

# CEHD connect

THE MAGAZINE OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

PROVIDING CARE  
FROM AFAR

P. 8

MAKING COMPUTER  
SCIENCE INCLUSIVE

P. 10

WORKING FOR THE  
NORTHSIDE

P. 14

*Striving toward*

**EDUCATIONAL  
EQUITY**

▶ P. 18



SPRING/SUMMER 2024



*from the*  
**DEAN**



**THIS IS THE SEASON** when we honor the achievements of our graduates. Their families, friends, and our faculty and staff gathered in May to acknowledge over 800 undergraduate and graduate degree recipients.

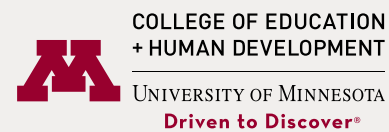
We also continue to face terrible global conflicts. By some counts, there are over a dozen wars underway across our small planet. Universities, where inquiry and dialogue form our bedrock, have long played a critical role in public discourse around social movements.

The University of Minnesota continues to be a model in this respect. And those of us that have been through decades of social movements know they take time, persistence, patience, and dialogue. Universities change the world in so many ways. We have endless examples of how CEHD faculty, staff, and students are changing the world and improving lives through teaching and learning, research and discovery, and public engagement and outreach.

In this issue of *Connect*, be sure to learn more about the telehealth innovations in our Institute on Community Integration; donor engagement in international initiatives and a recent trip to Thailand; the newly formed Northern Lights Collaborative for Computing Education and focus on creating sustainable and equitable computer science learning progressions for K-12 students; and the feature story on the Northside Job Creation Team developing models of sustainable jobs in North Minneapolis, through the department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development and multiple community partners.

I am also proud that we continue to host the LEAD conference, bringing over 400 educators, school leaders, and community partners to campus for two days of internationally renowned speakers, workshops, and networking. This has become a destination event and a highlight of the year.

The University of Minnesota is a learning organization. We rely on our bedrock to continually learn how to do the work of higher education. And in this moment, we also celebrate the achievements of our graduates who will continue in their own ways making the world a better place.



- EDITOR** Kevin Moe
- DESIGNER** Kirsten Mortensen
- WRITERS** Marina Aleixo, Vichet Chhuon, Ann Dingman, Kevin Moe, Jacquelyn Sertic
- PHOTOGRAPHERS** Jairus Davis, Jayme Halbritter, Marjan Samadi
- OFFICE OF THE DEAN**
- DEAN** Michael C. Rodriguez
- ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT** Tabitha Grier-Reed
- ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION, DIVERSITY, AND INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES** Nicola Alexander
- SENIOR ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY** Frank Symons
- ASSISTANT DEAN FOR EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS** Rashné R. Jehangir
- ASSISTANT DEAN FOR PROFESSIONAL AND ONLINE EDUCATION** Cassie Scharber
- CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER AND CHIEF OF OPERATIONS** Gail Renteria
- INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIP OFFICER** Ryan Warren
- CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER** Susan Holter
- DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES** Yvonne Shorts Lind
- ALUMNI SOCIETY BOARD** Jenna Mitchler (president), Julio Caésar (vice president), La Tasha Shevlin (past president), Louellen Essex (secretary), Ron Anderson, Emily DePalma Mance, Cody Freeman (graduate student representative), Sousada Grande, Danielle Hegseth, Kim Jenkins, Lisa Kaler, Kristin Morris, Jenni Norlin-Weaver, Jonathan J. Okstad, Jónína Ólafsdóttir Kárdal, Charlie Potts, Carlos Reyes, Allen Shen, Professor Stephanie Sisco (dean's designee), Antwoin Stephens, Marina Uehara
- ONLINE EDITION** connect.cehd.umn.edu

© 2024 Regents of the University of Minnesota. This material is available in alternative formats upon request. Direct requests to CEHD Office of Communications and Marketing, 612-626-7257, cehdcomms@umn.edu. The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

Connect is published three times a year by the University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development for alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the college. Send correspondence to the editor, 110 Wulling Hall, 86 Pleasant St. S.E., University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455. For address corrections, contact us at 612-301-2663 or connect@umn.edu.



## Features

### 14 WORKING FOR THE NORTHSIDE

How a CEHD lab is helping sustain community opportunities

### 18 STRIVING TOWARD EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

The LEAD conference's marriage of practice and research

#### ON THE COVER

The 2023 Leading in Equity, Action, and Diversity (LEAD) for PreK-12 System Improvement conference, held at McNamara Alumni Center

#### PHOTOGRAPH BY

Marjan Samadi

## In every issue

### 2 COMMUNITY

CEHD's technological innovations on display, education opportunity for all students, new gifts and commitments, Tucker Center celebrates 30 years, CEHD places high on *U.S. News* rankings

### 5 INTERNATIONAL

Reflecting on Cambodia, A journey to Thailand

### 8 RESEARCH/INNOVATION

Providing care from afar: The MIDB's telehealth initiative leads the way in behavioral health access

### 10 ANTIRACISM

Making computer science inclusive: Northern Lights Collaborative for Computing Education addresses CS inequities

### 12 FACULTY

School of Kinesiology announces new director, in memoriam, honors and appointments

### 26 STUDENT VOICES

A doctoral journey of community and support

### 28 ALUMNI

From the president, CEHD alumni can be found everywhere, congratulations, distinguished alumni!

