



LEADING MINDS

Challenging Conversations in Public Education



FEB 13, 2025

**ADAPTING TO A CHANGED WORLD:
TACKLING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM
AND REINVENTING PARENT
ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS POST-PANDEMIC**

WWW.BALTIMORECP.ORG



BALTIMORE
CURRICULUM
PROJECT

About Baltimore Curriculum Project

Founded in 1996, today Baltimore Curriculum Project (BCP) is the largest operator of local neighborhood, public charter schools in Maryland. We create safe, supportive learning environments for children PK-8 by providing innovative, research-based educational strategies, intensive teacher training and extensive support for administration and staff. We support our local neighborhood needs by tailoring our resources and support through community partnerships.

As one of the longest-running charter operators in Maryland, our schools are regularly recognized as some of the most highly acclaimed neighborhood charter schools in the state.



About Leading Minds

Since 2008, BCP has brought together local and national experts, through the Leading Minds symposium, with the purpose of engaging in a discussion of current issues affecting Baltimore City students, in order to influence policy and improve K-12 education.

Leading Minds attempts to challenge conventional wisdom through hard conversations that consider the complexity of education policy and prioritize lasting solutions over quick fixes.



Event Schedule

8:00 am-8:45 am: Breakfast

8:45 am-9:00 am: Welcome and Brenda Kahn Award Presentation

9:00 am-10:30 am: Leading Minds Symposium

10:30 am-10:45 am: Break

10:45 am-12:15 pm: Small Group Session 1

12:15 pm-1:30 pm: Lunch

1:30 pm-3:00 pm: Small Group Session 2

Leading Minds Program

8:45-10:30 am

Welcome Message

Harold Henry Jr.

Chief of Schools, Baltimore Curriculum Project

Brenda Kahn Award

Laura Doherty

President and CEO, Baltimore Curriculum Project

Introduction of Topic and Panelists

Joshua Michael, Ph.D.

Chair, Maryland State Department of Education School Board

Panel Discussion

Larry Simmons

Senior Fellow, Attendance Works

Mark Gaither

Principal, Wolfe Street Academy

Debra Brooks, Ed.D.

Director, Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success

Questions and Discussion

Moderator



Joshua Michael, Ph.D.

President of the Maryland State Department of Education and Executive Director of the Sherman Family Foundation

jmichael@shermanfamfdn.org

Joshua L. Michael, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Sherman Family Foundation, which provides grants to non-profit organizations to promote education and opportunities for young people in Baltimore, focusing on early childhood and K12 education. Born and raised in Maryland, he attended public schools and began his career as a public school teacher.

Previously, Dr. Michael served as the Director of Baltimore School Partnerships at UMBC with the Sherman Scholars Program, where he cultivated a pipeline of STEM educators and oversaw several signature partnership programs with Baltimore City schools, including the UMBC-Lakeland partnership. He designed evidence-based intervention programs, including the Reach Together Tutoring Program and the UMBC Summer Math Program. He taught middle school math and served as an instructional leader for six years at two turnaround schools in Baltimore City -- Booker T. Washington Middle School and Commodore John Rodgers Elementary/Middle School.

Dr. Michael received his Ph.D. from the UMBC School of Public Policy. His research focuses on mathematics achievement and education interventions for struggling students. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from UMBC in political science and secondary education and a Master of Science in school leadership from Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Michael is a board member of the Maryland Family Network, Cherry Hill Strong, and the Teach For America Baltimore Advisory Board. He lives in Baltimore City with his wife, Leslie, and their three children.

Panelists



Debra Brooks, Ed.D.,

Director, Mayor's Office of
Children and Family Success

debra.brooks@baltimorecity.gov

Debra Y. Brooks, Ed.D. was appointed to serve as Director of the Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success (MOCFS) in July 2022. In this role, Dr. Brooks is responsible for bringing together the tools of City government, Baltimore's collective love for children, and the vast assets of our communities to radically improve the lives of Baltimore's children and families through advocacy, policymaking, and programmatic initiatives around MOCFS's core values.

