital role zoos, aquariums, libraries, science centers, and children's museums play in supporting children's learning and development. These dynamic, engaging, and interactive community institutions foster curiosity and unconstrained skill-building through hands-on, fun experiences that deepen understanding in reading, math, the natural environment, and much more. These venues create rich, immersive environments where children explore, ask questions, and connect with the world around them.

By offering accessible, community-centered opportunities, these institutions contribute to an ecosystem of support that extends learning beyond the classroom and into everyday life. They also provide important spaces for families to learn and grow together. The session highlighted the power of collaboration across these cultural institutions and partner organizations to build coherent, connected learning experiences that uplift children, including those in rural and underserved communities.

CGLR and its Network express deep gratitude to these cultural institutions for their commitment to creating learning-rich environments that inspire children and families alike. **View the video.**

GLR Week in Alaska & New Mexico Communities

The Hobbs Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (HCGLR) in New Mexico *engaged partners in hosting a Laundry and Literacy Day during GLR Week. Wash Away Laundry provided 228 free loads of laundry while the United Way of Lea County's Project Feeding Families distributed 300 meals to attendees. The Hobbs Public Library engaged young people in creating 85 fun crafts while HCGLR distributed 170 books to families at the event. The Hobbs Police Department was also on site, distributing swag while engaging with community members.*

HCGLR also partnered with Future Innovators Academy for their "Back to School Bash" at the Hobbs Apartments. The community's traveling little library was on site for reading and storytime and participants worked on crafts provided by the public library. Families enjoyed lunch and snow cones while school children received backpacks, school supplies, and books.

In Fairbanks, Alaska, *a diverse group of local partners joined together to host the 5th annual Kids Literacy Farmers Market, engaging more than 500 people in this free family-friendly event. Stars of Gold Readers, Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District, Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks & Recreation, and Fairbanks North Star Borough Public Libraries organized the event, which featured reading and literacy-based activities for children in preK through sixth grade and opportunities to learn about 36 different local community organizations. Children could earn a "coin" at each table and then use the coins to purchase yummy produce and Alaska-grown flowers. Thanks to Michelle Daml with Stars of Gold Readers and Mel Sikes with the Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District for the leadership and hard work that made this event a success.*

MEET THE MOMENT:
FOCUS On The Gap(s)!
GLR WEEK 2025

speakers and moderators

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading appreciates and thanks the following individuals for participating as moderators, presenters, and commentators.

Arthur G. Affleck, III, M.Ed., J.D.
President and CEO, Association of Children's Museums

Gbenga Ajilore, Ph.D.
Chief Economist
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Mayra E. Alvarez, MPA
President
The Children's Partnership

Deidre Anderson-Barbee
Assistant Commissioner, Office of Childhood
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Amanda LaTasha Armstrong, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Scholar
Digital Promise

Lori L. Bailey
Director of Student Engagement Initiatives
Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Colorado

Melissa Ballard
Director of Programs
Association of Science and Technology Centers

Katherine Bassett
Chief Executive Officer
New Jersey Tutoring Corps

Monica P. Bhatt, Ph.D.
Senior Research Director, The Education Lab
University of Chicago

Derrell Bradford
President
50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now

Trish Brennan-Gac, J.D.
Executive Director
Maryland READS

Ebony Brown
Senior Director of Student Success
United Way of Delaware

Sally Brown, Ph.D.
Professor of Literacy Education
Georgia Southern University

Jennifer Buckley
Assistant Superintendent
Winchester Public Schools, Virginia

Hedy Chang
Founder and Executive Director
Attendance Works

Michael Chartier
Policy Director
Education Choice, Excel*in*Ed

An-Me Chung, Ph.D.
Director, Teaching, Learning & Tech, Strategic Advisor, Education Policy
New America

Steffanie Clothier
Director, School Readiness
Gary Community Ventures

Kate Cochran
Managing Director
Partnership for Student Success

Jaclyn Colona
Director of Grants Strategies
Georgia Foundation for Public Education

Susana Córdova, Ed.D.
Education Commissioner
Colorado Department of Education

Julia Cunningham
Former Director of Rural Engagement
U.S. Department of Education

Carla R. DeBose
Director of Professional Development and Family Literacy
Technical College System of Georgia

Rebecca Ellis
Director of Policy and External Partnerships, Office of Adult Education
Technical College System of Georgia