### 30 ALUMNI PROFILE

Public service is her calling: FSOS grad elected to St. Paul City Council

### 32 GIVING MATTERS

For the love of the game



## CEHD's technological innovations on display

CEHD'S ANNUAL RESEARCH & INNOVATION DAY highlights the impact of college research on all our lives. Visitors are treated to poster presentations of groundbreaking research conducted by students and faculty. To emphasize the "innovation" aspect of the day, two new sessions were added to this year's event, which took place at McNamara Alumni Center in March.

"Innovation Roadmap: Pathways to Launch" was for those CEHD students, faculty, and staff interested in discovering more about how their work can translate into commercialization opportunities, as well as for industry partners interested in learning more about the software and products emerging from and across CEHD.

"Our research is creating things and discovering things," said Vaughn Schmid, a technology portfolio manager at the University's Technology Commercialization office, who presented at the session. "The idea is how to get those things developed at the U outside into the world."

Technology commercialization benefits everyone, Schmid explained. It benefits the public good and generates revenue to foster economic growth. And some of that revenue comes back to the U to its labs and helps fund continued research. About 400 new inventions are submitted to his office every year, Schmid said. Patents are filed on 40 percent of the inventions. Many of the others are secured by copyright.

CEHD has its own technology commercialization enterprise, Educational Technology Innovations (ETI), formed in 2015. "Oftentimes the work of our college lands in manuals or training—we didn't have a way of developing software," said CEHD Innovation and Partnership Officer Ryan Warren, who founded ETI. "The thinking was bringing in people focused on software design, development, and dissemination. You pair developers with researchers,

and you can do things you wouldn't be able to do otherwise."

In the second innovation session, "5 Minute(ish) Pitch," attendees listened to four pitches of CEHD products that are currently poised to generate or are actively generating external sales from K-12 clients nationwide. They included:

**Functional Phonics + Morphology:** An evidence-based phonics curriculum which follows a logical progression of phonics-based skills from simple to complex for building reading and spelling proficiency. ([z.umn.edu/functionalphonics](http://z.umn.edu/functionalphonics))

**Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS):** A framework for literacy achievement in grades K-5 within a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) or Response to Intervention (RTI) context. ([presscommunity.org](http://presscommunity.org))

**IM4:** A problem-solving process that increases the likelihood of success when delivering interventions for students with social, emotional, and behavioral needs. ([im4education.com](http://im4education.com))

**Inference Galaxy:** A digital learning resource that teaches and assesses inference-making skills for K-2 students. ([inferencegalaxy.com](http://inferencegalaxy.com))

—KEVIN MOE

Learn more about Educational Technology Innovations: [eti.umn.edu](http://eti.umn.edu)

JAIRUS DAVIS



## Education opportunity for all students

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE that Professor Rashné Jehangir has been named Assistant Dean for Education Opportunity Programs. She is responsible for providing leadership, development, and oversight of units in CEHD whose focus is to enhance the education opportunities of students who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education.

She works closely with college leadership to ensure that all units within CEHD work effectively as a team and collaborate broadly with faculty, staff, and students to advance excellence and advocacy in serving the needs of underrepresented communities. Her role aims to support CEHD students, but is designed to continue to build broad coalitions across colleges, state institutions, and community partners.

Jehangir currently holds the Robert Beck Chair of Ideas in Education in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development. She is also the Horace T. Morse-University Distinguished Professor for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education and the inaugural founding director of the First-Gen Institute.

She holds a BA in psychology from Lawrence University as well as an MA in counseling and student personnel psychology and a PhD in higher education from the University of Minnesota. Her research centers around access and equity, with a focus on the experiences of first-generation students; students of color; and immigrant, poor, and working-class college students, faculty, and practitioners.

—KEVIN MOE

### NEW GIFTS AND COMMITMENTS

**\$500,000 TO \$1,000,000**  
Schmidt Futures Fund gave to the Learning Engineering Fund and the LEVI Engagement Hub Project.

**\$250,000 TO \$500,000**  
The Sauer Family Foundation established the Sauer Family Foundation Fund for Building Resilience to Trauma.

**\$100,000 TO \$250,000**  
Dr. Gail Nygaard Anderson added to the Anderson MIDB Fund for Early Identification & Intervention of Dyslexia and the Gail and Dean Anderson Fund for Early Identification & Intervention of Dyslexia.

Dr. Mary Jo Kane added to the David and Janie Kane Endowed Tucker Center Director Fund.

Brian M. and Wei S. Meyer established the Brian and Wei Meyer Scholarship in CEHD

and the Brian and Wei Meyer Fellowship in Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development.

**\$50,000 TO \$100,000**  
3M Company and 3M Foundation renewed its support of Prepare2Nspire.

**\$25,000 TO \$50,000**  
Brian and La Donna Boettcher made a pledge to the William E. Gardner Scholarship.

Gail S. Ghere made a pledge to the David Ghere Memorial Scholarship.

Mary Klinnert and Allen Adinoff made a pledge to the Mary Klinnert PhD and Allen Adinoff MD Scholarship.

Jean McCurdy made a pledge to the Tucker Center Internship and Graduate Fund for Gender Equity in Sport.

The Mendon F. Schutt Family Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation gave to the CAREI and Minneapolis Public School Partnership Fund.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community established the Indigenous Education for All Online Course Fund.

James Smith added to the Bruce Balow Fund in Special Education.

**HERITAGE SOCIETY\***  
Judy Lockwood Cutler made a gift to establish the Lillian Rantanen Lockwood Scholarship.

Nancy Jane Latini made a gift to establish the N. J. Latini Faculty Fellowship.

John P. and Joan A. Huseh increased their gift to the John P. and Joan A. Huseh Scholarship.

