LEADING MINDS

Challenging Conversations in Public Education

FEB 6, 2026

30 YEARS OF LEARNING: REFLECTING ON THE PAST TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS
BALTIMORE CURRICULUM PROJECT
SINCE 1996

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.

30 YEARS

BALTIMORE CURRICULUM PROJECT

CITY SPRINGS
EST 1966
ELEMENTARY / MIDDLE SCHOOL

FREDERICK
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

GOVANS
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

HAMPSTEAD HILL
ACADEMY

PIMLICO
ELEMENTARY / MIDDLE SCHOOL

Wolfe
Street Academy

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 Sessions

12:15 pm-1:30 pm: Lunch

1:30 pm-3:00 pm: Closing Plenary Session

Leading Minds Program
8:45-10:30 am
Auditorium

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

Alison Perkins-Cohen
Chief of Staff, Baltimore City Public Schools

Panel Discussion

Roger Schulman
CEO, Fund for Educational Excellence

Irma Johnson
Member, Maryland State Board of Education

Ken Shelton
Education Technology Leader and Author

Questions and Discussion

Moderator

Alison Perkins-Cohen

Chief of Staff, Baltimore City Public Schools

Currently in her tenth year as Chief of Staff of Baltimore City Public Schools, Alison Perkins-Cohen serves as second in command to CEO Sonja Santelises, managing day-to-day strategic priorities and decision-making in finance, communications, facilities management, personnel, emergency management, school operations, transportation and government relations.

Prior to her role as COS, Alison was the Executive Director of the Office of New Initiatives for five years, overseeing implementation of City Schools' portfolio management strategy. In that role she developed the district's 10-year plan for the creation of 21st century facilities for all students.

Prior to coming to City Schools, Alison worked extensively in Washington DC, including working for the Senate Appropriations Committee and at the Office of Management and Budget. Alison also served as Executive Director of the Baltimore Curriculum Project for six years, securing significant gains in achievement and enrolment for five charter conversion schools.

Alison earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Massachusetts and a Masters in Public Policy from the Claremont Graduate University. She lives in Baltimore with her husband and two sons, both graduates of Baltimore City Public Schools.

Panelist

Roger Schulman

CEO, Fund for Educational Excellence

Roger Schulman is President and CEO of the Fund for Educational Excellence, Baltimore's only education fund. His career in education began more than 30 years ago as a Teach for America teacher in Baltimore City Public Schools—an experience that sparked a lifelong commitment to the city.

After working with The New Teacher Project, Roger joined the Fund in 2010, where he led a strategic realignment focused on expanding resources for schools, accelerating effective solutions, and celebrating success. Under his leadership, the Fund has grown significantly, securing tens of millions in philanthropic investments, awarding more than 225 grants to City Schools principals, and elevating Baltimore education through data-driven reports and leadership recognition.

Roger remains deeply committed to ensuring Baltimore's students receive the opportunities they deserve.

Panelist

Dr. Irma Johnson

Member, Maryland State Board of Education

Dr. Irma E. Johnson has brought over 45 years of expertise in educational leadership, professional development, curriculum mapping, teacher development, and instructional strategic planning. She currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Coppin State University, where she prepares future school leaders for success.

Prior to joining Coppin State University, Dr. Johnson dedicated more than four decades to the Baltimore City Public Schools System, serving as a teacher, department head, assistant principal, principal, and executive director for K–8 schools. Throughout her tenure, she led initiatives in program development, improved instructional practices, supported urban school leadership development, and advocated for resources to strengthen public education.

Dr. Johnson specializes in coaching novice principals to establish effective systems and structures, solve problems, and make data-driven decisions. After a distinguished career in P–12 education, she continues to mentor new school leaders to achieve excellence in administration. Additionally, she has served as an Adjunct Professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Education, teaching courses in educational leadership and advanced instructional strategies.

As a member of the Maryland State Board of Education, Dr. Johnson contributes her expertise to several committees, including the Education Policy Committee and the Early Childhood Committee, where she collaborates on policies that advance student success and support leadership and teacher development statewide.

Panelist

Ken Shelton

Educational Technology Leader and Author

Ken is a multi-award-winning educator, best-selling author, and internationally recognized expert in educational equity, instructional design, and artificial intelligence in education. With over two decades of experience and a Master's in Education, he has led transformative work in school systems through leadership development, inclusive learning, and policy innovation.

Ken has served on statewide education task forces and is co-author of The Promises and Perils of AI in Education. His honors include multiple awards from ISTE and the 2024 CUE Platinum Disc Award to name a few. He speaks globally on creating equitable, human-centered learning environments through responsible and visionary use of emerging technologies.

Break-Out Sessions 10:45 am-12:15 pm

Following the Leading Minds Symposium, BCP staff will participate in interactive breakout sessions designed to dive deeper into areas of shared interest. These sessions will explore both the history of key topics and their future implications, including the Maryland legislative process, school funding, school leadership, community schools, school culture, and more.

The breakout sessions are designed to provide practical tools, actionable insights, and opportunities for ongoing collaboration—helping drive positive outcomes in an evolving educational landscape.

