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# INTRODUCTION

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Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award • Whelan Leadership for Learning Award

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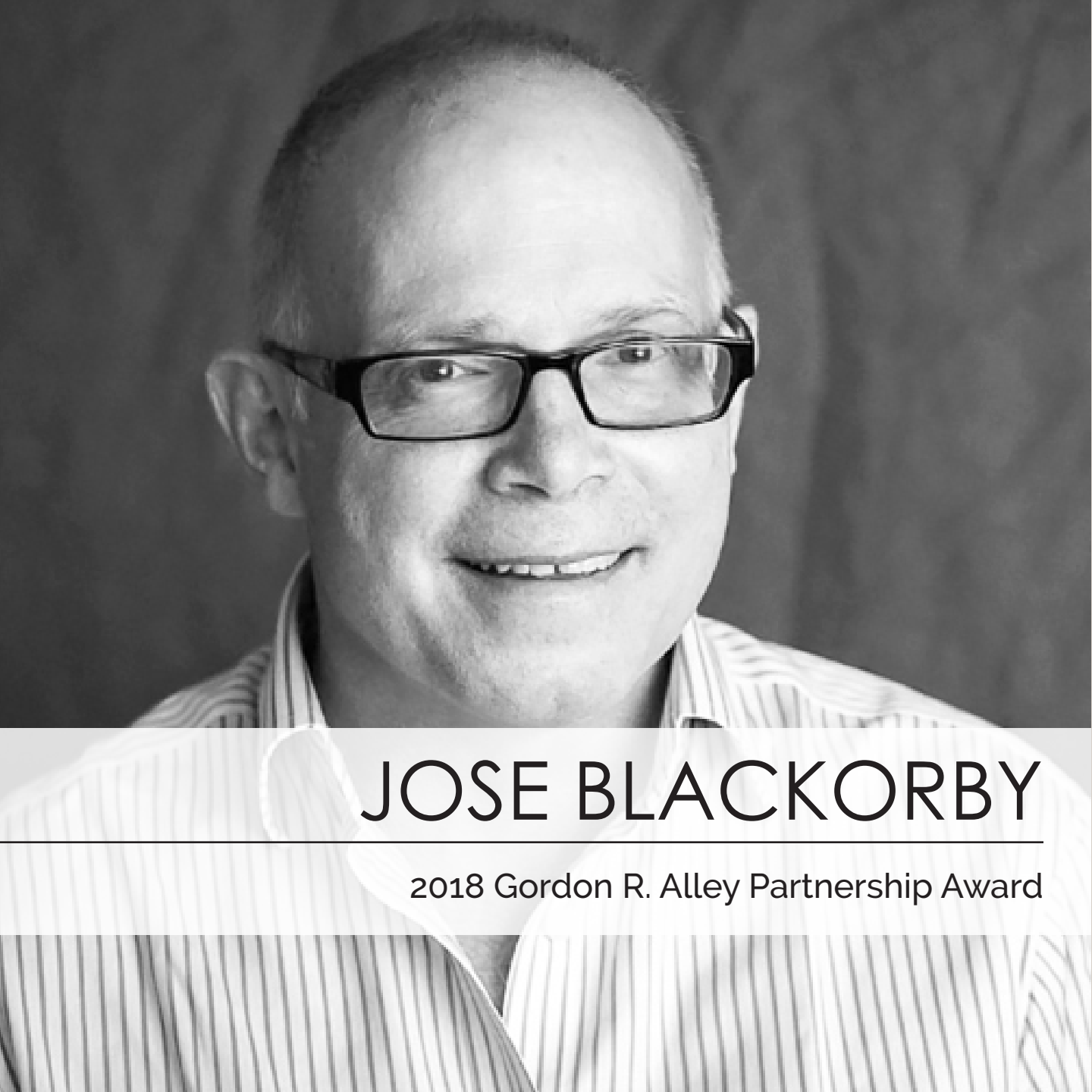
Since 1978, the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning has worked with schools, communities, teachers, students, and service organizations to tackle the serious challenges of improving literacy and learning among the nation's adolescents.

The **Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award** honors the legacy of Gordon R. Alley (1933-1997), one of the founders of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning and a master at mentoring the young and inexperienced assistant professors assembled to conduct the Center's first research studies. Dr. Alley generously shared his expertise and time to enable others to reach their goals and taught that partnership is vital to successfully conducting large-scale research and development efforts.

We are indebted to the many individuals who have accompanied us on our journey. Each year, we recognize outstanding teachers, administrators, professional developers, and partners who inspire greater achievements.

The University of Kansas Department of Special Education and the Center for Research on Learning have established the annual **Whelan Leadership for Learning Award** to recognize individuals or groups for their extraordinary leadership and vigorous pursuit of opportunities for each and every student to learn. Nominees can be from schools and districts in the immediate region. This award was named for Professor Richard J. Whelan (1931-2015), who served as Chair in the Department of Special Education and Dean of the School of Education. He was renowned for his leadership to the field in a number of ways and was a beloved mentor to many. Each year, we recognize his contributions by honoring the work of a practicing educational leader or leadership team.

We offer this tribute and our sincerest congratulations to this year's recipients of the Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award and the Whelan Leadership for Learning Award with profound appreciation for all of your efforts.



JOSE BLACKORBY

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2018 Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award

"After losing to KUCRL on multiple competitions, I figured I was better off to partner than compete. That turned out to be a good decision. Collaborations with KUCRL staff have resulted in projects that were professional growth opportunities for all involved and provided new tools and applications of the SIM model."