Sally J. Wagner and Kent Severson made a gift to the Louis R. and Dona S. Wagner Scholarship.

Luanne and William Turrentine made a gift to establish the Luanne (Johnson) and William Turrentine Study Abroad Fund in CEHD.

\*The University of Minnesota President's Club Heritage Society recognizes individuals who have made estate or other planned gifts to benefit the University. To learn more, contact [cehdexrl@umn.edu](mailto:cehdexrl@umn.edu).

Includes gifts made between November 16, 2023, and March 7, 2024



# Tucker Center celebrates 30 years



**IN 2023, THE TUCKER CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON GIRLS & WOMEN IN SPORT** celebrated its 30th anniversary as the first center of its kind in the world to take seriously the academic study of girls and women in sport. Endowed in 1993 by Dorothy McNeill Tucker, PhD, a 1945 University of Minnesota graduate, the center established standards of excellence with respect to scholarly inquiry, graduate education, community outreach, and public service. Housed in the School of Kinesiology, the Tucker Center is devoted

to sponsoring, promoting, and disseminating scholarly activity on how sport impacts the lives of girls and women.

Interest, investment, growth, viewership, attendance, and sponsorship in women's sport has increased exponentially and the Tucker Center has been at the forefront of this accelerated change. Its work is sought after and used around the world by those who support and care about girls' and women's experiences in sport, including policy makers, university athletic departments, national governing bodies, industry leaders, sport federations, coaches and coaching associations, schools, communities, and families.

Since its inception, the Tucker Center has provided centralization, organization, scientific excellence, and national leadership on issues of great national and local significance. Through its direction and thought leadership, it encourages everyone to work together to better the lives of girls and women in ways that go far beyond the playing fields. **Visit [TuckerCenter.org](https://TuckerCenter.org) to learn more.**

Read about the impact of the Tucker Center and its staff over the years:

**Empowering Sport for All:**

▶ [z.umn.edu/Tucker\\_empowering](https://z.umn.edu/Tucker_empowering)

**Helping Girls Reach Their Full Athletic Potential:**

▶ [z.umn.edu/Tucker\\_potential](https://z.umn.edu/Tucker_potential)

**Advocating for Women in Sport:**

▶ [z.umn.edu/Tucker\\_advocating](https://z.umn.edu/Tucker_advocating)

**Talking about Activism and Empowerment in Sports:**

▶ [z.umn.edu/Tucker\\_activism](https://z.umn.edu/Tucker_activism)

**Leveling the Playing Field:**

▶ [z.umn.edu/Tucker\\_playing\\_field](https://z.umn.edu/Tucker_playing_field)

**The Tucker Center at 25:**

▶ [z.umn.edu/Tucker\\_25](https://z.umn.edu/Tucker_25)

**A Champion for Coaches:**

▶ [z.umn.edu/Tucker\\_champion](https://z.umn.edu/Tucker_champion)

—KEVIN MOE



## CEHD places high on U.S. News rankings

**CEHD IS HOME** to the 15th best public education graduate school in the nation, according to *U.S. News & World Report*. In its Best Graduate School annual rankings, *U.S. News* moved CEHD up one place from last year among public educational institutions. Of the entire ranked list of 255 schools, both public and private, CEHD ranked 25th, unchanged from last year.

For specialty rankings, the Department of Educational Psychology continues to excel. Its educational psychology program placed seventh, a jump from 11th place last year, and special education was ranked the 10th best in the country.

The Institute of Child Development (ICD) continues to have the #1 developmental psychology program in the U.S. Psychology programs are not rated every year. ICD was last rated in 2022 as part of *U.S. News'* rankings of the Best Social Sciences and Humanities Schools.

Overall rankings are derived by scoring each school on several distinct factors, including research activity, faculty resources, student selectivity, and quality assessments from peers and other educational professionals.

JAIRUS DAVIS



## Reflecting on Cambodia

*CEHD faculty delegation engages with educational partners in Southeast Asian nation*

**IN JANUARY 2024**, nine CEHD faculty traveled to Southeast Asia to learn and engage with partners in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

International faculty delegations are part of recent efforts by the Office of International Initiatives to promote cultural understanding, interdisciplinary collaborations, and global perspectives among CEHD faculty. The first sponsored faculty delegation to Brazil in September 2018 was recognized by the University of Minnesota with the C. Eugene Allen Award for Innovative International Initiatives.

“The vision is for a diverse group of individuals from across our college to meaningfully engage in knowledge exchange and consider ways to integrate diversity and internationalization into their research and teaching,” says Marina Aleixo, director of the Office of International Initiatives.

The CEHD delegates to Cambodia included Aleixo, Vichet Chhuon from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I), David DeLiema from the De-

partment of Educational Psychology, Ka I Ip from the Institute of Child Development (ICD), Timothy Lensmire from C&I, Roozbeh Shirazi from the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD), Catherine Solheim from the Department of Family Social Science, Bhaskar Upadhyay from OLPD, and Sheila Williams Ridge from ICD.

The delegation to Cambodia is grounded in a “glocal” approach to international engagement, a concept that was first adopted by the business and technology sectors to understand how global issues impact local markets. In higher education, glocal has been adopted to describe the understanding that internationalization efforts must include a respectful exchange with local communities. To be glocal is to be in constant dialogue. Just as things that occur globally affect local communities, local life reflects diverse cultures and experiences from around the world. Hence, being glocal obligates researchers, teachers, and students to consider actions that

PHOTOS COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

will demonstrate respect and mutuality among those they work with domestically and abroad.