Amina Fazlullah
Head of Tech Policy Advocacy
Common Sense Media

Ronald Ferguson, Ph.D.
Founder and President
The Basics

Ayeola Fortune
Vice President, Impact Team
United Way Worldwide

Dawn Gerundo
Community Development and Engagement Director, Education
Valley of the Sun United Way, Read On Phoenix, Read On Southwest Valley

Josie Green
Executive Director
Teach for America South Dakota

Lisa Guernsey
Director and Co-Founder, Learning Sciences Exchange, Senior Director, Education Policy
New America

Emily Anne Gullickson, M.Ed., J.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Virginia Department of Education

Kari Hart
Director, Professional Development and Education
Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Isabel Hau
Executive Director, Stanford Accelerator for Learning
Stanford University

Robin Henderson, Ph.D.
Chief Program Officer
School Smart KC

Stephanie Hoopes, Ph.D.
Director, United for ALICE
United Way of Northern New Jersey

Kevin Huffman
CEO
Accelerate

Anya Kamenetz
Author
The Art of Screen Time

Heather Knight
Literacy Coordinator
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Robin Lake
Director, Center on Reinventing Public Education
Arizona State University

Pete Lavorini
Portfolio Manager, Innovative Schools
Overdeck Family Foundation

Alisa Leckie, Ph.D.
Professor and Assistant Dean for Partnerships and Outreach
Georgia Southern University

Susanna Loeb, Ph.D.
Founder and Executive Director, National Student Support Accelerator, Professor, Graduate School of Education
Stanford University

David Lowenstein, MPA
Co-Founder and CEO
Lionstone Consulting Group

Bruno Manno, Ph.D.
Senior Advisor
Progressive Policy Institute

Lori Masseur
Director of Early Learning
Read On Arizona

Scott Mengebier
Senior Director, Research and Evaluation
United Way of the National Capital Area

Marina Merrill, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Strategy
Children's Institute, Oregon

Emily Moore
Senior Policy Analyst
Voices for Virginia's Children

Erin Mote
CEO and Founder
InnovateEDU

Ken Oldham
MBA, LFC '18, President and CEO
United Way of Frederick County

Rudy Ortiz
Regional Director, First Things First
Read On Yuma

Ana Padilla
Migrant Recruiter/Interpreter
Queen Anne's County Public Schools

Jane Park
Senior Content Strategist
Google Kids & Families

Nasha Patel
Managing Director
Watershed Advisors

Kayla Patrick
Senior Fellow
The Century Foundation

Kris Perry, MSW
Executive Director
Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development

Matt Peterson
Executive Director
John & Janice Wyatt Foundation

Dona Ponepinto
President and CEO
United Way of Pierce County

Halley Potter
Director of PK-12 Education Policy and Senior Fellow
The Century Foundation

Marie Raymond
Community Health & Human Services Manager, City of Tempe
Read On Tempe

Jenny Radesky, M.D.
Immediate Past Chair, Council on Communications and Media, American Academy of Pediatrics
David G. Dickinson Collegiate Professor of Pediatrics and Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Michigan Medical School

Munro Richardson, Ph.D.
Editor
UnconstrainedKids.com

Alena Rivers
Executive Director
Association for Library Service to Children

Jen Roberts
Chief Executive Officer
Agenda for Children, Louisiana

Michelle Roers
Senior Vice President, Strategies for ALICE
United Way of Northern New Jersey

S. Kwesi Rollins, MSW
Chief Program Officer
Institute for Educational Leadership

Melissa Sadorf, Ed.D.
Executive Director
National Rural Education Association

Yissel Salafsky
Chief Executive Officer, Make Way for Books
Read On Pima County

Sydney Saubestre
Senior Policy Analyst, Open Technology Institute
New America

Marjorie Sims
Managing Director
Ascend at the Aspen Institute

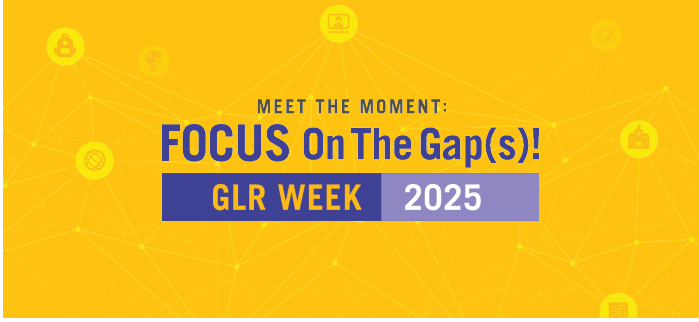
Patrick Steck
Vice President of External Affairs
Deans for Impact

Kerrie Urosevich, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Early Childhood Action Strategy, Hawai'i

Kerri Valencia
Maryland READS board member and Principal
Connected Consulting

Laura Wagner
Executive Director
Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning

state and community lead contributors



Twenty-five participating states, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, stepped up to organize and host 40 events and activities that were celebrated during GLR Week 2025. These webinars, panel discussions, and report release events were well attended and well received.