-Jose Blackorby

Jose Blackorby, Ph.D., is Senior Director of Research and Development for the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). Blackorby joined CAST in 2016 after nearly 25 years at SRI International, a non-profit research institute, where he served most recently as Co-Director of the Center for Education and Human Services. In that position, he worked closely for many years with Dr. Ellen Schiller, a principal scientist in the Center for Learning and Development. A widely published author, Blackorby received his doctorate in special education from the University of Washington. He serves in an advisory role on national panels for government initiatives. Additionally, he has a diverse range of research and development interests, including students with mild disabilities; reading, math, and science achievement; assistive technology; secondary school programs and transition; assessment and curriculum design; and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Blackorby is receiving the Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award because of his collaboration and contributions to the Center for more than 12 years. Many of his research and development interests parallel those of the KUCRL, as



he discovered long ago. "I first learned about the CRL as a graduate student at the University of Washington. I was working in dropout prevention and transition at the time. The CRL was the only option we saw for providing interventions to struggling students at the secondary level. We saw the Center's Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) approaches as powerful yet accessible to teachers and students alike. That has continued throughout my career." His appreciation of the work of the Center has resulted in years of collaboration and research and has been reciprocated by many Center researchers.

4 Among Center members who have worked closely with Blackorby are former director Don Deshler and current director Mike Hock. Since 2002, they have worked on multiple research proposals in efforts to expand knowledge of what works best for students with learning

differences. Both Deshler and Hock shared that Blackorby was always knowledgeable, skilled, persistent, and fun to work with. That partnership continues as Blackorby and the Center work together on new and exciting projects. As a result of such efforts, he believes that the "CRL remains the leader in developing innovative solutions which have helped thousands." This focus on innovative solutions and rigorous research guides Blackorby's research as well as that of the Center.

Janis Bulgren, KUCRL researcher, has collaborated with Blackorby and Ellen Schiller to develop and research technology supports for use in teaching several Content Enhancement Routines within content areas. The resulting technology is the CORGI instructional software. In this study, supported by an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant award, units in Biology and American History were iteratively developed



that respond to high level thinking and learning. These developments are part of ongoing research and development.

Jamie Basham, another KUCRL researcher and faculty member in the KU Department of Special Education, is working with Blackorby on a new way to support professional development and field growth in Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The UDL Credentialing and Certification Initiative (UDLCCI) supports voluntary recognition of individuals and schools that have invested time and energy into understanding and adopting UDL into their day-to-day practice. As a field change initiative, UDLCCI has the potential to truly impact the field of education in supporting all learners.

Blackorby's extensive experience in the design and implementation of large-scale, multifaceted studies with research, policy, and practice implications contributes to the Center's knowledge. Having led national studies on students with disabilities, including a national study of states' progress in implementing alternate assessment systems for students with significant cognitive disabilities and another on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), he also contributes unique knowledge from his work as co-director of the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) and from serving on the research team for the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). Both studies

provided national population estimates for many of the key questions related to programs and outcomes that face students who receive special education services. In addition to large-scale research in special education, Blackorby has considerable experience in projects related to emerging trends in education reform and innovation generally, as well as their potential for students with disabilities.

Blackorby shares with us his sense of humor as well as his history with the Center: "After losing to KUCRL on multiple competitions, I figured I was better off to partner than compete. That turned out to be a good decision. Collaborations with KUCRL have resulted in projects that were professional growth opportunities for all involved and provided new tools and applications of the SIM model. Importantly, KUCRL folks are fun to work with and remain some of my most memorable professional collaborations. I am grateful."

Likewise, we at the Center are grateful for having the ongoing opportunities to collaborate with Jose on how to help all students, including those with special needs, succeed in our society. For this reason, Dr. Jose Blackorby exemplifies the partnership valued by Dr. Alley and staff at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.



# ELLEN SCHILLER

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2018 Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award



Dr. Ellen Schiller is a principal scientist in the Center for Learning and Development at SRI International. Her research focuses on improving education and social programs for children and adolescents at risk of poor performance in school, including children and youth with disabilities. Schiller has more than 25 years of experience in research and evaluation of interventions to improve academic outcomes of students who struggle in school.

“Ellen is always a strong partner for all of us across the country, valuing our feedback, and elegantly guiding us along the best path to achieve our goal of helping all students succeed. She truly represents the spirit of partnership of the late

Gordon R. Alley.”

– Janis Bulgren

Ellen’s interaction with KUCRL began in the 1990’s when she was a Branch Chief in the Office of Special Education Programs for the U.S. Department of Education. “I supported a group of projects conducting metanalysis of research on reading comprehension,” Ellen explained. “That is when I first met Don and Jean.” Don Deshler and Jean Schumaker, founders of KUCRL, were conducting rigorous research with the goal of using that research to create evidence-based interventions. “The reason I left OSEP was a desire to work with colleagues who were committed to improving outcomes for students with disabilities and their families. The researchers at KUCRL were the right connection for me.”

When asked how partnering with KUCRL has embodied creating solutions for struggling learners, Ellen thoughtfully replied: “Our education problems today are so complex. You need multiple expertise and perspectives at the table to address these challenges. That expertise and perspective comes from a curriculum developer or software designer, statistician, school psychologist, learning theorist, measurement people as well as folks who think about policy, local policy, policy contacts. All of that expertise and perspective is necessary. When SRI builds a proposal or project team, we want to look for partners who complement our research and evaluation expertise. That

is the partnership we have with KUCRL. The people at KUCRL bring a deep understanding of how students learn, coupled with building and designing powerful interventions to support student learning and make meaningful progress to grade level benchmarks. They understand teachers and teacher implementation and create interventions that are feasible for both teachers and students. Deep understanding of student learning and what it takes to implement feasible interventions are really critical to improving student outcomes."

Another aspect of KUCRL that has really impressed Ellen is the SIM Network of Professional Developers. "The SIM Professional Developer Network really contributes to the multiple expertise that KUCRL brings to the table. It's impressive! At one point while I was at OSEP I remember seeing Don and asking why he was not submitting research applications anymore. He told me he was devoting time to this network of professional developers to work in districts and schools so that the interventions that were designed at the Center could have a better chance of improving student outcomes. With this network, there could be an emphasis on the importance of adherence to certain practices. I love bragging about this network, making presentations talking about the SIM PD Network. It is added value in addition to all of those attributes and expertise that Center staff bring."