The delegation met with a number of CEHD partners in Cambodia, including the Khmer Vulnerability Aid Organization (KVAO). KVAO is a non-governmental organization that works with Cambodian Americans who have been deported to Cambodia. They help individuals integrate into Cambodian society through temporary housing, legal documentation, and employment assistance. Since 2018, Chhuon and Aleixo have worked with KVAO to create a teaching series that supports deportees with pedagogical training and employment as English teachers.

DeLiema says of the visit, “We shared our noticings about the poise and affirmed identities of the English-language teachers we met, who are recent deportees to Cambodia, and who all participated in the UMN-led teacher education workshops. We discussed a renewed sense of human resilience and a deeper sense of who is given opportunities to be resilient.”

Delegates also visited Tiny Toones, a school founded by a deported Cambodian American, and has opened its doors to Cambodian street children since 2005. Its focus is on the whole child, including students' passion for the arts. Tiny Toones has helped hundreds of children receive schooling on its campus and elsewhere and in some cases, students developed into returning teachers and well-known dancers and artists. Tiny Toones is currently an internship site for CEHD graduate students in Cambodia.

Another highlight was the faculty visit to the Royal University of Phnom Penh, which is Cambodia's largest and oldest institution of higher education. This university represents the nation's rebuilding efforts after the devastating war and genocide that occurred in Cambodia from 1975 through 1979. The visit was also





meaningful given that many CEHD alumni attended Royal University of Phnom Penh prior to their matriculation in CEHD.

Shirazi says, “One common thread was the enormity of labor of re-envisioning and rebuilding educational structures and practices in Cambodia in the wake of a genocide that targeted Cambodian educators and intelligentsia. This rebuilding is not only long-term cognitive and material labor, but deeply emotional as well—I was struck by how proximate the past was to the educators we met, by the ways their stories were narrating a collective memory in real time.”

Williams Ridge is director of the Child Development Lab School and says, “My experience was supported by talented educators from many different backgrounds

in Cambodia, including the teachers who were deported from the U.S., those working at universities, those with little formal education, and others with extensive formal education. Learning more about the genocide in Cambodia was also very meaningful in the contexts of education, injustice, and resiliency. Thinking about my work in leading the Child Development Lab School and teaching in the Institute of Child Development, these experiences inform the ways that I more broadly talk about education, educators, and the communities of learning that we create.”

The issue of trauma and family separation as related to war and state policy was a recurring theme throughout the visit. For example, the family of Ka I Ip, assistant professor in ICD, was directly

◀ Left: The CEHD delegation visits the Institute of Foreign Languages, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Right: A gathering of CEHD-KVAO teaching methodology graduates on January 16, 2024.

impacted by the Cambodian civil war and genocide. On this trip, Ip met many Cambodian Americans deported by the U.S. and observed that “the trauma of separation extends beyond the immediate family, impacting broader social networks and community cohesion. Thus, the practice of deportation without considering its profound consequences on families and communities perpetuates cycles of intergenerational trauma and hinders opportunities for resilience and healing.”

Chhuon, the delegation’s faculty lead, says, “These colleagues represent the very best of our college in terms of diverse interests, intellectual curiosity, and embodiment of the spirit of collaboration.” CEHD continues to support multiple projects in Cambodia related to areas of immigration policy, refugee experiences, teacher training, entrepreneurship, and mental health.

—VICHET CHHUON

Read more reflections about the visit: [z.umn.edu/Cambodia\\_delegation](https://z.umn.edu/Cambodia_delegation)

This spring, a small group of CEHD alumni and donors embarked on a journey to listen, learn, observe, and engage with our partners in Thailand. This was a unique opportunity for individuals who have been committed to CEHD to see firsthand the dynamic collaborations and projects that have been happening in Thailand.

Belle Yaffe, Louellen Essex, Mary Tjosvold, Christine Warren, and U of M Regent Bo Thao-Urabe had the opportu-



▲ Upper left: A meeting with women leaders at a Hmong village in Chiang Khong. The Women for Change project is a collaboration with the local organization Center for Girls, a CEHD longtime partner and site for our graduate student summer internships. Lower Left: A meeting with Akha elders at the Hill Area Development Foundation (HADF) center in the mountains in Chiang Rai province. HADF is a longtime college partner and a summer internship placement site for CEHD graduate students. Above center: Christine Warren speaks with a student during the Anuban Wiang Kaen School visit. Above right: U of M Regent Bo Thao-Urabe and Belle Yaffe looking through resource materials developed by HADF and local partners.

nity to visit current program sites and interact with local students, educators, and community members while immersed in vibrant Thai traditions and customs. The visit showcased CEHD’s internationalization efforts and sustained commitment to infusing global experiences into its teaching, scholarship, and service.

The experience “helped me to see the depth of commitment we make to local partners and how much time, effort, and resources go into creating these opportunities for our students and faculty,” shares Thao-Urabe (BS’94, family social science).

Thailand was chosen not only for its historical ties with CEHD but also for its cultural richness and educational opportunities. Visits to current program sites provided valuable insights into the educational landscape of Thailand. For example, the group’s visit to Anuban Wiang Kaen School helped show ways educators are engaging students in project-based learning to solve local challenges and teaching culturally relevant curriculum to create a sense of belonging for their diverse student population.

Such meetings with local hosts facilitated deep conversations about the benefits of these experiences for Thai partners as well as CEHD students and faculty. “It’s essential that our students

and faculty see themselves as part of the larger world, and though we have much to offer, we also have much to learn, so these opportunities help to elevate that,” shares Tjosvold (BS’64, mathematics education; PhD’75, educational administration).

