

About Our Speakers

Ramona Morin Aguilar is currently the director of Family and Community Engagement in the Garland Independent School District. With 19 years in public education, she has been a bilingual teacher in Lubbock ISD, assistant principal and principal in Garland ISD, and has served previously as the Region 10 bilingual/ESL/migrant program coordinator. Aguilar was awarded a Raise Your Hand Texas Raising Family Partnerships fellowship to attend the Harvard Family Engagement Institute. She has also received a Texas PTA Honorary Life Membership and was awarded the 2018 Parent and Family Engagement Model School award at the Statewide Parent Involvement Conference. Aguilar received her undergraduate and master's degrees from Texas Tech University and a doctorate at Texas A&M University-Commerce.

Lawrence Allen, Jr., a third-generation educator, has served on the State Board of Education since 2005. A former teacher, assistant principal, and principal, Allen now works as a community relations liaison in Houston Independent School District's Strategic Partnerships office. A Democrat, Allen represents parts of Fort Bend and Harris counties. As a state board member, Allen has served on all the board's standing committees and served as vice chair of the board. Allen holds a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees from Prairie View A&M University.

Donna Bahorich is the chair of the 15-member State Board of Education. A Republican from Houston, Bahorich was first elected to the board in 2012 and Gov. Greg Abbott appointed her board chair in 2015 and re-appointed her in 2017. During her tenure on the board, she has focused on shortening and strengthening the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, making the instructional materials adoption process more transparent and supporting high-quality charter schools. The annual Learning Roundtable was Bahorich's brainchild and this is the fourth roundtable that has provided free training to Texas educators and policymakers. Bahorich, who worked in the telecommunications industry, holds a bachelor's degree in financial management from Virginia Tech University and a master's degree in counseling from Liberty University.

Sarah Baray is the chief executive officer of Pre-K 4 SA, San Antonio's award-winning early learning program. Baray has more than 25 years of experience in education. Before joining Pre-K 4 SA, she was a professor at Texas State University where she directed the doctoral program in school improvement and served as a researcher and instructor in the Educational and Community Leadership program. Her research interests center on policies and practices related to educational equity. As a scholar-practitioner, Baray utilizes research to inform practice, particularly as it relates to the role of high-quality early learning in educational outcomes. She began her education career in the Austin Independent School District, serving in various roles including teacher, principal, and district administrator.

HD Chambers has worked in the field of education for 33 years, including serving as superintendent of the Alief Independent School District since 2011. Previously, Chambers served as superintendent of the Stafford Municipal School District. He also taught in the Aldine Independent School District and served in various administrative roles in the Cypress-Fairbanks

Independent School District. He was honored as the Friends of Public Schools Ambassador of the Year in 2013-2014, 2014 Superintendent of the Year for Region 4, and the Region 4 Special Honoree Award for 2015.

Kari Garcia serves as the Texas FFA vice president from the Area X Association. The Eagle Pass FFA is her home chapter. She is a distinguished graduate from Eagle Pass High School. Garcia is pursuing a degree in Environmental Studies in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University and plans to attend law school. This year Garcia hopes to inspire FFA members to believe that they CAN. She is proud to have the opportunity to represent the Texas FFA this year.

Sharon Hoover is a leading figure in advancing school mental health (SMH) research, training, policy and practice at national, state, and local levels. Hoover is a licensed clinical psychologist and an associate professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. After providing direct mental health promotion and treatment service for several years in the Baltimore City Public Schools, she was appointed as director of Research for the national Center for School Mental Health (CSMH) in 2002. From 2005-2010, she guided the advancement of research and policy in her role as the CSMH director of research and analysis, and in 2010 became the CSMH principal investigator and co-director. Hoover has published extensively, with many peer-reviewed articles and editorial service, including serving as editor in chief of the journal, *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*.

Nicole Conley Johnson is the chief business and operations officer for the Austin Independent School District, where she is responsible for managing a more than \$1 billion budget. She has more than 15 years of financial management experience, more than a decade of which has been in an executive role. She has amassed a breadth of knowledge from serving large, complex urban systems, including: the New York City Department of Education, District of Columbia Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools and Atlanta Public Schools. She recently served on the Texas Commission on Public School Finance.

Tom Maynard is a member of the State Board of Education, representing District 10, which stretches from Freestone County to Waller County. Maynard, a Republican from Florence, has been actively engaged in education as a parent, teacher, school board trustee, non-profit executive, and state board member for more than 30 years. He served for 17 years as executive director of the Texas FFA Association, the nation's largest state career and technical student organization with an overall membership of more than 118,000 students. Maynard also served on the SBOE's Long-Range Plan for Public Education Steering Committee.