"When you are writing a competitive proposal and designing an evaluation, these are difficult undertakings. However, when working with Center staff, I always feel we are facing the challenge together, and the Center staff shoulder as much responsibility whether they are the prime or SRI is the prime. The other side of that is that when we need to address problems and come up with solutions, we learn together, so our work and shared solutions create this natural community...again bringing back these multiple perspectives and expertise in solving tricky design and implementation challenges. When you go to work, what more could you ask for than to have this feeling that

"The reason I left OSEP was a desire to work with colleagues who were committed to improving outcomes for students with disabilities and their families. The researchers at KUCRL were the right connection for me."

– Ellen Schiller

anything can be solved because you have this terrific group of people with these varying views who can solve problems."

Ellen directed the evaluation of the Michigan Striving Readers Grant large-scale randomized trial of the Fusion reading program conducted by Mike Hock and Irma Brasseur-Hock in ten Michigan school districts. Fusion is designed for accelerating the reading outcomes of adolescents reading more than two years below grade level. Ellen played a key role in the research, data collection, analysis and reports.

For the past 5 years, Ellen, Jose Blackorby, and KUCRL Research Professor Jan Bulgren have collaborated with others across the country in an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to develop and research technology supports for use in teaching several SIM Content Enhancement Routines within content areas. Says Ellen, "It has been such a treasure working with Jan Bulgren. I consider her a National Treasure." The resulting technology is the CORGI instructional software. In this study, units in Biology and American History were iteratively developed and tested. Regarding Ellen's work on this project, Jan said, "SIM professional developers such as Cathy

Spriggs in California and Bonnie Fenwick in Virginia can attest to Ellen's partnership and hours of consultation, days on the road to support teachers, and our ever-valuable Tuesday afternoon meetings to assure success."

Jan adds, "We nominate Ellen for this award because of her hard work to assure success for all students and her commitment to the highest quality of research and development. Equally important in the nomination is the WAY she does all this. She is always a strong partner for all of us across the country, valuing our feedback, and elegantly guiding us along the best path to achieve our goal of helping all students succeed. She truly represents the spirit of partnership of the late Gordon R. Alley."



SUZANNE MYERS

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2018 Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award

Dr. Suzanne (Suzy) Myers is currently a Project Director for the Literacy Network of Kansas (LiNK), which is the Kansas Striving Readers initiative; a Standards Coordinator at the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), and an Adjunct Instructor at Baker University. In the past, she has been an Education Program Consultant for KSDE and a Language Arts Teacher at Atchison County Community High School and Washburn Rural High School. Myers holds degrees from Washburn University, Kansas State University, and the University of Kansas. An online and site-based professional learning designer, she is also a National Board-Certified Teacher and a literacy advocate.

"She embraced our partnership and worked right beside our CRL faculty. It was a pleasure to discover such an enthusiastic and willing collaborator!"  
-Amber Rowland



Myers was nominated for the Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award based upon her partnership and collaboration with the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KUCRL) in the development of a proposal for the 2016 Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy grant. As Dr. Amber Rowland from KUCRL wrote, "We were immediately impressed by her enthusiasm for pursuing this possibility for the students and teachers of Kansas. Her organization, persistence, expertise, and collaborative nature made this proposal process quite doable. She was never afraid to reach out to federal, state, university, or local contacts in order to ensure understanding and completeness."

KSDE was awarded the \$27 million federal grant, one of the largest grants in their history. As the project director,

"We were immediately impressed by her enthusiasm for pursuing this possibility for the students and teachers of Kansas. Her organization, persistence, expertise, and collaborative nature made this proposal process quite doable. She was never afraid to reach out to federal, state, university, or local contacts in order to ensure understanding and completeness."  
-Amber Rowland

Myers is working tirelessly to help create comprehensive literacy programs at schools across the state. KUCRL supports and advises KSDE during the initiative, which reflects Myers' style of informed decision-making and collaboration. As Rowland pointed out, "Our partnership has grown even stronger as we co-support day-to-day operations, conceptualize roll-out needs, and facilitate the sub grantee process across Kansas."

When asked to reflect on her relationship with the Center, Myers discussed the "leadership and graciousness" of the people at the Center and her admiration for Mike Hock, Center Director, as a leader who makes people feel like "You can do it." She shared her feelings about the Center with her administrator, Lynn Bechtel, who replied, "That's how they are; it's in their DNA." Myers shared that she was drawn to how the Center conveys its desire to work with others, to learn together, and to share that learning. Citing KUCRL's array of resources and connection to experts regionally and nationally, she knew that her connection with the Center would be beneficial in establishing new relationships, bonds, and links.

As Myers continues her work to create and support comprehensive literacy across the state of Kansas, she has a laser focus on developing a greater network of professional learning where all teachers and students benefit from the collective knowledge capacity of our great state. Indeed, she changed the name of the grant from the Kansas Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Initiative to the Learning Network of Kansas or LiNK. She describes LiNK as "more reflective of the idea we wish to convey, that we want to support districts in building birth to grade 12 literacy networks that can support literacy growth and development far beyond the term of the grant...and that we will be working to build a network of statewide support that will LiNK historically underserved and under-resourced populations to community



and statewide literacy supports.” Not only is she maintaining a strong collaboration between KSDE and KUCRL, but she is working to facilitate greater LiNKs across the state.

At KUCRL, we are most appreciative of Dr. Myers’ unwavering collaboration to help the Center improve what we do and to grow in our learning. She embodies the legacy of Dr. Alley in her daily

service to the state of Kansas and her ongoing pursuit of linking the students, educators, and researchers of Kansas. Like Gordon R. Alley, she demonstrates partnership and teamwork, and has developed a relationship with the Center that is about creating solutions to educational challenges.





PAULA CRAWFORD

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2018 Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award



“We have come quite a way over the past several years with the support of KUCRL and others. We are now beginning to make progress with capacity building.”

-Paula Crawford

Dr. Paula Crawford is Section Chief for Program Improvement and Professional Development in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Exceptional Children Division. Her background in education spans 28 years with experience providing instructional programming for students from kindergarten through adulthood. As the Project Director for the NC State Improvement Project, she provides the leadership to build the state's capacity for improving student outcomes through support of educators' professional learning. Her previous service in the field of education includes work in special education and beginning teacher support programs, public and private institutions of higher education, and educational publishing. She earned her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, and her Doctorate in Adult and Higher Education from North Carolina State University.