The group also met with women leaders from the Kiew Doi Luang Village, a Hmong community in Chiang Khong, to learn about their Women for Change project in collaboration with the Center for Girls, a longtime CEHD partner. The visit offered these CEHD leaders a glimpse into Thailand’s dynamic shifts in gender roles, education, and economic sustainability. “I am much more aware of the types of learning experiences our students can have and how important it is to have a global view,” says Essex (BS’70, speech; PhD’79, educational administration).

The Thailand Showcase was a collaboration between CEHD’s External Relations Office and Office of International Initiatives. The group, led by Office of International Initiatives Director Mari-

na Aleixo and Catherine Solheim of the Department of Family Social Science, was composed of extraordinary women whose support of CEHD allows for these types of engagements to flourish. “The experience of traveling with this amazing group of women leaders was invaluable,” Aleixo says. “Beyond the insights we gain from our Thai host, the reflections we shared within our group will undoubtedly inform my thinking and leadership in CEHD.”

The visit has sparked new and creative ideas that will facilitate internationalization of CEHD teaching, research, and engagement scholarship. “It was gratifying to interact with fellow CEHD alumni in Thailand and to witness the valuable, positive impact that CEHD’s international program has had on past graduates and which I know now from firsthand experience will benefit future CEHD students. It was a wonderful learning experience,” shares Yaffe (BS’70, elementary education).

—MARINA ALEIXO

PHOTOS COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

## A journey to Thailand

*Alumni and donors see firsthand the dynamic collaborations between CEHD and a partner country*

**FOR DECADES**, CEHD has maintained strong partnerships with schools, organizations, and individuals in Thailand. From undergraduate study abroad programs to graduate internships, CEHD has established a robust network of relationships focused on research, student exchange, academic study, and professional training. Thailand is also home for many CEHD alumni.





## Providing care from afar

*The MIDB's telehealth initiative leads the way in behavioral health access*

**ONE OF THE LASTING EFFECTS** of the COVID-19 pandemic was the adoption of telecommunications in numerous areas of society. Communication via screen has been available for some time, of course, but the pandemic brought on its use with greater urgency and ubiquitousness. A prime example is in the realm of health-care. Providers unable to see their patients in person due to proximity or quarantine had a new outlet for their services.

“The pandemic resulted in a very clear and swift demonstration of human ingenuity regarding the workforce and interactions with patients, research participations,

and trainees,” says Damien Fair, PhD, a professor in the Institute of Child Development (ICD) and the Redleaf Endowed Director of the Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain (MIDB), a collaboration between CEHD and the Medical School. “New forms of telecommunications, online assessments, and online training emerged from seemingly nowhere.”

MIDB is at the forefront of these advances with its TeleOutreach Research Core and TeleOutreach Center led by the Institute on Community Integration (ICI) and directed by Jessica Simacek, PhD. “We are innovating in a place that can provide

access to services and care in ways that were unheard of even just a few years ago,” Fair says. “For MIDB, ICI, and the work by Jessica, this became an opportunity to re-think how we engage traditionally underrepresented populations and reduce inequalities in health and training, particularly in rural communities, military families, and communities with limited access to our institutions.”

Simacek, a Department of Educational Psychology alum, has been involved in telehealth research for nearly 10 years. Much of her work is focused on supporting children with neurological disabilities such as autism.

“We found that kids have to wait a long time to access the supports they and their families need,” she says. “This has been a problem for a long time.” It is even worse in geographically dispersed areas—there might not be specialists in regions near where families live, necessitating their need to travel far for services.

The TeleOutreach Center was established in 2020. The center implemented telehealth to support families who had no easy means to travel long distances—it was a tool designed to connect with families while they waited for support. Additionally, the center provides training and technical assistance to professionals in the field. Since its inception, the center has provided support to 241 children with developmental, emotional, or behavioral health needs and hosted 94 training sessions for 4,532 attendees.

With the 2020 pandemic, telehealth became near universal. “Providers had to do everything remotely,” Simacek says. “That certainly wasn’t ideal, but it did force everyone to try to use telehealth in some way or another. That urgency has gone away, which is very good, but other urgencies remain that must be addressed, such as extraordinarily long periods of time that most families spend on waitlists prior to



▲ Above: Jessica Simacek and Damien Fair. Below: Simacek and Adele Dimian connecting with community providers from the TeleOutreach Suites at the Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain.

accessing developmental and behavioral specialists for their children. We are now trying to disentangle and figure out where telehealth can be helpful to promote access to care faster and to improve care quality.”

In particular, this means using telehealth to support populations that have the greatest challenges accessing care: those in rural or geographically dispersed locations. In many cases, these are military families. To assist these families, the Department of Defense recently awarded the MIDB \$3.5 million to partner on a study: “A Research Collaboratory to Explore Best Practices for Expanding Access to Care Through Expansion and Support of Telehealth Care for Children and Families with Behavioral Health Needs.” Simacek is the PI of the study. The project will entail creating a “Minnesota Telehealth Innovation” site to provide training and assistance to providers, educators, and families to improve service access.

“There are many ways in which this study will change the way we do care for underserved populations for years to come,” says Fair, a co-PI of the project. “I think it is not shocking to anyone to hear that our health care system in Minnesota

is complicated. I’m a fairly educated, well-intentioned patient myself who has difficulty navigating this system, and if it wasn’t for the persistence of my wife, I would be fearful my children wouldn’t get the care they need. Having systems in

place to speak with providers and supporters on how to get the care one’s family needs, no matter where they are in the state or really across many states, is of enormous value to the healthy development of our kids long term.”

