

OCTOBER 28-30, 2025

Cradle-to-Career Fellowship Site Visit

Spartanburg, South Carolina

EdRedesign
OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL



Speaker Biographies

(in order of appearance)



Denisse Arias

**Director, Cradle-to-Career Leadership & Learning,
EdRedesign, Harvard Graduate School of Education**

Denisse Arias is the Director for Cradle-to-Career Leadership and Learning and oversees signature talent development programs and initiatives, including EdRedesign's inaugural Fellowship for Cradle-to-Career Partnership Leaders and By All Means Senior Fellows Program.

Denisse brings experience in equity-focused leadership development, cross-sector collaboration, education systems transformation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning within education and international development. Prior to joining EdRedesign, Denisse held various roles at Teach For All, supporting leaders across all regions pursuing systems change and collective leadership efforts, most recently as the Director for Leadership Development & Equity. During her time at Teach For All, Denisse also co-led a 17-person team responsible for designing and executing over 50 learning experiences, Fellowships, and communities of practice for network stakeholders. She also supported multiple multilateral partnerships, with USAID, the European Commission, and the World Bank. Denisse co-launched the Leading from Lived Experience Fellowship from 2019-2024, a leadership development opportunity for network members who themselves had experienced inequities within their contexts.

A Teach For America Alum, Denisse taught in her community and served as the inaugural Co-Board Chair for the Teach For America – Massachusetts' Homegrown Alumni Board. In June 2024, Denisse was selected as a Hispanics in Philanthropy Lideres Fellow. Denisse serves as the co-Board Chair for Shout Mouse Press, a non-profit publishing organization that supports youth in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV). She holds a B.A and B.S. from

Boston University and a Master's in Public Administration (MPA) from Columbia University's School of International & Public Affairs.



Russell Booker

Chief Executive Officer, Spartanburg Academic Movement; By All Means Senior Fellow, EdRedesign, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Russell Booker is the Chief Executive Officer of the Spartanburg Academic Movement in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Russell is a devoted champion of education and community advancement, with over 30 years of leadership experience across the education and nonprofit sectors. His life's work centers on creating opportunity and empowering students for lives of leadership, purpose, and service. As Chief Executive Officer of the Spartanburg Academic Movement, he is spearheading Movement 2030, a bold, integrated economic mobility plan designed to help thousands of Spartanburg's children chart a path to upward mobility.

Following his retirement as Superintendent of Spartanburg County School District Seven, Russell continues to shape national and local systems of support for children and families. He currently chairs the StriveTogether Board of Directors and serves on the boards of Purpose Built Communities, Wingate University, the Mary Black Foundation, and the Spartanburg Regional Hospital Foundation. His impact has been widely recognized. Russell is a recipient of the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Humanitarian Award, was named South Carolina Superintendent of the Year, and has been inducted into the South Atlantic Conference Hall of Fame as a Distinguished Athlete Alumni. In 2020, he received South Carolina's highest civilian honor—the Order of the Palmetto. Most recently, he was named the 2023 Neville Holcombe Distinguished Citizen by OneSpartanburg, Inc.

A proud member of the Spartanburg Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and the South Carolina Liberty Fellowship, Russell is deeply engaged in his community. He earned his B.S. in Education from Wingate University and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of South Carolina. In recognition of his contributions, he has also been awarded two honorary doctorate degrees. He served as a By All Means Senior Fellow at the EdRedesign Lab at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education in the 2023-2025 Cohort.

Russell and his wife, Sheryl, reside in Spartanburg and are the proud parents of two sons. Grant, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, was commissioned as a U.S. Marine Corps officer in 2023, and Maxwell is a member of the Harvard College Class of 2026. The family worships at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church.



Brenda Lee Pryce

Founder of the Spartanburg Heritage Committee, South Carolina State House of Representatives (1995 - 2005)

Brenda Lee Pryce is an author and civic leader whose work centers on preserving and amplifying the history of Spartanburg, South Carolina. She is co-author of *North of Main: Spartanburg's Historic Black Neighborhoods of North Dean Street, Gas Bottom, and Back of the College* (Hub City Press, 2024) and *South of Main* (Hub City Press, 2005), landmark community histories documenting the rise, displacement, and enduring legacy of Black neighborhoods in Spartanburg. *North of Main* was released on October 22, 2024, and spans 250 pages with 150+ archival photographs and maps.

From 1995 to 2005, Pryce represented House District 31 in the South Carolina House of Representatives—the first Black woman from Spartanburg elected to the state legislature. During her tenure, she served on the Labor, Commerce and Industry Committee, helped secure funding for breast-cancer education for underserved women in the Upstate, and sponsored a resolution honoring Martin Luther King Jr. with a stretch of South Church Street designation.

A founding member and longtime leader within the Spartanburg African American Heritage & Culture Committee, Pryce has been central to recent heritage initiatives—including the Southside Cultural Monument project, which reached a public unveiling in 2025. She has also held roles with the Urban League of the Upstate, the Spartanburg Development Council, and Wofford College's President's Advisory Council. In recognition of her decades of public service and community history work, Wofford College awarded Pryce an Honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2023. A lifelong Southside resident, she graduated from Carver High School (1966) and attended the University of South Carolina.