Crawford was nominated for the Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award because of her many years as a collaborator with KUCRL, the SIM Network, and the Professional Development Research Institute. Crawford first experienced SIM professional development and implemented SIM strategies in the early 90s. Her leadership and commitment in steering North Carolina's

adolescent literacy path has not been easy given North Carolina's geographical challenges and diversity. However, she has continued to convey the message about SIM's evidence-based practices. Her message to her school communities is that when used with adherence, SIM can ensure a positive trajectory for students who learn to apply the learning strategies from well-prepared teachers, learn how to read through SIM reading courses, and engage more fully in the classes of teachers who regularly implement Content Enhancement Routines. She has assembled a team of literacy consultants who can guide and support their districts in selecting and implementing various practices, coaching them toward better implementation. One of those practices is KUCRL's framework for adolescent literacy, the Content Literacy Continuum (CLC) approach.

Crawford explained, “We have come quite a way over the past several years with the support of KUCRL and others. We are now beginning to make progress with capacity building.” She attributes this to Xtreme Reading data collection, Pam Leitzell's long time expertise, and the contributions of the NC SIM professional developers who engaged in the School Improvement project (LuAnn Jordan, Chris O'Brien, Dan Boudah, Debbie

“With the support of two of NC IHEs, Xtreme Reading pre and posttest data were collected and analyzed across schools. Dr. Crawford’s office took the lead on the initiative in 2016-17. She has recruited staff with deep literacy knowledge and has been a collaborator with KUCRL in the thinking about and development of micro-credentials.”  
– Patricia Graner

Higginbotham, and Elizabeth Gibbs) for “strengthening what we have been doing to build capacity.” Outcomes of that capacity include development of an Adolescent Literacy Readiness Packet for LEAs to learn more about SIM literacy programs. An extension of that outcome is that her team has been able to provide more opportunities to learn SIM over the past year, and more and more districts are taking advantage of those opportunities. The adolescent literacy and some of the SIM content had never been offered or been as accessible as it has been in the past year.

KUCRL has learned much from Crawford and her team. Importantly, her encouragement to build micro-credentials/badges fueled KUCRL’s commitment to learn more about them and ultimately to create a SIM micro-credential program. As Crawford shared, “We want to have confidence that educators could prepare others, and this was a way to do it.” Nationally, teachers are earning SIM micro-credentials and building capacity, but more importantly, they are building sustainability in their communities. Professional development has become more job-embedded, and students are benefitting from districts’ investment in SIM PD.

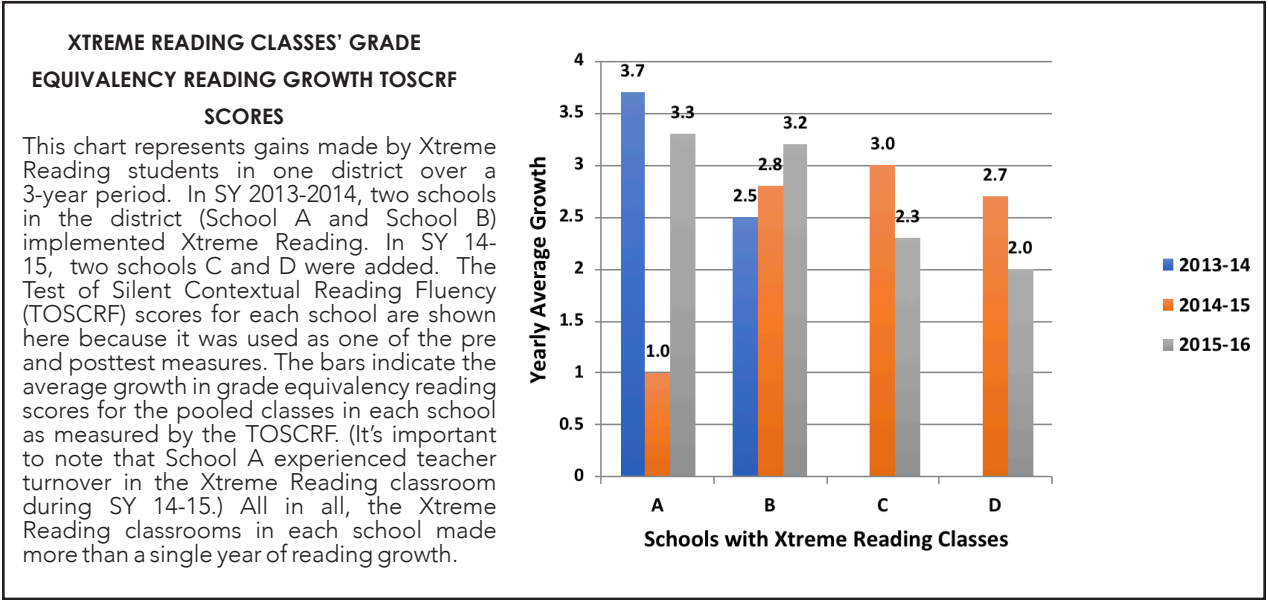
In Crawford’s words: “Familiarity with the CLC framework was useful for the most recent grant cycle. In writing the proposal, the team added evidence-based practices as a requirement. We make that distinction based on all of the research and history. Never before have we had a structure in place to disseminate the PD in a consistent manner, but you have worked with us hand in glove to allow people to earn badges and acquire the knowledge which made a difference in people’s motivation. Once they see the success they have with students who have been resistant to instruction, they know that this will work with their students. I wish we could do more with CLC, but as we work forward, hopefully we will get to that place.”

Crawford also attributes virtual coaching to helping provide great PD in such a large state. She and her team have worked with Pam Leitzell to create and post videos about SIM on their website so information is easily accessible when LEAs begin to determine if SIM could be a fit based on their data. With eight regions and facilitators, Crawford's team can understand LEA's priority needs and quickly respond to them.