Thinking long term is top of mind when Simacek reflects on telehealth. She envisions the many ways it can grow: engaging with more areas of the state, developing new technologies, and providing more training. “I could see us expanding more deeply into some other focus areas where

we can take these methods that have been working well and adapt them to support children and youth with other developmental and behavioral health needs who are facing other related barriers to care access,” she says.

Fair is excited that the telehealth initiative is built upon the strengths of many at the University. “It is literally the embodiment of what was imagined when we started this experiment we now call the MIDB,” he says. “We have brought together folks in pediatrics, psychiatry, ICI, ICD, psychology, and more. Support structures around web development, software development, data security, databasing, mobile technologies, and more from Research Computing, Health Sciences Technology, CEHD, and the Medical School are also contributing to this amazing endeavor.”

—KEVIN MOE

Learn more: [z.umn.edu/MIDB-Telehealth](https://z.umn.edu/MIDB-Telehealth)



PEXELS.COM

ADAM GUGGENHEIM; COURTESY OF MIDB



# Making computer science inclusive

*Northern Lights Collaborative for Computing Education addresses CS inequities*

**IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE** to many people that for the percentage of its high schools offering computer science (CS) courses, Minnesota ranks dead last in the country. The national average sits at 58 percent and Minnesota’s neighbors Iowa (71 percent) and Wisconsin (66 percent) are markedly higher than that. In Minnesota, only 28 percent of schools offer these essential programs. Of those, 12 percent are urban schools.

Not only are CS courses gateways to STEM careers, but they are also more and more necessary in navigating day-to-day living. “As our society increasingly relies on digital technologies, it’s imperative that students also understand computer science,” says Jennifer Rosato, director of Northern Lights Collaborative for Com-

puting Education, an organization devoted to advancing CS education across Minnesota and nationally. “Students learn science to understand the world around us.”

Northern Lights Collaborative, housed in CEHD, was created in late 2023 in part to address Minnesota’s dismal standings in its CS course offerings. “A primary purpose of establishing the collaborative at the University of Minnesota is to support expanding access to rigorous and equitable computer science education for all students in Minnesota,” Rosato says. In short, the Northern Lights Collaborative believes computing education should be universally accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the unique needs and aspirations of all learners and educators.

“We aim to be state and national lead-

▼ Below, left: Jennifer Rosato and Paul Schonfeld participate in STEM Day at the Capitol in St. Paul on March 26, 2024.

ers in supporting computing education that is community-oriented,” says the collaborative’s District Support Coordinator Paul Schonfeld. Schonfeld leads the implementation of programs that support K-12 CS pathways through professional development, coaching, and district planning. “We look for ways to identify barriers to participation and use evidence-based strategies to address these challenges so that all students have the opportunity to learn about computer science.”

The collaborative involves partnerships with local and national organizations and community leaders. “We are unique in how we approach developing learning experiences that are evidence-based and supported through collaboration,” says Learning Experience Designer Justin Cannady, who helps develop inclusive CS for educators and students. “We never design in a silo and are constantly partnering with other educators and organizations to ensure as many voices are heard as possible.”

## EDUCATION PARTNERS

Through a National Science Foundation grant, “K12 CS Pathways for Rural and Tribal Communities,” the collaborative is partnering with four school districts in northern Minnesota to offer support as they build their own district visions for CS education. The grant is a four-year project aimed at creating sustainable CS pathways. The partner districts are part of a professional learning network that shares best practices and strategies for adding CS in elementary, middle, and high schools with a focus on supporting Native American students and students with disabilities.

“Districts have opportunities to collaborate with our organization and partner districts as they work toward their own goals,” Schonfeld explains. “Northern



▲ Above, from left: Educators in the K12 CS Pathways program learn about equity and computer science during a professional learning network meeting; Hermantown Community School administrators and teachers try out hands-on computational thinking activities at a professional development event; Hermantown and Fond du Lac educators share with each other traditional and modern ways of making maple syrup, or *Iskigamizigan* (sugar bush camp) as it’s called in Ojibwe.



Lights offers customized professional development for districts, and also helps guide them as they select curriculum and seek additional support from partner organizations.”

Northern Lights also recently received a Google Gift to support the development of an Indigenous CS curriculum unit incorporating Ojibwe and Dakota languages and cultures. Up to 15 schools with significant Native American populations will be provided with stipends for educators to attend workshops, implement a CS curriculum unit, and provide feedback to improve the materials. Northern Lights was one of only three university organizations across the country to receive funding from Google to increase CS access and participation for Indigenous students from K-12 through postsecondary.

The collaborative is also partnering with youth-serving organizations in Duluth to document, study, and support opportunities for informal CS learning for K-12 youth outside of school hours. “We

have received support from the national organization CSforALL, with Duluth being one of six cities participating in the inaugural cohort of the CSforALL Accelerator Program,” Schonfeld says. “The accelerator program is focused on accelerating high-need communities in their progress toward fundamental standards-aligned CS education for all learners, and increased access to interest-driven CS learning opportunities.”

Within the schools, Duluth’s elementary library media specialists are now receiving professional development in CS fundamentals and will implement CS lessons in kindergarten through fifth grade this year. Also, the district is adding or adjusting three courses in its middle schools for the 2024-25 school year. Along with these significant changes, the district reports that one of the most valuable aspects of its involvement with Northern Lights is being connected to people in other districts who are also building equitable CS pathways.

Feedback like this lets the collaborative know it is on the right track. “Success for me means building trusting relationships with the people I work with and seeing evidence that all of their students have opportunities to experience the joy and intrigue involved in learning about computer science,” Schonfeld says.