A100 The History of Restorative Practices Globally and Locally

Todd Wade, Director of Restorative Practices and Peer Mediation at City Springs EMS

We will briefly explore the global history of Restorative Practices and delve deeper into our local RP history. This interactive session will then embrace and understand the incredible positive impact RP has had BCP and our city.

A111 From Baltimore to Annapolis: City Schools' 2026 Legislative Priorities

Melissa Chalmers Broome, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, Baltimore City Public Schools

This session will provide an in-depth look at Baltimore City Public Schools' 2026 legislative priorities, with a focus on preserving sustainable state funding and resources under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future amidst ongoing federal uncertainty. Participants will explore key priorities such as ensuring accurate methodologies for counting poverty, as well as the need for critical capital investments in the face of a looming state budget deficit. The discussion will highlight ways for educators to enhance the district's advocacy efforts.

A113 School Funding under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

Sandi Jacobs, executive director, strategic resourcing, Baltimore City Public Schools

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future fundamentally changed how schools in Maryland are funded, bringing an equity lens to how funds flow from the state to districts and from districts to schools. The session will discuss how the funding structures under the Blueprint work and what this means for schools and classrooms in City Schools.

Please note this session will not include anything specific to FY27 budget planning or the charter methodology.

A302 Schools Have Evolved: So Must School Culture

City Springs Coaching Team (Elena Gagnier, Stacey Hicks, Maddie Phillips, Ribekah Oroke, Emily Abel)

Over the past 30 years, public education has grown more complex—making strong academic systems necessary, but no longer sufficient. This interactive session explores how and why school culture has become a critical driver of student and staff success. Participants will reflect on shifts in education, examine current culture challenges within their own schools, and learn how systems such as Leader in Me, Culturally Responsive Teaching and the House System work together as modern, aligned frameworks for building belonging, leadership, and engagement. Attendees will leave with one concrete action step to strengthen culture in their school community.

Bridgeroom Science of Reading and DI

Nicole Hauser and **Rebecca Wheeler,** Academic Coaches at Govans Elementary

To build a shared understanding of the Science of Reading and reflect on how evidence-based reading practices align with our current instruction/curriculum. Discussion materials will be provided in order to create a debate-like session where colleagues can discuss the pros and cons to the Science of Reading and how reading instruction has changed over the past 30 years.

A303   The History and Evolution of Community Schools

Alexandria Warrick Adams, CEO of Elev8 Baltimore, Inc

During this session, participants will learn about the history of community school locally and its evolution. From humble beginnings to being imbedded in one of the most robust educational funding formulas nationally, Baltimore is leading the way.

A304   The Evolution of School Leadership

Dr. Irma E. Johnson, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership | Coppin State University; State Board of Education Member

This session explores how the role of school leaders has evolved over time—from managers to instructional and community leaders—and examines the growing expectations placed on leaders today. Participants will also look ahead to the skills and mindsets needed to lead schools effectively in the future.

A306   School Attendance, Then and Now: Past trends and what is currently working for us!

Samantha St. Germain, School Counselor and **Kara Silber,** School Social Worker at Govans Elementary

In this session, we will take a look at school attendance trends over the last 30 years. Then we will explore the plan our team currently uses to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism. Walk away with context of how school attendance rates and perceptions have changed over time in addition to specific steps and tools you can use in your school right now.

A307   Design Matters: Rethinking How We Lead and the Impact It Has on Learning Environments

Ken Shelton, Educational Technology Leader and Author

This talk will explore empowered learning, focusing on innovative learning design, responsiveness to learner needs, and strategic use of educational technology. The talk will examine the design conditions necessary to foster engaging, culturally relevant, personalized educational experiences. We will look at the importance of dynamic learning space designs and key leadership practices that support learner growth, educator empowerment, and provide transformative experiences, all while highlighting the essential role of educational technology in enriching learning environments.

Closing Plenary Session
1:30-3:00 pm
Auditorium

Reimagining Learning with AI:
A Pathway To Empowerment

Ken Shelton

Educational Technology Leader and Author

This talk will explore the promises and perils of leveraging AI in education. On one hand, AI holds the potential to create more personalized learning experiences. On the other hand, issues such as bias, problematic data, flawed design, and over-reliance on AI risk deepening existing pitfalls. We'll delve into strategies for maximizing AI's benefits while addressing its risks, ensuring that AI becomes a tool for true empowerment in education. AI can be used and designed for good, and we have to lead the way.

Save the Date!

30
SINCE 1996

30 Years of Impact

Join us in celebrating at the annual
Are You Smarter Than a BCP Student?
Gala!

Thursday, April 30

6:00 PM — 10:00 PM
Maryland Science Center

Cocktails & hors d'œuvres

30th Anniversary Video Premiere

Awards & special thanks

Are You Smarter Than A BCP Student?
Game Show

Dinner, dessert, and open bar

Get tickets online! Individual tickets or
table for 10 available.
Can't make it? Please consider
donating to support the BCP mission.