Change is inevitable in today's educational climate and has been a constant, if sometimes unwelcome, companion in this work. "Since the 80s, SIM has come and gone in North Carolina," Crawford said. "However, I wanted to find a consistent delivery system that would

provide some level of funding. When you have something that is so good (like SIM), why would you not want students to have access to it?" She went on to say, "When SIM and the CLC could have all gone away after the years of work here, and as we and the districts were in a state of flux, there was continued, steadfast support (from the Center)."

At KUCRL, we are most appreciative of Paula Crawford's unwavering support and collaboration to improve what we do. Like Gordon R. Alley, she demonstrates partnership, teamwork, and has developed a relationship with the Center that is about creating solutions to educational challenges.





# SHERRY THOMAS

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2018 Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award

For the past five years, Sherry Thomas has served as the Assistant Director of the Exceptional Children Division of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Prior to this position, while serving as Section Chief within the division, she became involved with KUCRL's Content Literacy Continuum (CLC). Beginning in 2011, Thomas oversaw a state project supported by the Oak Foundation to explore and install the Center's CLC approach in secondary schools across nine districts.

"Keeping everyone on the path was something that Thomas did so well.

At the same time, she ensured that at the end of each conversation everyone was able to see their role and maintain a forward trajectory."

– Patricia Graner

Thomas was nominated for the Gordon R. Alley Partnership award because of her role as an important collaborator with the Center in that CLC work. Her leadership and commitment to the nine CLC districts/communities was demonstrated through her style as a goal-oriented leader who provided guidance in building and maintaining the direction of the project. Thomas taught the Center what a state leader can do while navigating ever-changing district and school waters. Statewide work with school districts is not for the faint of heart!

Thomas's role became more complex as she and her division moved into a focus on adolescent literacy. This new focus seemed like a natural extension of her division's success with establishing a statewide reading focus at the elementary level. Thomas and her division selected CLC as the approach for this new focus because CLC was comprised of evidence-based practices with which she and her staff were familiar – the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM). One of the division's goals was to ensure that the state's investment in the CLC was scalable. Implementing this goal required Thomas to maintain equilibrium among all the players, maintain a focus on improving adolescent literacy outcomes for students with disabilities, and

orchestrate the financial and personnel issues that come with an array of organizations and personalities.

Professional development for the adolescent literacy focus was conducted by SIM professional developers who were experienced in systems change and proficient with Xtreme Reading, Content Enhancement Routines, and Learning Strategies. The SIM professional developers led the school-based work that was dependent upon the school's data and expressed needs. However, as Thomas pointed out, "Sometimes, they (the schools) thought that they could just do it without support and that caused some of the struggles..." Goals and timelines were set and needed to be met.

Thomas further shared, "They (the schools) would say at the outset, 'Oh yeah, we got this. We know how to do this.' But we had to help them step back and see that 'Maybe we aren't doing this the way we should be doing this.' Those were some of the tough parts."

Another challenge, Thomas observed, was getting schools and administrators to think about how to prepare for change when current staff left. "I thought about all the school sites and all of the turnover and shifts they had," she said. "Turnover will always happen, so we had to ensure that we built in the structures to support the work and the investment so it wouldn't fall apart."

These scenarios led to what Thomas described as her "tenacious conversations" among the groups. "My tenacious conversations were to make sure we were all getting on the same page," she said. "Sometimes it is those honest conversations that are hard but necessary if we are all going to get to that goal that we are trying to achieve. Sometimes we have to have those crucial and the tough conversations just to make sure we all get there. It doesn't do anyone any good to let things get off track. We felt like we were building something of importance, but it was also taking some time to build it and it wasn't always necessarily what people wanted to do – sometimes they thought that they could just do it without support and that caused some of the struggles I felt with the schools."

Having participated in these conversations, Patty Graner observed that Thomas required tremendous skill to maintain equilibrium: first, between people and organizations, and then with the schools that had agreed to carry out the project and had so much coming at them. "Keeping everyone on the path was something that Thomas did so well," Graner said. "At the same time, she ensured that at the end of each conversation everyone was able to see their role and maintain a forward trajectory."

"LEAs that use SIM strategies have shown positive change in their special education performance for adolescents," Thomas said. "That was critical and the bottom line for us;



we knew the product (SIM and CLC) would make a difference. Figuring out not only how to start it but how to sustain it was critical.” The development of micro-credentials became a path to sustainability.

Deep into implementation, discussions with Graner and Dr. Paula Crawford (another Alley Award recipient and partner engaged in this North Carolina work) began to focus on micro-credentials or badges to reflect the schools’ hard work and the funds that had been expended. The idea for micro-credentials became a reality, with NC as the forerunner for implementation. “They (micro-credentials) do ensure that when people get to fidelity they can learn to teach others. That is where I saw major movement when that happened. It allowed us to pull people in who were already empowered and allowed us to scale up. Implementation Science

was what we were trying to do, but it wasn’t easy and these helped,” said Thomas.

At KUCRL, we are most appreciative of Sherry Thomas’s collaboration, support to improve what we do, and her shared faith that we are shoulder-to-shoulder working in the best interest of the students and teachers in her schools. Her continued partnership in problem-solving and encouragement to move to micro-credentials extended these changes beyond the life of the grant. Deserving of the Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award, Sherry Thomas demonstrates partnership and teamwork, and has developed a relationship with the Center that is about creating solutions to educational challenges.



## North Carolina State Improvement Project

### Improving Instruction for Students with Disabilities

Since 2001, the North Carolina State Improvement Project (NC SIP) has worked to address achievement gaps for students with disabilities through the State Personnel Development federal grants supporting teacher professional development. The project has developed evidence-based courses addressing literacy and math instruction and has partnered with institutions of higher education to embed the course content into their teacher preparation programs.

#### Results

Students with disabilities taught by teachers who have completed the courses and a selected program training demonstrate higher proficiency on end-of-grade tests than students with disabilities in classrooms with teachers who have not completed courses.

Compared with students with disabilities in the rest of the state, students in NC SIP sites have demonstrated

**6% higher proficiency in reading**

**5.3 % higher proficiency in math**



# CHRIS COOPER

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2018 Whelan Leadership Award



"Mr. Cooper's dedication to meeting the needs of each child has had and will continue to have a positive, sustainable impact in Abilene and across Kansas."