Legislation from the 2023 session supports a state plan to grow CS education in Minnesota. Northern Lights Collaborative will grow in tandem. “We want to be the guiding light and a source of inspiration for other education entities by modeling ways of teaching and learning computer education so that it is inclusive to all students,” Cannady says. “We have an opportunity to bring Minnesota from last to first in computing education.”

—KEVIN MOE

Learn more: [northern-lights.umn.edu](https://northern-lights.umn.edu)



COURTESY OF NORTHERN LIGHTS COLLABORATIVE

Northern Lights Collaborative will be hosting Minnesota’s second-annual computer science professional development week from August 13 to 15 in Minneapolis. ▶ **Learn more about the workshops and indicate your interest at: [z.umn.edu/empowermncs](https://z.umn.edu/empowermncs).**



# School of Kinesiology announces new director

**CEHD IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE** that Alex Garn has accepted the position of director of our School of Kinesiology. Garn comes to CEHD from Louisiana State University (LSU), Baton Rouge, where he has served as interim director of its school of kinesiology since last year. He has been at LSU since 2007, holding the Karen Wax Schmitt and Family Endowed Professorship, leading the division of behavioral science, and serving in numerous leadership roles.

“Alex brings a tremendous commitment to supporting faculty, staff, and students to reach their personal and professional goals, and a commitment to translational science,” says CEHD Dean Michael C. Rodriguez. “He knows the incredible success and potential of the school and has plans to further enhance the research and engaged scholarship goals across disciplines. He brings an outstanding record of fundraising and strategic investments in faculty and infrastructure. He leads by empowering others, and as a Fellow in the American Kinesiology Association Leadership Institute, continues to deepen his leadership knowledge and skills. His record of supporting a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion is supported by his strategic investments and outcomes in student recruitment, funding, curriculum development, and operations.”

Garn holds a BA in physical education from the University of Northern Iowa, an MS in kinesiology from the University of Wyoming, and a PhD in human performance from Indiana University. He serves on the editorial boards of the *International Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, the *Journal of Teaching in Physical*



*Education*, and is the psychology section editor for *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science*. He also was on the board of the *Journal of Advanced Academics* for several years.

Prior to his career in academia, Garn served as a physical education teacher, coach, and supervisor for Cedar Rapids Community Schools in Iowa and at St. Laurence Elementary School in Laramie, Wyoming. These experiences greatly informed his research path. His current focus investigates motivational and emotional determinants of physical activity, motor skill performance, learning, and psychological well-being. He has a strong interest in exploring effective ways to increase health behaviors across the lifespan. A secondary avenue of his research is the use of schools as a point of intervention for children’s health and well-being.

“I am so excited to join one of the best kinesiology programs in the country,” Garn says. “I can’t wait to work closely with the outstanding School of Kinesiology faculty and staff to find innovative ways to promote cutting-edge research, student success, and community impact. I am thankful for this opportunity and will work tirelessly to advance the school’s mission and core values.”



## In memoriam

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY** Professor Emeritus Frank Henderson Wood died on December 11, 2023. He was 94 years old. Wood dedicated his career to improving outcomes for children with emotional and behavioral disabilities. His contributions to the field of special education are prolific; and yet, his career began humbly in the public school classroom. Wood was drawn to teaching students with special needs; however, he felt his effectiveness as an instructor was limited due to the number of students in the general education classroom. He left general education to become the first public school teacher for students classified as emotionally disturbed. When special education became a discipline,

he joined the PhD program at the U and graduated in 1965. He was the first U of M PhD student to graduate with a specialization in emotional and behavioral disabilities. Following graduation, Wood became a faculty member of the Department of Educational Psychology’s special education program, serving from 1965 to 1994.

## Honors

**Alexandre Ardichvili**, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, was inducted into the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) Hall of Fame, presented to scholars in human resource development and related disciplines who have made enduring contributions to the field.

**Don Dengel**, School of Kinesiology, was inducted into the University of Minnesota’s Academies for Excellence in Team Science. The award was given to a team of University researchers investigating new treatments that improve the physical and emotional health of children who are affected by obesity and obesity-related conditions.

**Ann Masten**, Institute of Child Development, received the 2024 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Psychology for her landmark body of work that identified “ordinary magic” as a contributor to resilience in children. Some of the factors Masten coined as “ordinary magic” that encourage resiliency include supportive relationships, a sense of belonging, self-control, problem-solving skills, optimism, motivation, and a sense of purpose.

**Abigail Rombalski**, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, received a 2024 early career award from the Grassroots, Community & Youth Organizing for Educational Justice SIG of the American Educational Research Association.

## Appointments

**Joan Blakey**, School of Social Work, was elected director-at-large of the Society for Social Work and Research.

**Nicole Dillard**, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, was selected to be a Faculty Fellow in the 2024-25 Emerging Technologies Faculty Fellowship Program.

**Robert Poch**, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, was named president of the Organization of Educational Historians. This national organization is committed to the comprehensive study of all facets of education history.

## Upcoming events

### CEHD Reads

**Wednesday, October 9**

CEHD Reads is part of the college’s First Year Experience Program, and the 2024-25 selection is *The Seed Keeper*. The public is invited to attend a discussion with author Diane Wilson on the Carlson Family Stage at Northrop Auditorium. Stay tuned for specific event times.

► Info: [cehd.umn.edu/reads](http://cehd.umn.edu/reads)

### CEHD Book Week:

#### A Celebration of Children’s Literature

**Thursday, October 17**

Award-winning author Kate DiCamillo will speak on the following topic: “Every Good Story”—a meditation

on how reading and writing stories can help us become ourselves. The public is invited to attend at 5:30 p.m.

at McNamara Alumni Center.