Mike Morath is the Texas commissioner of education. In office since January 2016, he heads the Texas Education Agency, which oversees pre-kindergarten through high school education for about 5.4 million public school students. He has worked to focus the state agency on his four priorities including: recruiting, supporting, and retaining teachers and principals; building a foundation of math and reading; connecting high school to career and college; and improving low-performing schools. Prior to becoming commissioner, Morath served on the Dallas

Independent School District board of trustees for more than four years. He holds a bachelor's degree from George Washington University.

Melody Parrish is the deputy commissioner of technology and the chief information officer for the Texas Education Agency. She oversees the agency's Information Technology Services/Statewide Education Data Systems. Parrish is a former mathematics and computer science teacher and served as a technology director in the Lockhart and Austin school districts. Parrish recently oversaw the creation of the state's *Long-Range Plan for Technology*.

Georgina Pérez, a Democrat from El Paso, serves on the State Board of Education member where she represents 40 counties in West and South Texas. Pérez, a former English teacher, is known as a passionate advocate for literacy. One of her literacy projects, Tu Libro, has provided more than 150,000 books to students who live in rural and impoverished parts of El Paso County and who don't have regular access to a library. She served on the State Board of Education's Long-Range Plan for Public Education Steering Committee.

Marta Plata has been the principal of Manuel Jara Elementary School in the Fort Worth Independent School District since 2005. She is recognized throughout the state of Texas as an innovative, compassionate and effective educator who empowers teachers, students, parents, and the community. She makes personal relationships with her staff, her students, their families and her neighbors a priority in everything she does. Among the many innovations she has started at Manuel Jara are the High F.I.V.E., that focuses on bringing fathers and men from the community, as well as any others who want to support students, to high five students and speak words of encouragement to them as they enter the school building on the first day of each 6-week period. She also created and implemented Parent University on her campus 6 years ago -- a program that helps parents grow in parenting and life skills and is now operating in school districts around the state. She holds a bachelor's degree from University of North Texas and a master's degree from Texas Women's University.

Usamah Rodgers serves as the assistant superintendent for strategic initiatives in the Dallas Independent School District. In this role she leads Dallas ISD's Post-Secondary, Pathways in Technology (P-TECH) and Early College Programs. Prior to assuming her current position, Rodgers served as the executive director of P-TECH and Early College programs where she was responsible for assisting with the design and implementation of systems to support campuses as Dallas ISD launched 18 P-TECH programs. Rodgers received a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Missouri State University, a Master of Education degree in education administration from the University of Texas at Austin and is currently pursuing a doctorate in education administration from the University of Texas at Austin.

David Vinson has served for almost eight years as superintendent of schools for the Wylie Independent School District, a fast-growth district in Collin County. He has worked in public education for more than 25 years. As a national leader in character education, Vinson created his own model of Achievement Education called "the Wylie Way." This model calls for the

schools to equip students with the core ethical values necessary to make their community, state and nation both smart and morally responsible.

Leigh Wall serves as superintendent of schools for the Santa Fe Independent School District in Santa Fe, Texas. As an educator for the past 37 years, she has served as an elementary, middle and high school teacher and coach, fine arts director, middle school and high school assistant principal, middle and high school principal, and, for the past 11 years, as superintendent. Wall holds a bachelor's and master's degree from Louisiana State University, master's certification from University of Houston, and doctorate from Walden University. She currently serves as president of the Board of Trustees for Learning Forward, an international non-profit organization serving more than 10,000 members across the globe, focused on supporting quality professional learning for every educator in every school.

Bryan J. Williams is the community superintendent in the Spring Branch Independent School District. In this role, Williams supports 22 campuses by focusing on student achievement, principal professional development, implementation of district initiatives, supporting campus improvement plans, and enhancing quality teaching and learning. Prior to accepting this role in September 2018, Williams served as the principal of Spring Branch Middle School. Under Williams' leadership, Spring Branch Middle participated in the 2016 Transcend + New Schools Collaborative, a cohort of 10 districts and charter networks designed to explore learning science, new models of education, and the demands of the 21st century. He was instrumental in leading his school's design team of parents, teachers, and administrators to spend an entire year designing a model of personalized learning (Atlantis & Endeavour Programs). Williams began his education career as an elementary teach in his Kansas City, Mo., his home town.

Lacy Wood is a principal technical assistance consultant for American Institutes for Research (AIR). Wood has more than 18 years of experience in the area of family and community engagement. In her current role, Wood leads policy work for the Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) focused on working with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to support family engagement and implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This work for the TXCC also includes partnering with TEA to lead the recently established Texas Council on Family-School Engagement. Wood chairs the Family Engagement State Leaders Network, a cadre of State Education Agency (SEA) family engagement staff across the United States, focused on providing resources and capacity building supports for SEA family engagement initiatives. She is the associate project director for the U.S. Department of Education's Statewide Family Engagement Center Technical Assistance initiative. Wood currently serves as vice-chair of the National Association of Family, School and Community Engagement's policy committee and is a founding board member of the association.