-Amy Gaumer Erickson

Before becoming Assistant Superintendent of Abilene, Kansas, Public Schools, Chris Cooper was a teacher and principal for 22 years. "Those experiences helped him to see the necessity for interventions that occur early and often, but also that each student deserves to have their individual needs, as well as their stories, understood and respected," says Dr. Ben Smith, Principal of Abilene High School.

Cooper has led the effort in Abilene to implement evidence-based interventions to address the needs of individual students as determined by the Kansas Integrated Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). These interventions include co-teaching, strategies from McREL Classroom Instruction that Works, direct instruction and guided practice of social-emotional competencies, and working collaboratively with the community mental health center to deliver individualized and group interventions for trauma, depression, and other mental health needs within the school building.

In 2016, Cooper facilitated the formation of Abilene Cares ([www.abilenecares.org](http://www.abilenecares.org)), a group of local agencies and citizens, to establish community goals, combine resources, and work collaboratively to support children and families

in the Abilene area.

KU Associate Research Professor Amy Gaumer Erickson recognizes the special impact Chris Cooper has had on students. "As a evaluation lead for the Kansas State Department of Education, Technical Assistance System Network, I have the opportunity to analyze the implementation fidelity and impact of evidence-based practices on school systems and students. Abilene Public Schools, specifically Chris Cooper, stand out as exemplifying the dedication necessary to make sustainable change focused on improving the lives of students, particularly students with disabilities."

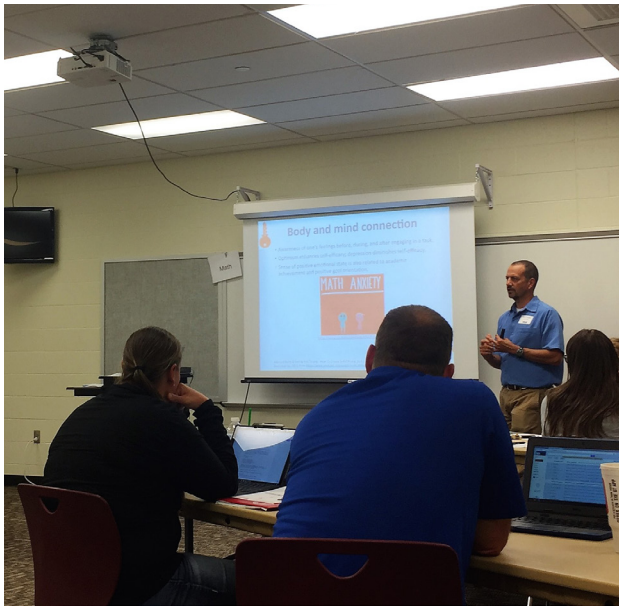
"Most districts find it challenging to implement a sustainable, tiered support structure for any single construct," Gaumer Erickson continued. "Abilene Public Schools has fully implemented tiered supports pre-K through 12 in reading, math, behavior, and social-emotional constructs. The school and district leadership teams, with the facilitative administration of Cooper, frequently analyze individual student data across all of these constructs, considering the whole child as they design individualized supports that best meet each student's needs. Labels no longer determine the educational programming for a student, but instead each

"He has helped to make positive inroads not only to how we teach students in Abilene, but how we view and understand them as people. Mr. Cooper has helped us to understand that by recognizing the innate talents and unique qualities that every child brings to school, we can better serve all of our students."  
-Ben Smith

student is viewed as a unique individual with unique strengths and needs that can be fully supported through collaboration among school staff. This has created a district collective efficacy in which every staff member sees how their role positively influences the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional growth of each student."

School data speaks volumes. KU Associate Research Professor Patricia Noonan recognizes Cooper's contribution to data collection efforts. "He supports his districtwide leadership and staff through example, guiding interdisciplinary teams to attain their shared vision for embedded intrapersonal competency instruction, while facilitating data-based decision making throughout the process. He ensures data for students with and without disabilities are collected, summarized, understood widely, and then utilized for targeted improvement."

Through Cooper's collaborative leadership in the implementation of integrated MTSS, high school student risk factors (as measured by a universal behavior screener) decreased by 19%, ninth-grade students on track for graduation increased by 37%, in-school suspensions decreased by 50%, and out-of-school suspensions became nearly nonexistent. Between 2014 and 2015, Abilene's high school graduation rate increased by 5% and the success rate and effectiveness rate of graduates as measured by National Student Clearinghouse data increased 9% and 11% respectively. Between 2016 and 2017, Abilene's four-year cohort graduation rate for students with disabilities increased by 6%.



During the same period, while the percentage of students scoring at proficient or above on reading and math state assessments across the state decreased for all students and for students with disabilities, the percentage of Abilene students achieving proficiency on the state assessments increased by 3% in math for all students, increased by 4% in math for students with disabilities, increased by 1% in reading for all, and remained steady in reading for students with disabilities. Additionally, Cooper's dedication to hiring, retaining, and coaching the best available staff to serve the needs of all Abilene students is illustrated in the district's above average percentage of fully licensed (99% compared to a state average of 97%) and highly qualified (95% compared to a state average of 93%) teachers.

Says Dr. Ben Smith, Principal of Abilene High School, "I am consistently impressed with Chris's ability to support learning for all students in the district, and to help staff recognize the importance that they hold in the life of a student. Under his leadership, Abilene teachers, from kindergarten through high school, have completed over 2000 hours of LETRS (Language Essential for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training. As a result, the number of students qualifying for Tiers II and III in reading has steadily declined, to the point where many students identified with reading disabilities are no longer in need of intensive assistance. The same is true of many ELL students, as Mr. Cooper has helped to highlight the need for additional English Language Learners certified teachers across the district."

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Chris Cooper's dedication to meeting the needs of each child has had and will continue to have a positive, sustainable impact both in Abilene and across Kansas. For this reason, the University of Kansas Department of Special Education and the Center for Research on Learning are pleased to recognize Chris Cooper as the recipient of the 2018 Whelan Leadership for Learning Award.



