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LESN Ancillary Meeting
Participant List

2018 National Forum
ON EDUCATION POLICY
YOUR EDUCATION POLICY CONVENING.

Other Speakers and Session Leads

Stephanie Aragon
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Stephanie joined Education Commission of the States in January 2015. She works on various topics related to K-12 education, focusing most of her efforts on issues related to teacher recruitment and retention. Prior, Stephanie held various positions at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law and at a private law firm. Stephanie holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Colorado at Boulder, as well as a master’s degree in public policy/education policy from the University of Denver’s Institute for Public Policy Studies. Outside the office, Stephanie enjoys tri training, dreaming alongside her husband, David, and keeping pace with her always curious, always active son, Elijah.

Neal Holly
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Neal joined Education Commission of the States in February 2017. He provides project management, staff supervision and development, and budget oversight to large-scale projects. He stays current on states’ political and governance structures, as well as policy climates, to better serve their postsecondary and workforce needs. Prior, Neal served as vice chancellor for policy and planning for the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical Education. He has also served multiple staff roles at public and private colleges and universities throughout North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. He holds a bachelor’s degree in history from Wingate University, a master’s degree in higher education administration from Appalachian State University and a doctorate of philosophy in higher education administration from the College of William and Mary. He enjoys fishing, camping and spending time with his wife and two beagles.

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Joellen joined the National Conference of State Legislatures in 2015. Joellen serves as the education program’s career pathways expert, covering the continuum of K-12 education, postsecondary education and workforce systems. Prior, Joellen worked as a science teacher in Mississippi and Colorado. Joellen holds a bachelor’s of science in journalism from Ohio University and a master’s in social work from the University of Denver.

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Emily joined Education Commission of the States in December 2015. In this role, she supports states on issues of school finance across the entire P-20 continuum. Prior, Emily worked at the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., where she helped launch Ben Bernanke's Blog. While in grad school, she worked at the Colorado Department of Higher Education and on the Emmy Award-winning Truth Test Team at 9NEWS/KUSA in Denver. A proud Pioneer, Emily earned her bachelor’s degree and her master’s of public policy from the University of Denver. Outside of the office, Emily enjoys board games, show tunes and trivia.

Alyssa Rafa
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Alyssa joined Education Commission of the States in November 2015. As a policy analyst, she focuses on various topics related to K-12 education, including school climate, accountability, assessments and school improvement.
Prior, Alyssa worked and interned for several nonprofit organizations, holding positions in policy, development and administration. Alyssa holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from California State University, San Bernardino and a master’s degree in international relations from the University of Denver’s Josef Korbel School of International Studies. Outside of work, Alyssa enjoys spending time with her family, coaching youth volleyball and traveling with her husband.

Sara Shelton  
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Sara joined Education Commission of the States in February 2016. As a member of the state relations team, Sara strives to serve all stakeholders of Education Commission of the States by cultivating relationships and building partnerships. Prior, Sara directed civic engagement initiatives at The Civic Canopy, a local nonprofit, where she helped build and support a statewide Civic Health Network. Sara also spent 10 years at the National Conference of State Legislatures, working on state education policy. Sara holds a bachelor’s degree in forestry from the University of Montana and a master’s degree in public administration from the University of Colorado at Denver. Sara enjoys spending her free time exploring the rugged Rocky Mountains with her adventurous kids and husband.

Lauren Sisneros  
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Lauren joined Education Commission of the States in August 2015 and is currently a member of the state relations team. Prior, she was a policy analyst, primarily focused on postsecondary issues. Lauren has also held positions at the Colorado Department of Higher Education, Colorado Legislative Council Staff and Adams State University. She earned a bachelor’s degree in business management from Colorado State University–Pueblo and a master’s degree in education and human resource studies from Colorado State University. Lauren is a Colorado native, and enjoys spending time with her husband and two children exploring the outdoors of Colorado.

John Turcotte  
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John is a career legislative program evaluator, who has now headed legislative program evaluation staffs in three states over a 40-year period. The Legislative Services Commission appointed John as the first director of the Program Evaluation Division in June 2007, following his services as project manager of the North Carolina General Assembly’s Government Performance Audit Committee in 2006. John was CEO of Turcotte Public Administration Consulting and Training, LLC from 2003–07. TPACT provided training and consulting for audit and other knowledge-based staffs at all levels of government. From 1996–2003, John was director of the Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. From 1977–95, John served as director of Mississippi’s Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review. In Mississippi, Florida and North Carolina, John and his staffs produced over 907 technical reports and program evaluations. He was the national staff chair of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) in 1994. John has also been an adjunct professor of political science at Mississippi College and Millsaps College and an instructor of American Government at Hinds Community College in Jackson, Miss. He began his career as a math and science teacher in Mississippi. He received a bachelor’s degree in political science with highest honors and a master’s degree in political science and American government from the University of Southern Mississippi. He completed additional study at Millsaps College, the Federal Executive Institute, Mississippi State Executive Development Institute and the NCSL Legislative Staff Management Institute. In 1986, the Council of State Governments selected John as one of the first group of Henry Toll Fellows.
Julie Woods
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Julie is a senior policy analyst. In her role, she researches and analyzes K-12 education policies and provides support to policymakers on education issues, with a focus on standards, assessments, accountability and federal law. Julie earned her law degree and master’s degree in education policy from the Pennsylvania State University, and is a Colorado-licensed attorney. She has taught legal research and writing to attorneys from around the world and taught English as a second language to immigrants. Julie is a proud Texan, married a Midwesterner and is raising a Colorado-native daughter.

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Jennifer first joined Education Commission of the States in 1997. In her current role, she conducts research and analysis and counsels states on numerous issues related to high school, college readiness and transitions to postsecondary, in addition to STEM topics from early learning through postsecondary. Previously, Jennifer served as the co-director of Education Commission of the States’ Information Clearinghouse, where she honed her expertise on high school issues while performing, coordinating and overseeing research, analysis and technical assistance across issues from early learning through postsecondary. Jennifer’s education experience also includes teaching adult English as a second language in Slovakia and Denver. When not bent on saving the world through better education policy, she loves travel, yoga, cooking (including inflicting new recipes on her reluctant husband), watching documentaries and spending time with her family.