Keisha Gray

Chief Strategy Officer, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Keisha Gray is the Chief Strategy Officer at the Spartanburg Academic Movement, where she steers cross-sector strategy to advance SAM's cradle-to-career agenda across initiatives in early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and community resilience. Her portfolio includes partnering with SAM's Centers (e.g., Early Childhood Success, Youth Engagement & Partnerships, Postsecondary Success) to align programs, data, and community partnerships that boost educational attainment and economic mobility in Spartanburg County.

Before joining SAM, Keisha led human resources teams in professional sports and media—serving as Director of Human Resources for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and previously for the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* Media Group. Earlier, she was Program Director for Early Childhood Development at the Mary Black Foundation, where she helped shape community investments and frameworks that advanced health equity and early learning.

A frequent collaborator across Spartanburg, Keisha is an active partner in countywide coalitions and has been featured speaking on SAM's work to expand family supports (Hello Family) and strengthen postsecondary pathways and workforce readiness.

Keisha holds a B.S. in Biology (minor in Psychology) from the University of South Carolina and a master's in Human Resource Development from Webster University. Her community leadership includes service with the Spartanburg Housing Authority, the Junior League of Spartanburg, and the Spartanburg Preparatory School board, among others.



Marquice Clark
Principal, The Cleveland Academy of Leadership,
Spartanburg School District 7

Marquice Clark is principal of The Cleveland Academy of Leadership, where he has led a multi-year turnaround since 2019—earning the school its first-ever “Excellent” rating on the South Carolina School Report Card (now back-to-back) and significantly boosting student outcomes. In 2024, he was named the 2025 South Carolina Elementary Principal of the Year by the

South Carolina Association of School Administrators, recognition that cited sharp gains in proficiency—ELA from 20% to 52%, math from 13% to 58%, and science from 7% to 55%—and reductions in discipline referrals under his leadership.

A former second-grade teacher and assistant principal at Cleveland, Marquice became principal after serving in those roles on the same campus, helping to build a culture of continuous improvement in partnership with community organizations. His team's work has been recognized nationally: Cleveland received StriveTogether's Cheryl Broadnax Award for Innovation and Results in 2024 for driving better and more equitable outcomes for students and families. The school is also a FranklinCovey Leader in Me Lighthouse School, reflecting its sustained focus on student leadership and aligned academic systems.

Clark earned his Ed.D. from Clemson University in 2023 and is an alumnus of the Call Me MISTER program. He holds a B.S. in Elementary Education (History minor) from Morris College, plus an M.A. in Administration & Supervision and an Education Specialist (Ed.S.) degree from Furman University.



Julie Fowler

Superintendent, Spartanburg County School District 3

Julie Fowler is the superintendent of Spartanburg County School District Three, where she leads a cradle-to-career vision for student success across Cannons, Cowpens, and Pacolet Elementary Schools, Clifdale Middle, Gettys D. Broome High, and the Daniel Morgan Technology Center. She was selected to lead District Three in 2023 and is the district's current superintendent.

With nearly four decades in education, Fowler previously served as deputy state superintendent for College & Career Readiness at the South Carolina Department of Education and as superintendent of Abbeville County School District, among other cabinet-level roles in Greenwood 51 and McCormick. She has also served the state education agency as a director and dispute-resolution officer.

Under her leadership, District Three is a core partner in a \$15 million Full-Service Community Schools initiative with Spartanburg Academic Movement and District Seven, expanding integrated academic, health, and family support for students. She also serves ex officio on the Daniel Morgan Technology Center governing board.

Fowler began her career as a special education teacher after earning her B.S. (1985) and M.Ed. (1988) from Winthrop University and later completed a Ph.D. at Clemson University. She served eight years on Winthrop's Board of Trustees, chairing the presidential search that selected the university's 12th president.



Randall Gary

Superintendent, Spartanburg County School District 5

Randall Gary is superintendent of Spartanburg County School District Five, where he leads a 14-school, PreK–12 district serving the Duncan–Lyman–Wellford–Reidville communities. His recent work includes major capital improvements—such as the new James F. Byrnes High School stadium complex—and districtwide strategic planning tied to “Bond 2025.”

Gary became superintendent of District Five on July 1, 2019, after serving as superintendent of Lexington County School District Three from 2015 to 2019. Earlier, he was principal of Dent Middle School in Richland Two, where he was named South Carolina's Middle School Principal of the Year in 2010.

He serves on the University of South Carolina Upstate Foundation Board (elected in 2023) and is an active collaborator with regional partners advancing cradle-to-career outcomes for

students. A career educator with classroom, principal, and superintendent experience, Gary holds an Ed.D. and has a background in civil engineering technology.



Darryl Owings

Superintendent-in-Residence / K-12 Liaison, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Darryl Owings serves as Superintendent-in-Residence and K-12 Liaison at the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM), where he strengthens partnerships with superintendents and school leaders across Spartanburg County. A founding board director of SAM, he stepped down from the board to take on this role.