ANNETTE MCDONALD

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2018 Whelan Leadership Award

"Mrs. McDonald is not only my teacher but my friend. She has taught me more than I can put into words, and I can honestly say that she has changed my life for the better."

-Melody Eldridge

Whelan Award winner Annette McDonald is a general education mathematics teacher at Free State High School in Lawrence, Kansas. With more than 20 years of experience in helping students learn both the content and the life skills required for a successful future, McDonald embodies all of the characteristics recognized by the Whelan Award.

One of her students, Melody Eldridge, summarized these characteristics. "Ms. McDonald shows a real commitment to making sure her students do the best they possibly can," Eldridge said. "Being her teacher's aide, I have the opportunity to see her work with other classes. She has done nothing if not show that she is committed to each and every student comprehending the material and living up to their full potential."

In 2016, McDonald approached Karrie Shogren, Director of The Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities (KUCDD). She felt that students with disabilities in her general education math classes were struggling and she needed help figuring out how to get them engaged in math. Shogren's team began working with McDonald to teach her to

implement the Self Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI). The SDLMI provides a model for teachers to overlay goal setting and problem-solving instruction and activities in any content area, including math. Using this model, McDonald was able to adapt her instruction to get students to set and engage in goals.

The benefit of the SDLMI for McDonald's students was significant. All students showed greater engagement and increases in self-determination. McDonald also saw improvement in grades, particularly for those with disabilities. "As just one example, when first implementing the SDLMI with her Algebra classes, the vast majority of Ms. McDonald's students (91.2%) reported attaining expected or higher levels of academic goal attainment, including students with disabilities who had continuously struggled to achieve their goals," said Shogren.

Free State Principal Myron D. Graber filled in more of the story. "Mrs. McDonald self-initiated a collaborative project with the University of Kansas and has implemented the project across her classes over the past two years. This work enabled Mrs. McDonald to increase her

knowledge of and strengthen relationships amongst her students to best support them in their current and future endeavors. Her commitment to the learning process has not only changed the classroom environment but has inspired the administration to explore schoolwide implementation of the SDLMI for all students, including those with disabilities. Mrs. McDonald understands the many academic and social needs of students in preparing students for future success in today's world."

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McDonald found that with SDLMI she began to better understand her students. She already understood what they knew about math, but she also began to understand their motivations, their fears, and what supports they needed. She was able to use this information to support students to set personalized learning goals and to develop and implement action plans to achieve goals related to math learning. "She goes above and beyond, recognizing that students need to connect the math content to their life and to learn to set goals that are connected to what they need to learn and the support they need," said Shogren.

While McDonald has significantly impacted students in her own classroom, she has also acted as an extraordinary teacher leader advocating for change at Free State High School. Her efforts have served as a potential catalyst for collaboration between general and special education educators at the school. Administrators, special and general education department chairs, and special and general education teachers have begun to engage in collaborative discussion with the team at KUCDD to conceptualize how they may be able to leverage expertise and resources to support students'

"Her commitment to the learning process has not only changed the classroom environment but has inspired the administration to explore schoolwide implementation of the SDLMI for all students, including those with disabilities. Mrs. McDonald understands the many academic and social needs of students in preparing students for future success in today's world."

-Myron D. Graber



“She goes above and beyond, recognizing that students need to connect the math content to their life and to learn to set goals that are connected to what they need to learn and the support they need.”

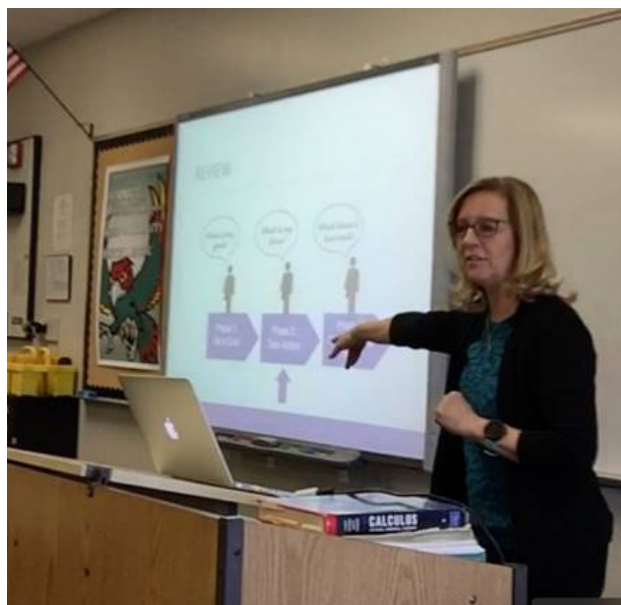
-Karrie Shogren

learning skills associated with self-determination schoolwide using the SDLMI. These efforts will have a direct and positive impact on students with disabilities now and in the future.

“Over the past two years, Ms. McDonald has taught us as much about the real-world implementation of the SDLMI as we have taught her,” says Shogren. “She has contributed to publications and provided comprehensive and informative feedback to support the development of an enhanced version of

the SDLMI Teacher’s Guide, including rich descriptions of her implementation through case studies to support future general and special education teachers. Ms. McDonald continues to support the development of a comprehensive package of SDLMI training materials by allowing us to video tape her instruction in the classroom. Ms. McDonald always has innovative and creative ideas for enhancing our research and dissemination activities to best support teachers and the students with and without disabilities that they teach.”

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Annette McDonald’s commitment to improving student outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities, her mentorship of students and other teachers, and her focus on creating opportunities for growth and development of all students have had a real impact. Karrie Shogren summed up why McDonald is the recipient of the 2018 Whelan Leadership for Learning Award. “I cannot think of another leader that I have worked with who has more passion and focus for enhancing the opportunities for students to learn.”