Dr. Brooks has more than 30 years of experience in education. She has served as a teacher, elementary and middle school building leader and Central Office administrator. Prior to joining the Scott Administration, she was the Executive Director of Special Education for Baltimore City Public Schools where she was a staunch advocate for students living with disabilities. She earned her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Maryland Baltimore County, a Master of Science in special Education from Coppin State College and a Doctorate in Education with a specialization in Higher Education from Morgan State University.

Dr. Brooks values the importance of student voice and self-advocacy. She believes that all students are capable of achieving greatness when given the appropriate supports and services while attending school and transitioning to post-secondary opportunities.

Most importantly, Dr. Brooks is a proud resident of Baltimore City. She has three adult daughters who graduated from Baltimore City Public Schools and is a grandmother of seven, four currently attending City Schools.

Panelists



Larry Simmons

Director of Community Engagement at Nobody Asked Me Campaign, Attendance Works Sr. Fellow

larrycsimmons@gmail.com

Larry founded LCSIMMONS Consults in July 2020 to support the growth and sustainability of BIPOC-led organizations. He leverages nearly 20 years of experience in program development, process improvement, fundraising, leadership development, advocacy, and community organizing. His experience spans the nonprofit and public sectors, including Baltimore's Promise, Baltimore City Health Department, Elev8 Baltimore, Child First Authority at Westside Elementary, and Y of Central Maryland.

Larry is native to West Baltimore, and is committed to improving the health, wellness, and economic vibrancy of Baltimore City's neighborhoods; to the young people of Baltimore; and economic, social, and racial justice. Larry is a 2018 JHU Bunting Fellow, a BMe Vanguard, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation IRL Fellow and currently serving as a co-primary investigator and the Director of Community Engagement for the Nobody Asked Me Campaign Research Team, Chair of the Board of Directors for the Baltimore Children and Youth Fund, and CO Chair of both Wide Angle Youth Media and New Song Academy Board of Directors.

Larry is known for his ability to expose injustice while holding himself and others accountable to create alternative solutions. He easily navigates through often siloed city initiatives, bridging gaps and often bringing non-traditional stakeholders and leaders together into partnership. As a valued and respected community leader, Larry uses his influence and reach to advance community improvements for those who need it most. Larry is a constant and consistent presence in the city who believes that our community's future depends on the success of our children.

Panelists



Mark Gaither

Principal, Wolfe Street Academy

cgaither@bcps.k12.md.us

This is Mark's 20th year serving as the principal of Wolfe Street Academy (WSA), a public charter school in Southeast Baltimore operated by the Baltimore Curriculum Project (BCP). Under his leadership, the school has become a model for educational success and community involvement, with a focus on academic achievement and supporting the whole child through the Community Schools Strategy.

Wolfe Street Academy serves a diverse group of students, with over 80% living in poverty and speaking a language other than English at home. Mark and his team work hard to create an environment where all students can succeed. As a result, the school moved from the 77th to the 2nd highest performing elementary school on the previous state standardized test, and consistently outperforms the Baltimore City average on the PARCC and MCAP tests.

WSA has gained national recognition for its success as a Community School. Mark's efforts to improve student outcomes have earned him several awards, including the 2020 Heart of the School Award from the Fund for Educational Excellence and recognition as one of the district's Transformational Principals since 2015.

Mark also shows his commitment to the community through the daily routine at Wolfe Street Academy. Every morning, he holds a school-wide meeting where students, staff, and parents come together. Mark believes that when schools and communities work together, students are more likely to succeed.

Mark lives in Baltimore with his wife and has two sons in college.

Afternoon breakout sessions



In the afternoon, BCP staff will participate in two interactive breakout sessions designed to explore strategies and solutions for supporting students, families, and schools in a post-pandemic world. The sessions will focus on key topics such as building strong family-school partnerships, effective communication with families, improving student attendance and academic success, and strengthening community support systems.