Before joining SAM, Owings led Spartanburg County School District Six for 21 years, retiring in 2023 after 31 years in the district and 36 years in public education; he was the district's second-longest-serving superintendent. The board appointed Ken Kiser to succeed him later that year.

An educator and leader rooted in the community, Owings previously served as principal of Dorman High School and Gable Middle School and began his career teaching at Spartanburg High School. He holds an Ed.D. and a master's degree from the University of South Carolina and a B.A. from Newberry College, where he was inducted into the Newberry Athletics Hall of Fame in 2009.

Among his signature initiatives as superintendent, Owings championed District Six's Farm-to-School program—recognized with Upstate Forever's 2018 Tommy Wyche Land Conservation Champion Award—and helped build a districtwide culture of health and nutrition. The district also established the Darryl F. Owings "Make a Difference" Scholarship Fund in his honor.



Savannah Ray

Director of Center for Youth Engagement & Partnerships, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Savannah Ray serves as the Director of Center for Youth Engagement and Partnerships, leading SAM's Out-of-School Time Collaborative and the Youth Philanthropy Board.

A native of Spartanburg County, Savannah works to broaden active relationships with organizations across the county's diverse nonprofit, faith, and business sectors, willing to align their actions in support of children across Spartanburg County. Savannah was previously

employed with the Girl Scouts of South Carolina - Mountains to Midlands, leading outreach teams.

Savannah earned her Master of Public Administration from the University of Georgia and Bachelor of Arts in Communications Studies from Furman University.



Julie Denesha

Manager, Workforce & Pipeline Development, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System

Julie Denesha is a passionate healthcare leader, educator, and vibrant workforce strategist dedicated to building equitable and sustainable career pathways in healthcare.

As Manager of Workforce Development at Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System (SRHS), she leads initiatives that connect education, community, and healthcare to cultivate the next generation of professionals.

Julie holds a Master of Science in Nursing Education from Chamberlain College of Nursing and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of South Carolina–Spartanburg. This combination of clinical and business education enables her to bridge clinical expertise with strategic leadership and systems thinking, fostering collaboration and promoting teamwork across disciplines to drive meaningful results.

Her career spans nursing education, student services, and organizational development, giving her a unique perspective on aligning talent development with both organizational and community needs. As an educator, she has learned to inspire, guide, and empower others to grow skills that also define her leadership approach.

At SRHS, Julie has led the design and implementation of career exploration programs, immersive internships, and healthcare apprenticeships that open doors for students across Spartanburg, Union, and Cherokee County. Since October 2024, her team has engaged more than 9,000 K–12 students through hands-on activities, middle and high school partnerships, and community events.

Among her signature initiatives is Career Immersion Days—an interactive, small-group experience that introduces students to healthcare careers in a meaningful, engaging way. These events provide an innovative alternative to traditional shadowing and help SRHS reach a broader and more diverse pipeline of future talent. Her work is deeply collaborative, involving partnerships with local schools, colleges, and organizations such as OneSpartanburg Inc. and the Spartanburg Academic Movement.



Bennie L. Harris, PhD

Chancellor of the University of South Carolina Upstate

Bennie L. Harris is Chancellor of the University of South Carolina Upstate, where he helps provide uniquely transformative opportunities for students, staff, faculty, and the community to experience possibilities and fulfill their dreams.

Chancellor Harris received a Bachelor of Science degree in industrial engineering from Mississippi State University, a Master of Business Administration in strategic marketing from Washington State University, and a doctorate in strategic educational marketing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

He went on to serve in increasingly crucial roles at Washington State University, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, DePaul University, Lipscomb University, and at Morehouse School of Medicine, where he was Senior Vice President for Institutional Advancement from 2014 until his appointment at USC Upstate in 2021.

Chancellor Harris serves on several civic organization boards, including the Spartanburg Academic Movement, OneSpartanburg, United Way of the Piedmont, the Franklin School, and NCAA Big South Conference. He also is a member of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce Board and works with the Prisma Health Medical Scholars program.



Allen Smith

CEO, OneSpartanburg, Inc.

Allen Smith was born and raised in Greenville, NC. After graduating from East Carolina University with a Bachelors of Science in Political Science, Smith was appointed to serve as Town Clerk for the Town of Bethel, NC. After working in local government for a couple years, Smith was hired as Vice President of Operations for the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce. He was then promoted to Senior Vice President. In 2010, Smith was hired as the President/CEO of the Greater Greer Chamber of Commerce. With the support of a professional staff and devoted volunteer leadership, the Chamber grew financially and in overall membership growth. On June 16, 2014, Smith was named the President/CEO of the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce – the only organization in South Carolina in which the chamber, economic development and tourism entities co-exist under one umbrella. In January 2017, the Chamber, through the leadership of a 52 member steering committee, launched a five-year, comprehensive community and economic development strategy entitled “OneSpartanburg”. The \$4.5 million effort has enhanced, augmented and accelerated much of the

transformative work currently underway in the Spartanburg community. In September 2020, the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce launched a rebrand to represent its collective and strategic plan. Allen is now the President/CEO of OneSpartanburg, Inc. OneSpartanburg, Inc.'s mission is to build a vibrant Spartanburg through business, economic and tourism development. Whether you're looking for business resources, economic expertise, community leadership or tourism information, OneSpartanburg, Inc. is where you'll find it.