# GORDON R. ALLEY PARTNERSHIP AWARD RECIPIENTS

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1991

Edward Meyen  
*University of Kansas*

Bruce Passman  
*Blue Valley (KS) School  
District*

Donald E. Wilson  
*Shawnee Mission (KS) School  
District*

1992

Richard Schiefelbusch  
*University of Kansas*

Cecil D. Mercer  
*University of Florida*

1993

Marty Beech  
*Florida State University*

Judy Petry  
*University of Kansas*

Nona Tollefson  
*University of Kansas*

1994

Robert Taylor  
*Lawrence (KS) School District*

Ann Hoffman  
*Colorado Springs, Colo.*

Conn Thomas  
*West Texas A&M*

Gary M. Clark  
*University of Kansas*

1995

Jerry Chaffin  
*University of Kansas*

Carl Skordahl  
*Osseo (MN) Area Schools*

Ron Wolf  
*West Virginia Graduate  
College*

1996

Michael Pressley  
*State University of New York  
at Albany*

Charles Hughes  
*Pennsylvania State University*

1997

Philip C. McKnight  
*University of Kansas*

Jean Peterson  
*Learning Disabilities  
Association*

Nancy L. Peterson  
*University of Kansas*

1998

Hugh W. Catts  
*University of Kansas*

Edwin S. Ellis  
*University of Alabama*

Robert E. Frederick  
*University of Kansas*

1999

Carmen Cantrell  
*Shawnee Mission (KS)  
School District*

Randy Weseman  
*Lawrence (KS) School  
District*

Thomas L. Lowe  
*Muskegon (MI) School  
District*

2000

Douglas Eicher  
*Lawrence (KS) School  
District*

John Emerson  
*Casey Family Programs*

2001

Anne Clouatre  
*Louisiana State Department  
of Education*

Barbara Duchardt  
*Northwestern State  
University, Louisiana*



# GORDON R. ALLEY PARTNERSHIP AWARD

## RECIPIENTS (continued)

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James Glass <i>Topeka (KS) School District</i>	2009 D. Sue Vernon <i>Edge Enterprises Inc.</i>
2002 Tom Skrtic <i>University of Kansas</i> John Poggio <i>University of Kansas</i>	2010 Janet Marquis <i>University of Kansas</i>
2003 Paul Buskirk <i>University of Kansas</i>	2012 Dubuque Community School District <i>Dubuque, Iowa</i>
2004 Sharyl Kennedy <i>Horizon Academy</i>	2015 Mary Ann Ahearn <i>Northeast Florida Education Consortion</i>
2005 Jerry D. Bailey <i>University of Kansas</i>	2018 Jose Blackorby <i>CAST Inc.</i> Paula Crawford <i>North Carolina Dept. of Public Instruction</i> Suzanne Myers <i>Kansas Dept. of Education</i> Ellen Schiller <i>SRI</i> Sherry Thomas <i>North Carolina Dept. of Public Instruction</i>
2006 Mark Cooper <i>University of Central Arkansas</i>	
2007 Randy Sprick <i>Safe &amp; Civil Schools</i>	
2008 Andres Henriquez <i>Carnegie Foundation</i>	

# WHELAN LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING AWARD RECIPIENTS

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2013

**Kansas City, KS Public Schools**  
Cindy Lane  
*Superintendent*

2014

**Wichita KS Public Schools**  
John Allison  
*Superintendent of Schools*  
Denise Seguire  
*Assistant Superintendent,  
Learning Services*  
Neil Guthrie  
*Assistant Superintendent,  
Student Support Services*

2015

**Lawrence, KS Public Schools**  
Dr. Rick Doll  
*Superintendent of Schools*  
Dr. Angelique Nedved  
*Assistant Superintendent,  
Teaching and Learning*  
Neil Guthrie  
*Assistant Superintendent,  
Student Support Services*

2016

**Gardner Edgerton, KS School District**  
Judy Martin  
*Director of Special Services  
and Federal Programs*  
**Olathe, KS School District**  
Lanie Fasulo  
*Director of Special Services*  
Deb Chappell  
*Assistant Director of Special  
Services*  
Carol Affholder  
*Special Services  
Administrator*  
Kathy Easterly  
*Special Services Coordinator*  
Cristan Philipp  
*Special Services Coordinator*  
Tom Salas  
*Special Services Coordinator*  
Heidi Schneider  
*Special Services Coordinator*

2017

**Blue Valley, KS School District**  
Dr. Joan Robbins  
*Executive Director of  
Students Services / Director  
of Special Education*  
**Liberty Memorial Middle  
School**  
Jeff Harkin  
*Principal*

2018

**Abilene, KS School District**  
Chris Cooper  
*Assistant Superintendent*  
**Lawrence (KS) Free State High  
School**  
Annette McDonald  
*General Education  
Mathematics Teacher*

# 2018 NEWLY CERTIFIED SIM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPERS

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## ARKANSAS

Amanda Price, CEPD

## FLORIDA

Sarah Drachler, LSPD

Sarah Gentry, LSPD

Kerry Fitzgerald, CEPD

Laura Steere, LSPD

## OHIO

Amy Loyd, LSPD

## TEXAS

Kathy Alexander, CEPD

Amanda Arguijo, CEPD

Lauren Benoit, CEPD

Kristyna Brewer, LSPD

Casey Cole, LSPD

Georgina Courtney, CEPD

Chandra Daniels, CEPD

Zenovia DeCuir, CEPD

Lacy Dillard, LSPD

Kendra Harris, CEPD

Elizabeth Hodges, CEPD

Kylee Jeffers, CEPD

Shanna Jones, CEPD

Kristyn McNeely, CEPD

Laura Porras, CEPD

Zenobia Pressley, LSPD

Amanda Richardson, CEPD

Debbie Rosenbaum, CEPD

Gaye Rosser, CEPD

Daphne Sewell, CEPD

Jennifer Stowers, CEPD

Cheryl Thompson, LSPD

Roxanne Walker, CEPD

Amber Walker, LSPD

Cyntell Washington, CEPD

Amy Wolfe, LSPD

Emily Zartman, CEPD

Melissa Zoulek, CEPD

## VIRGINIA

Elizabeth Graham Lau,  
CEPD

## WASHINGTON

Christina Meeks, CEPD

