

GLR Learning Tuesdays Webinar
Reaching their Full Potential: Plugging the Leaky Pipeline for
High-Achieving, Low-Income (HALO) Students

December 16, 2025

Moderator and Presenter Bios

MODERATOR

Michael J. Petrilli

President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute



Michael J. Petrilli is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, executive editor of *Education Next*, editor in chief of the *Education Gadfly Weekly*, host of the *Education Gadfly Show* podcast, and a contributor at Forbes.com. An award-winning writer, he is the author of *The Diverse Schools Dilemma*, editor of *Education for Upward Mobility*, and co-editor of *How to Educate an American* and *Follow the Science to School*. An expert on charter schools, school accountability, evidence-based practices, and trends in test scores and other student outcomes, Petrilli has published

opinion pieces in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg, 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 and the Policy Innovators in Education Network, and serves on the board of the Association of American Educators Foundation. He lives with his family in Bethesda, Maryland.

PRESENTERS

Brenda Berg

President and CEO, BEST NC

(Business for Educational Success and Transformation in North Carolina)



Brenda is the President & CEO of [BEST NC](#) (Business for Educational Success and Transformation in North Carolina), a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of 100 business leaders with a focus on making education in North Carolina the best in the nation. Through research, policy, and advocacy, BEST NC strives to ensure that every student in North Carolina will graduate with the knowledge, skills and behaviors to succeed in a competitive global economy. As an entrepreneur, Brenda was recognized with the “40 Under 40” and “Women in Business”

awards from the Triangle Business Journal. She serves on various boards and education organizations, including the NC Principal Fellows Commission, Teaching Fellows Advisory Board, myFutureNC Advisory Board, and the NC Community College Foundation Board. Brenda has a BA in economics and a master’s degree in public policy, both from Georgetown University.

Aaron Churchill

Ohio Research Director, Thomas B. Fordham Institute



Aaron Churchill is the Ohio research director for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, where he has worked since 2012. In this role, Aaron oversees research and commentary aimed at strengthening education policy in Ohio. He writes regularly on Fordham’s blog, the [Ohio Gadfly Daily](#) on topics such as [state assessment](#) and [school accountability](#), [school funding](#), and educational choice including [public charter schools](#), [private school choice](#), [interdistrict open enrollment](#), and homeschooling. His work has appeared in media outlets, such as the [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), [Columbus Dispatch](#), [Cleveland Plain-Dealer](#), [Dayton Daily News](#), and [Toledo Blade](#). He has also been a guest on NPR’s [All Sides with Ann Fisher](#) and [The Sound of Ideas](#) and participated in various panels discussing education issues in Ohio. Aaron earned degrees from the University of Maryland, Wheaton College (IL), and Carnegie Mellon University.

Aaron Daffern

Director of Mathematics, Dallas Independent School District



Aaron has been a teacher, principal, and district administrator in the DFW area since 2000. He lives in Ft. Worth with his wife Heather and their four lovely children. He enjoys running, disc golfing, doing math problems, and leading professional development. He joined Dallas ISD in the Early Learning department in 2018 and has been the director of mathematics for the district since March 2024.

Stéphane Lavertu, Ph.D.

Professor of Public Policy, John Glenn College of Public Affairs

The Ohio State University

Senior Research Fellow, Thomas B. Fordham Institute



Stéphane Lavertu is a professor of public policy in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. He has a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin, a master’s degree from Stanford University, and a bachelor’s degree from The Ohio State University. His interdisciplinary research appears in education, economics, policy, and political science journals. He has over 20 years of experience conducting policy-relevant research that estimates the causal impact of K-12 education policies and governance arrangements on student outcomes.

Jonathan Plucker, Ph.D.

**Research Professor, Program Director, Master of Science in Education Policy
John Hopkins University School of Education**



Jonathan Plucker, is a Professor of Education and Program Director for the Master of Science in Education Policy program at the Johns Hopkins School of Education. He previously served as the Julian C. Stanley Endowed Professor of Talent Development at Johns Hopkins, the Raymond Neag Endowed Professor of Education at the University of Connecticut, and Professor of Educational Psychology and Cognitive Science at Indiana University. He is past-president of the National Association for Gifted Children and the Society for the Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts (APA Division 10). His research examines education policy, talent development, and creativity. Recent books include the 2nd edition of *Creativity and Innovation*, 3rd edition of *Critical Issues and Practices in Gifted Education* with Carolyn Callahan, and *Excellence Gaps in Education* with Scott Peters. He is an APA, APS, AERA, and AAAS Fellow, and a recipient of the Arnheim Award for Outstanding Achievement from APA and of the Distinguished Scholar Award from NAGC. He graduated with a B.S. in chemistry education and M.A. in educational psychology from the University of Connecticut. After briefly teaching at an elementary school in New York, he received his Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Virginia.

David Taylor

Superintendent and CEO, Dayton Early College Academy, Ohio



David Taylor is the Superintendent and CEO of the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA). He started his teaching career at DECA as a language arts and social studies teacher and has also served as assistant principal, principal, and deputy superintendent before assuming his current position. During his tenure DECA has earned several awards including the rating of “Excellent with Distinction” by the Ohio Department of Education, selection as one of America’s Top High Schools for “Closing the Gap” by Newsweek, the designation as one of America’s Best High Schools for five consecutive years by the US News & World Report, and selection as one of the Governor’s Innovation Award recipients in 2017. The Ohio Alliance of Public Charter Schools named him School Leader of the Year in 2014, and he was selected as a member of the Dayton Forty Under 40 in 2020. Originally a native of Coatesville, Pennsylvania, he moved to Ohio to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Middle Childhood Education from Cedarville University. He later earned a Master’s of Education from Cedarville and completed the Program for Leadership Development at the Harvard Business School. He has served as an adjunct professor at the University of Dayton and Wright State University and was a Lead Coach for the Montgomery County Equity Fellows. Mr. Taylor currently serves on several community boards.