Given Spartanburg's recent accolades as a statewide leader in education, healthcare, culture and economic development, Smith, his wife Jenni, and their two daughters, Eloise, and Mary Barrett are excited about what's to come and are incredibly proud to call Spartanburg home.

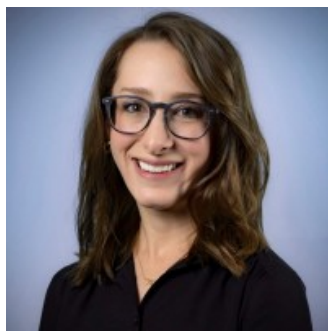


Meghan Smith

Director of Center for Postsecondary Success, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Meghan Smith serves as the Director for Center for Postsecondary Success. Meghan earned her Bachelor's degree from Samford University and her Master's from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Meghan has had experience dealing with the challenges faced by first-generation college students through her work with SC Test Prep, which she co-founded, and through its "Open Doors" program that supported a holistic approach to assisting youth set to become first-generation college students.

Meghan volunteers with the Spartanburg Hispanic Alliance and began her first term on the Spartanburg City Council in January 2020. She led City Council efforts toward the unanimous adoption of the resolution, "Healing, Reconciling, and Unity: A Pathway to a More Equitable Spartanburg" the only such municipal resolution in South Carolina.



Taylor Dockter

Director of the Center for Early Childhood Success, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Taylor Dockter is the Director of the Center for Early Childhood Success, dedicated to ensuring every child in Spartanburg County has a strong foundation for lifelong success. She employs a systems-based approach, combining national best practices with a place-based approach to tailor strategies to the specific needs of Spartanburg.

Taylor's expertise spans public health areas like reproductive health, mental health, substance use prevention, and high school dropout prevention. She advocates for amplifying

community voices, especially those of adolescents, believing partnerships are crucial for driving meaningful change. This approach led to the successful passage of the Tobacco-21 resolution, leadership of the Impact Spartanburg Coalition, and the launch of the Partners Aligned and Collaborating Together (PACT) for OnTrack Greenville.

Taylor holds a Master of Science in Human Development, Master of Public Administration, and a Nonprofit Management Certificate from the University of Georgia.

Beyond her professional roles, Taylor is deeply committed to serving her community. She actively participates on local boards, volunteers, and advocates for policies that benefit the community. Taylor believes that serving others is not merely a career but a way of life.



Jauntavia Padgett

Director of Advocacy, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Jauntavia Padgett serves as Director of Advocacy, leading policy and systems change to strengthen opportunities and outcomes for students and families in Spartanburg County.

With experience ranging from the South Carolina State House to the White House, she has worked across the nonprofit and private sectors to shape policy, build coalitions, and engage communities. Jauntavia also serves on the Lyman Planning Commission and as a Drill Sergeant in the U.S. Army Reserves, reflecting her deep commitment to service and leadership.

She is the author of *Speaking Up for Good!* (2023) and holds a Political Science degree from Coastal Carolina University. Jauntavia grounds her work in service and leadership, with a focus on building stronger communities and brighter futures.



Chris Story

City Manager, City of Spartanburg

Chris Story has lived in Spartanburg since age 13. He was educated in District 7 Schools. He graduated from Wofford College with a B.A. in Economics and has since participated in a variety of post-graduate coursework in business and public administration at Clemson and USC. In the late 1990s, he was the Executive Director of the City-initiated community strategic planning process called

Spartanburg Share the Vision. From 2000 through 2009, he was Assistant County

Administrator with Spartanburg County, participating in all aspects of local government management. In 2009, he was thrilled to return to the city, serving as Assistant City Manager before being promoted to City Manager in 2018

He has lived for over 20 years in the Duncan Park neighborhood. His wife, Jessalyn, a Spartanburg native, is the Director of the Center for Community-based Learning at Wofford College. They have a 10-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter.

Chris loves wrestling with the issues of effectiveness, value, and equity inherent in local government management. However, he finds it a particular privilege to serve a city that includes his parents, his in-laws, and countless old and new friends.



Rob Watson

Executive Director, EdRedesign; Lecturer on Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Rob Watson is the inaugural Executive Director of EdRedesign and Lecturer on Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, having previously served as Deputy Director. At EdRedesign, Rob leads an interdisciplinary team of staff, fellows, consultants, research affiliates, and students supporting

communities across the U.S. to develop cradle-to-career systems of opportunity. He presides over many of EdRedesign's signature talent development offerings, including the EdRedesign Fellowship for Cradle-to-Career Partnership Leaders, Summer Institute for Neighborhood Leaders, By All Means Senior Fellows Program, and By All Means Communities of Practice initiative.