We appreciate and thank the following state and community leads for their leadership during GLR Week 2025. Learn more about **these events**.

Alaska
- Fairbanks -
Peggy Carlson
Stars of Gold Readers

Lesa Meath
Golden Heart Literacy Council

Arizona
Terri Clark
State Literacy Director
Read On Arizona

Lori Masseur
Director of Early Learning
Read On Arizona

Arkansas
Kathy French
Executive Director
AR Kids Read

California
- Los Angeles -
Olga Corona De La Cruz
Senior Campaign Director
Families In Schools

- Oakland -
Jen Bloom
Director of Programs
Oakland Literacy Coalition

Connecticut
- Hartford -
Brandon Emerson
Chief Philanthropy Officer
United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut

Delaware
Ken Livingston
Senior Director, Student Success
United Way of Delaware

Florida
Jenn Faber
Director of Engagement, Networks & Memberships
Florida Alliance of Children's Councils & Trusts/Florida Grade-Level Reading Campaign

Georgia
Arianne Weldon
Strategic Innovation Manager and Get Georgia Reading Director
Georgia Family Connection Partnership

Akia Lewis
Strategic Innovation and Get Georgia Reading Project Manager
Georgia Family Connection Partnership

Hawai'i
Kerrie Urosevich, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Early Childhood Action Strategy

Ku`i Adolpho
Founder
Kokua Logistics

Indiana
- Greater Lafayette -
Kelci Fox
Community Impact Associate
United Way of Greater Lafayette

Amy O'Shea
Senior Director of Community Impact
United Way of Greater Lafayette

Iowa
Malai Amfahr
Senior Program Officer of Engagement
State Lead Iowa
Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Maryland
Trish Brennan-Gac, J.D.
Executive Director
Maryland READS

Mississippi
Alissa Hobart
Director
Mississippi Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
Center for Excellence in Literacy Instruction, University of Mississippi

- Deer Creek -
Gwendolyn West
Literacy Specialist, Delta Health Alliance
Assistant Vice President
Deer Creek Promise Community

Rhonda Lewis
Vice President of Education
Delta Health Alliance

- Oxford/Lafayette County -
Cara Buffington
Early Childhood Director
Oxford School District

- Southeast Mississippi -
Tracie Fowler
President/CEO
United Way of Southeast Mississippi

- Tupelo/Lee County -
Shelly Brooks, Director Early Childhood Coalition
United Way of Northeast Mississippi

- Vicksburg/Warren County -
Michele Connelly, Executive Director
United Way of West Central Mississippi

Missouri
Lisa Greening
Executive Director
Turn the Page STL

Kristin Droege, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Turn the Page KC

New Mexico
- Hobbs -
Elizabeth Wieser
Early Literacy Project Manager
Hobbs Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

New York
- Buffalo -
Pam Johnson, Ph.D.
Co-Lead

Anne Ryan
Executive Director
Read to Succeed Buffalo

North Carolina
Lisa Finaldi
Community Engagement Leader
North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation

Crystal Folmar
Project Coordinator
North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation

Rachel Stine
Senior Director, Books on Break
Book Harvest

Oregon
Kali Thorne Ladd
Chief Executive Officer
Children's Institute

Marina Merrill, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Strategy
Children's Institute

Pennsylvania
- Philadelphia -
Jenny Bogoni
Chief of Community Engagement and Public Programs
Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation

Puerto Rico
Perla del Mar Rodriguez Fernandez
Senior Director, Advocacy and Partner Engagement
Flamboyan Foundation

Utah
Kelly Noorda
Lead Network Director
Promise Partnership Utah

Emily Carr
Partnership Director
Promise Partnership Utah

U.S. Virgin Islands
Dee Baecher-Brown
President
Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands

Virginia
- Winchester -
Matt Peterson
Executive Director
John & Janice Wyatt Foundation