Participants will engage in discussions and collaborate on practical, actionable solutions to address the challenges students and families are facing today, with the guidance of both external experts and internal colleagues who bring firsthand knowledge of BCP schools' needs and strengths.

These sessions aim to provide practical tools, insights, and opportunities for ongoing collaboration to drive positive outcomes in the evolving educational landscape.

Breakout Sessions

1

Revisiting the community school strategy

Alexandria Warrick Adams, Executive Director of Elev8 Baltimore
aadams@elev8baltimore.org

Room 127

Participants will analyze the BCPS policy governing community schools to determine ways to improve efforts at the school level, and collaborate to identify current practices in their schools and identify adaptations that may improve outcomes for engagement and lead to improved attendance.

2

Mining and leveraging resources of community partners

Larry Simmons, Senior Fellow, Attendance Works
larrycsimmons@gmail.com

Room 129

Participants will explore the various agencies and organizations available to support school-based initiatives around attendance and engagement, and develop specific requests and strategies for connecting with them.

3

Restorative Practices and Classroom Management to Support Attendance

Todd Wade, Director of Restorative Practice, City Springs
tcwade@bcps.k12.md.us

Library

Participants will explore ways of leveraging relationships and RP to improve attendance and engagement.

Breakout Sessions

4

Engaging families using Restorative Practices

Andria Cole, Founder and ED of The Restorative Project
andria@therestorativeproject.net

Room 315 (A side)

Participants will explore ways to use RP to engage families in the educational process, encouraging families to participate in school-based activities to drive their commitment to attendance for their students.

5

Building an effective School Family Council

Jacqueline Clary Thomas, 1st grade teacher, HHA
jclary@hha47.org

Room 130

Participants will explore strategies for building and maintaining a strong SFC; including how to choose team members, how to keep members engaged, what kinds of activities the SFC should sponsor and/or engage in at the school, and how to develop and run meeting agendas for maximum engagement and impact.

6

Engaging ESOL Families

Heidi Weiss-Beedie, Community School Coordinator, Wolfe Street Academy
hweiss-beedie@elev8baltimore.org

Room 325

Participants will explore strategies to engage ESOL families in the educational process; and ways to help with communication barriers.

Breakout Sessions

7

Effective Strategies for improving attendance and engagement of students with disabilities and their families

Kwame Simmons, Founder of The Simmons Advantage
ksimmons@simmonsadvantage.com

Room 231

Participants will explore ways that teachers of SWD can create engaging and impactful learning environments to support students' desire to come to school, as well as strategies for engaging and fostering relationships with families of SWD.

8

Pathway to Wellness

Steve Plunk, Director of Restorative Practices, HHA
splunk@hha47.org

Room 232

Explore the impact your environment has on your well-being and explore ways to incorporate elements of feng shui into your work and living space, plus the science of sleep and exploring ways to enhance your sleep hygiene.

9

Leveraging District Resources to Combat Absenteeism

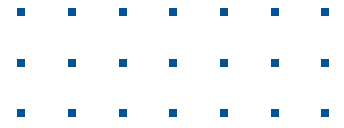
Vanessa Stone, Director, Family Engagement, City Schools
VStone01@bcps.k12.md.us

Room 230

Participants will learn about resources and supports provided by central office to support reducing chronic absenteeism and promoting engagement



BALTIMORE CURRICULUM PROJECT



baltimorecp



baltimorecurriculumproject



baltimorecp.org



Sign up for our monthly newsletter direct to your inbox.

Save the Date!

BALTIMORE
CURRICULUM
PROJECT
PRESENTS

ARE YOU SMARTER THAN A BCP STUDENT?

JOIN US
May 15, 2025
5:30 - 9:30 PM
BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY
WWW.BALTIMORECP.ORG

local celebrities
& students
compete!

1ST