His work has focused on themes of civic engagement, community development, and educational equity in the U.S., Latin America, and Africa. Prior to joining EdRedesign, Rob served as a consultant and advisor to organizations that include the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, Harvard College, Tufts University, The Social Impact Studio, FUSE Corps, The Foundation for Louisiana, The Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, The Obama Foundation, and Harlem Children's Zone.

A former Peace Corps volunteer and winner of the Peace Corps' 2023 Franklin H. Williams Award, Rob has co-founded five civil society organizations in Paraguay, including Teach for Paraguay, member of the global Teach For All Network and the Paraguayan Government's first national youth service program. Additionally, he partnered with the mayor, superintendent of schools and community stakeholders from his hometown of Poughkeepsie, New York, to launch the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet, a collective impact organization that convenes leaders across sectors to develop a citywide cradle-to-career agenda for children, youth, and families. Rob is also a co-founder of the Poughkeepsie Service

Accelerator (PSA), a place-based service year collaborative that aims to attract and retain local talent to pursue social impact careers in the Mid-Hudson Valley region of New York State.

In January 2024, Rob was selected as a Presidential Leadership Scholar. Rob is a member of the Board of Directors of the Children's Funding Project, a former World Economic Forum Global Shaper, and a former Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Millennium Scholar. In January 2025, Rob joined the StriveTogether Board of Directors. He holds a B.A. from Harvard College, an Ed.M in Education Policy and Management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a Mid-career Master's in Public Administration (MPA) from Harvard Kennedy School.



Bill Barnett

Former Mayor & Community Champion

William Barnett, III, is a respected business and civic leader whose career spans more than five decades in industry, community development, and public service. A graduate of Dartmouth College with both a Bachelor of Arts (1964) and a Master of Business Administration from the Amos Tuck School (1965), Barnett began his career in the family business, William Barnett & Son, Inc., a global textile enterprise founded in 1898. He joined the company in 1968, later serving as President and CEO from 1976 until its sale to a management team in 2001.

Today, Barnett is the Chief Executive Officer of Barnett Development Company and continues to contribute to community progress through leadership and philanthropy. From 2002 to 2010, he served two terms as Mayor of Spartanburg, South Carolina, guiding the city through a period of growth and revitalization.

Barnett has served on numerous civic and corporate boards, including The Duke Endowment, Bank of America, and Duke Energy. His community leadership includes roles as Chairman of the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, Leadership Spartanburg, and the South Carolina Textile Manufacturers Association, as well as service with the Spartanburg County Foundation.

His distinguished record of service has been recognized with numerous honors, including the Order of the Palmetto (the State of South Carolina's highest civilian award), the Daniel Morgan Award, the Neville Holcombe Distinguished Citizen Award, and induction into the South Carolina Business Hall of Fame. He also holds honorary doctorates from Wofford College and the University of South Carolina. A U.S. Army veteran, Barnett served as a First Lieutenant in the Adjutant General's Corps from 1967 to 1968. He and his wife, Valerie Manatis Barnett, have three children: Mary Rebecca, Will, and John.



Jasmine Stewart

Place-Based Partnerships Manager, Center for Resilient Schools & Communities, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Jasmine Stewart serves as the Spartanburg Academic Movement's Place-Based Partnerships Manager in the Center for Resilient Schools and Communities. Jasmine was born and raised in Columbia, SC. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Secondary Education-English from USC Upstate and her M.A. in Organizational Leadership from Columbia College.

Jasmine is also the Vice President of Sugar Ridge Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization.

Jasmine is married to Devin Stewart, who works with LISC Upstate. Devin and Jasmine have been married for nine years and have two children, Devin Jr. and Alivia.



David Summers

CEO, Northside Development Group

David Summers serves as Chief Executive Officer of Northside Development Group (NDG), where he leads the organization's mission to empower resident-led community transformation across Spartanburg's Northside neighborhood. With over a decade of experience in affordable housing, community partnerships, and nonprofit leadership, Summers brings both technical expertise and a deep personal commitment to equitable development.

Before joining NDG, Summers served as Project Manager at Gulf Coast Housing Partnership, overseeing more than \$44 million in real estate development and securing \$5 million in federal funding for community revitalization initiatives. Previously, as Chief Operating Officer at Partners Southeast, he built a \$281 million development pipeline and strengthened the organization's financial foundation.

Summers holds an MBA from the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School, with concentrations in Real Estate Development and Finance. At NDG, he is guiding implementation of the organization's 2025–2029 strategic plan, Centering Community: The Northside and Beyond, and expanding its impact through the new Thrive Spartanburg initiative.



Leroy Jeter

President, Highland Neighborhood Association

When Leroy Jeter returned to Spartanburg's Highland neighborhood in 1967 after serving in the U.S. Air Force, he knew he wanted to dedicate his life to making a difference in his hometown's historic Black community.

Upon his return, Mr. Jeter worked briefly in a cotton mill on the third shift before holding a series of manufacturing jobs, including in men's and women's apparel production. He later joined Norfolk Southern, where he worked as a mechanic until his retirement.

Affectionately known as "Mr. Jeter," he and his late wife, Gloria, have long been mentors and advocates for their community. He has served as president of the Highland Neighborhood Association, where his leadership and commitment have helped strengthen the fabric of the neighborhood he calls home.



Mitch Kennedy

Deputy City Manager, City of Spartanburg

Mitch Kennedy, Born and raised in Spartanburg, South Carolina, Mitch Kennedy has dedicated his career to community service and youth development. A graduate of Spartanburg High School, he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications from Wake Forest University.

Before joining the City of Spartanburg, Mitch spent nearly a decade as a scouting professional with the Palmetto Council, Boy Scouts of America (1996–2005). His earlier career included roles with the Spartanburg Housing Authority and Spartanburg School District 7.

A committed civic leader, Mitch remains deeply engaged in his community through service on numerous boards and committees, including the Urban League of the Upstate, Spartanburg Development Corporation, Jessie Boyd Elementary School Improvement Council, Mt. Moriah Foundation, Camp White Pines: AMI Kids, and the Spartanburg Housing Development Corporation. He is also an active member of the Epsilon Nu Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and a Rotarian with the Downtown Rotary Club. Mitch is the proud father of his son, Micah.



Keith McDaniel

Pastor, Macedonia Baptist Church

M. Keith McDaniel Sr. and his ministry have often been described as dynamic, relevant, uplifting and innovative. A passionate preacher and teacher of the gospel, He currently serves as the pastor of the 1,700-member Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church located in Spartanburg, SC.

McDaniel is an honor graduate of Shaw University where he majored in Religion and Philosophy and minored in business management. He continued graduate and post graduate studies at Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC and at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio receiving a Master of Divinity degree and a Doctor of Ministry degree respectively. In 2007 Pastor McDaniel was invited to Harvard University to participate in a program that focused on economic development and community revitalization. With his role as an adjunct professor of African American Religious Studies at USC Upstate and an author of three books; *Live Your Kingdom Life Now: A Theological Guide To Living By Choice Not By Chance*, *If God Be For Us: Pastoral Reflections of Faith and Family Concerning the Black Church* and *Til The War Is Won How A Reading of Psalm 27 Kept Me Encouraged in Times of Uncertainty*.

McDaniel's ministry expands beyond the pulpit. In 2014, the Epsilon Nu Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. recognized McDaniel's work in the community by awarding him the "Man of the Year" award, and in 2022, he was also awarded "Citizen of the Year" by the Epsilon Nu Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. He is a founding member for the Spartanburg Village Network where he served as board chair. He also served as a board member to Urban League of the Upstate, United Way of the Piedmont and ReGenesis Community Development Corporation. He is a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. In 2018 McDaniel was recognized as a Community Empowerment Champion by the Spartanburg branch of the NAACP for his efforts of leading and speaking toward issues of social change and community reconciliation. In 2019 McDaniel was awarded the Clergy Men of the Year award during the 2019 Black Excellence Gala held in Spartanburg SC and he currently serves as the moderator of the Spartanburg County Baptist Association.

A native of Winston Salem, N.C. he is a man who loves God and his family. He is the son of Reverend Silas and Branelia Kay Hart. He is married to Latron McDaniel. He is the proud father of four beautiful children Marceo Keith Jr., Madison, Savion, and Kensley. And the proud Pop-Pop to Greyson, Aliviyah, and Amour. His favorite scripture is Romans 8:38-39 "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."



Patrena Mims

Executive Director, Bethlehem Center

Patrena Mims, with over three decades of leadership in housing, family self-sufficiency, and community transformation, Patrena Mims stands as a pillar of purpose-driven leadership in Spartanburg. As the longtime Executive Director of the Bethlehem Center, led the organization through several transitions as a trusted community anchor, now central to the Spartanburg Movement 2030 and its bold vision for place-based equity.

Under her leadership, the Bethlehem Center has expanded in every dimension—programmatically, operationally, and strategically. She launched the Highland Early Learning Center (HELC) in 2021 in partnership with SC First Steps 4K, Spartanburg County First Steps, and the Mary Black Foundation. She has grown the Center’s reach to include a wide array of supportive services for youth, families, and seniors and the launch of Family Academy framework to support academic and using the cradle to career framework of Family Academy including navigation, behavioral health, academic support, and financial vitality.

Mims has been selected as a member of the 2025–2026 Launch Carolinas Leadership Accelerator cohort. This initiative, supported by GOODSTOCK Consulting in partnership with a coalition of philanthropic organizations, is designed to strengthen nonprofit leadership and foster meaningful collaboration across North and South Carolina.



Elizabeth Dudek

Program Officer, BlueCross BlueShield Foundation

Elizabeth Dudek is a Program Officer at the BlueCross BlueShield Foundation, where she applies her expertise in the nonprofit sector and passion for expanding healthcare access to support grantees in creating lasting, sustainable change for South Carolinians. Elizabeth is dedicated to fostering collaboration and building meaningful connections between partners to make a significant impact on the health landscape of the state.

A native of South Carolina, Elizabeth holds a Master’s Degree in Public Administration from the University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Arts in History from Birmingham-Southern College. She has lived and worked in both rural and metropolitan areas across the state, giving her a unique perspective on the diverse needs of the communities she serves.

Before joining the Foundation, Elizabeth gained extensive experience in nonprofit development. She served as a Development Officer at South Carolina First Steps and Director of Development at Homeless No More, where she played a pivotal role in raising funds to improve the lives of economically disadvantaged individuals facing challenges. Elizabeth has a strong track record in grant writing and program helping organizations meet their missions and enhance their community impact. Committed to improving her community. Elizabeth is passionate about using her skills to serve others and create a positive change in South Carolina.



Eshauna Smith

National Director of Community Impact, Ballmer Group

Eshauna Smith is Ballmer Group's National Director of Community Impact, where she focuses on improving economic mobility and reducing racial disparities at scale through Place-Based Partnerships and Talent Development. Eshauna holds two decades of experience building and leading organizations to open pathways for youth, including serving as the CEO of Urban Alliance, Senior Policy Advisor for Disconnected Youth and Workforce Development in the DC Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, and founding Executive Director of the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates.



Molly Talbot-Metz

President & CEO, Mary Black Foundation

Molly Talbot-Metz brings over 25 years of experience in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. Before joining the Foundation, Molly served as the Campaign Director for the SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (now Fact Forward), where she led training in evidence-based programming and evaluation for all 46 counties in SC. Prior to that, she worked directly with youth through out of school time partners, providing evidence-based programming, youth development, and service learning opportunities. In her years at the Mary Black Foundation, Molly has built and nurtured meaningful and long-term partnerships with community members and institutional leaders across a variety of sectors. She is actively involved in the community and plays a volunteer leadership role in many organizations.

Molly has a Master of Public Health Degree from the University of South Carolina in Columbia and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Health Education from the State University of New York at Cortland. Molly and her husband are natives of Syracuse, New York and have lived in Spartanburg since 1999. They are the proud parents of two children.



Mary Thomas

President & CEO, CFLeads

Mary L. Thomas is President & CEO of CFLeads, a national network of community foundations committed to community leadership. Ms. Thomas brings over 25 years of experience in the nonprofit sector to this role, having previously served as the Chief Operating Officer of The Spartanburg County Foundation and as the Executive Director of the Robert Hett Chapman III Center for Philanthropy. In this dual leadership role, Ms. Thomas was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the foundation and the center, leading its mission, vision, and strategies while translating the Foundation's goals into the overall program of work. Prior to joining the Foundation in 1998, Ms. Thomas was the Executive Director of The Bethlehem Center, a ministry that serves families in the Highland community of Spartanburg, SC. Ms. Thomas is a graduate of Winthrop University and holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in French and Communications. She was an exchange student to France through Lenoir-Rhyne College in 1983 and is a former French teacher in Spartanburg District 7 schools. Ms. Thomas is a very active leader in the Spartanburg community and has held extensive leadership roles with a host of organizations throughout the area and across the country. She was elected the first African American, female chairman of the board for Apella Health, a division of Spartanburg Regional Health System, The Council on Foundations National Policy and Advocacy Committee, Southeastern Network of African Americans in Black Philanthropy, Converse College Board of Visitors, Vice-Chairman for the Northside Development Group Board of Directors, and the BMW Community Advisory Panel. Her past board service includes: The Southeastern Council of Foundations, The Rotary Club of Spartanburg, CFLeads, Women in Philanthropy, AFL Advisory Board, the Mary Black Health System Women's and Children's Advisory Board, the Mary Black Health System Board of Trustees, and SC ETV Advisory Board. She is also a former Commissioner for The South Carolina State Housing and Finance Authority. Ms. Thomas is a graduate of Leadership Spartanburg, Furman University Diversity Leadership Institute, and Spartanburg Regional Fellows. She is a Past Chair of The SC 1 Grantmakers, the Spartanburg County Consensus Project, and Spartanburg Communities in Schools.



Paul Reville

Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration; Founder and Faculty Director, EdRedesign, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Paul Reville returned to the Harvard Graduate School of Education as the Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration in 2013, having just completed nearly five years of service as the secretary of education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As Governor Deval Patrick's top education advisor, Paul established the Executive Office of Education and had oversight of higher education, K-12, and early education in the nation's leading student achievement state. He served in the Governor's Cabinet and played a leading education reform role on matters ranging from the Achievement Gap Act of 2010 and Common Core State Standards to the Commonwealth's highly successful Race to the Top proposal.

Prior to joining the Patrick Administration, Paul chaired the Massachusetts State Board of Education, founded the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, co-founded the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), chaired the Massachusetts Reform Review Commission and the Massachusetts Commission on Time and Learning, and served as Executive Director of the Pew Forum on Standards-Based Reform, a national think tank which convened the U.S.'s leading researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to set the national standards agenda. Paul played a central role in MBAE's development of and advocacy for Massachusetts' historic Education Reform Act of 1993. Reville has been a member of the HGSE faculty since 1997 and has served as Director of the Education Policy and Management Program.

Paul is a board member and adviser to a host of organizations, and a frequent writer and speaker on education reform and policy issues. He edited the book entitled, *A Decade of Urban School Reform: Persistence and Progress in the Boston Public Schools*. He holds five honorary doctorate degrees.



Phil Fiesal

President, Spartanburg Medical Center; Board Chair, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Phil Feisal is the President of Spartanburg Medical Center & the Chief Operating Officer of the Hospital Group at Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System. He has been with Spartanburg Regional since 2009 and his healthcare career has spanned nearly 37 years. Previously, he has served in executive leadership roles at the Greenville Hospital System (now Prisma Health) and Bon

Secours Mercy St. Francis Health System. Phil also holds an adjunct professorship in the Government Department at Wofford College.

Phil is active on several local Boards and Advisory Councils in Spartanburg and Greenville. Notably, he currently serves as the Chairman of the Spartanburg Academic Movement Board of Directors and formerly served as Chairman of the OneSpartanburg, Inc. Executive Board. He also serves on the Board of Directors at Upstate Forever & participates on Spartanburg's Northside Development Group Advisory Board.

Phil received an undergraduate degree in Finance at the University of Memphis and holds master's degrees in public health and business administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Phil and his wife, Katrina, have three children & 5 grandchildren. They have lived in the Upstate since 1994.



Tauheedah Jackson

Deputy Director; Director of the Institute for Success Planning, EdRedesign, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Tauheedah Jackson serves as the Deputy Director of EdRedesign and the inaugural Director of EdRedesign's Institute for Success Planning at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. As the Deputy Director, she leads EdRedesign's organization-wide strategy and culture-building work and efforts that deepen alignment across all talent development work that provides direct support to communities. As the Director of the Institute, she leads a team that partners with local communities nationwide to design personalized, relationship-based systems of support for children and youth through cross-sector collaboration. Prior to joining EdRedesign, she was the director of Place Based Strategy & Community School Initiatives at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL). In this role, she was responsible for supporting networks of leaders in local communities to build, scale, and sustain cross-sector, place-based Community Schools initiatives across the country. Tauheedah currently serves as the Vice Chair of IEL's board of directors. Before entering the national landscape, Tauheedah worked as a local cross-sector leader as the Director of the former Hartford Partnership for Student Success, a collaborative partnership that founded and funded the local Community Schools initiative in Hartford, Connecticut. Under Tauheedah's leadership, Hartford Community Schools became locally and nationally recognized as an exemplar for its systems-building work, before being scaled across the entire school district.

A native of Bridgeport, Connecticut, Tauheedah is a first-generation college graduate. She earned her bachelor's degree from Connecticut College in government and secondary

education and holds a master's degree in education policy and management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Tauheedah is a sought-after presenter and facilitator, has served on various nonprofit boards, and has received several awards recognizing her leadership in the field. As a mother of 3 sons, Isaiah, Isaac, and Ian, she is committed to working toward ensuring more equitable access and opportunity for all.



Sagar Desai

Senior Consultant, EdRedesign, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Sagar Desai is a continuous learner who brings more than 15 years of experience in improving education and economic mobility outcomes, having worked with nonprofits, for-profits and NGOs in start-up, scaling and sustaining roles. He is currently an Executive Coach and Consultant for Nonprofit Leaders and Organizations

helping clients move toward their hoped-for future and impact. In every engagement, he brings his experience creating more equitable systems, facilitating to make clear and collective decisions, and synthesizing information into a set of actionable recommendations. Over nearly two decades, Sagar has built and scaled training programs for community leaders to transform systems in service of more equitable outcomes, invested \$35 million in national training and fellowship organizations, and launched a statewide campaign to equitably increase public education funding by \$3+ billion. Sagar received his MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. He currently sits on the Board of Directors for Govern for America and Brooklyn Prospect Charter Schools.



Chris Shelton

Director, Education Strategy & Cross-Sector Community Impact, EdRedesign, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Chris Shelton recently earned her Doctor of Education Leadership from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. During her third-year residency, she worked with EdRedesign as a cross-sector leadership advisor and, after graduation in May 2025,

Chris joined the EdRedesign team as director of education strategy and cross-sector community impact.

Shelton's career began as a defense attorney at Bryan Cave, LLP, before she discovered her true calling in education. Shelton transitioned and began working as a middle school mathematics teacher with Teach for America in St. Louis, Missouri. She spent a decade at her Teach for America placement school relentlessly fighting to ensure that urban scholars receive a quality and equitable education. After leaving her placement school, Shelton was awarded the Zuckerman Fellowship from the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Shelton also received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Saint Louis University, a Juris Doctor degree from Howard University School of Law, and a master's degree in Education Leadership, Organizations, and Entrepreneurship from Harvard.