► Info: [cehd.umn.edu/book-week/#rsvp](http://cehd.umn.edu/book-week/#rsvp)

### Homecoming Pre-Parade Party and Parade

**Friday, October 25**

Gather with the CEHD community for Homecoming events with fun, friends, and food.

► Info: [cehd.umn.edu/events/homecoming](http://cehd.umn.edu/events/homecoming)



JAIUS DAVIS





# Working for the Northside

How a CEHD lab is helping sustain community opportunities

by Kevin Moe

**THE NORTHSIDE JOB CREATION TEAM** (NJCT) has a clear-cut goal: to help bring sustainable jobs to North Minneapolis that pay a living wage and offer decent benefits. So far, it has succeeded in its task, and it wants to make sure that success continues. Its new collaboration with CEHD’s Workforce Development and Research Lab (WDRL) is an effort to do just that.

The NJCT was formed in 2012 with its roots going back to a job summit held by then-Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton two years earlier. The idea was to infuse

employment opportunities into that underserved area of the community.

“Most people don’t understand what underserved means,” explains Heidi Barajas, an associate professor in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD) and former director of the University’s Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC). “North Minneapolis simply didn’t have developers interested in looking for opportunities there. The city had never even mapped the available real estate places for businesses to come.”

## BILL ENGLISH

Tapped to lead the NJCT was William “Bill” English. English, a former vice president at Control Data and well known in the area, has interests that lie at the intersection of business and community, so if anyone could make the plan work, it was him.

“They knew of the work Mr. English had done previously around community engagement and his long-term business acumen, and they charged him with forming this collaborative,” says James De

Sota, a former assistant director at UROC and now the director of program development and delivery at the U’s Center for Transportation Studies. “From the beginning, it was Mr. English meeting with different representatives from the public community and governmental organizations and trying to form this kind of collaborative that could really focus on economic development and job creation centered in North Minneapolis. It started with a group of four or five at the very beginning and then grew to between 40 and 50 different member institutions that were part of the coalition.”

English used his familiarity with how business works to connect entrepreneurs, existing small business owners, and mid-size companies to resources that can help them analyze their business plans and invest in projects that generate jobs in North Minneapolis. He served as a wayfinder of sorts.

The original goal of the NJCT was to help bring in 1,000 sustainable-wage jobs to North Minneapolis by 2019. “At this point, over a decade, approximately 1,200 jobs have been created either directly by the NJCT or by its affiliated members,” De Sota says. “Now that they’ve hit that milestone, they’re looking at adding another 600 jobs in the next year or two with some advanced manufacturing companies that are expanding or moving into North Minneapolis. It’s pretty exciting.”

Besides its coalition of government, non-profit, faith-based, and business stakeholders, the NJCT also has strong ties to the University of Minnesota. One of these is the Carlson Ventures Enterprise, an experiential learning program for students in the Carlson School of Management. Here, NJCT received guidance on employment trends, market analyses, and real estate mapping, among other topics. UROC had been another partner from the very beginning. UROC’s mission is to “advance learning, improve the quality of life, and discover breakthrough solutions to critical problems” in urban communities. It has provided NJCT with a meeting space, administrative assistance, and help with fiduciary matters.

“We were able to partner with people who understood the unique needs of community members and really wanted to develop the people along with their business,” Barajas says. “And it helped to have the Carlson research to help guide

people on what kind of businesses were likely to succeed in North Minneapolis.”

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH LAB

More recently, the NJCT has entered a relationship with CEHD in its Workforce Development and Research Lab (WDRL). Launched in 2021, the WDRL is an interdisciplinary group of scholars, including researchers and students, dedicated to addressing the challenges facing workers in the rapidly changing workplace by developing actionable research and strategies. The lab is a collaboration between the School of Social Work and OLPD. It is co-directed by OLPD professors Alexandre Ardichvili and Kenneth Bartlett.

“Part of that lab is us doing research with some of our students, giving them an opportunity to have some field work. But also, for us to connect it to practice,” says OLPD Assistant Professor Stephanie Sisco, who focuses on workforce and ca-



AMANDA THEISEN | SUNRISE BANKS; KEREM YÜCEL | IMPR NEWS; COURTESY OF NJCT





to secure resources,” she says. “But after the pandemic, George Floyd, and other cultural and social impacts, people kind of got disengaged. There are a small few that stayed, like the executive leadership committee, but in terms of the numbers they had before, it was significantly lower.”

Sisco met with English to determine how her expertise could best support NJCT and they landed on the goal of sustainability. How can the

reer development. “The directors go out and find projects that make sense for us to take on.”

The WDRL’s involvement with the NJCT began when former co-director and School of Social Work Professor John Bricout was having a conversation with English, mentioning that the lab was looking to take on some research projects with a community focus.

“The co-director came back to our lab and sent out an email asking, ‘Is there anyone interested in engaging in community work centered on job creation in North Minneapolis?’” Sisco explains. “I raised my hand because the work that I have traditionally been doing is focused on professionals of color and how they experience social inequities at work, how they navigate that, and how they empower one another through social participatory learning strategies. It made sense for me to take on that project. I got connected to Bill right away.”

Sisco learned that the NJCT has changed a bit in the last few years. “It used to be a very robust group of so many people with a lot of energy and attention from others supporting their work that they were able

NJCT sustain its mission given all of what it has been going through and continue the work that’s needed? There is also the question of succession planning—English turned 90 this year and is looking to step down from his post.

“The NJCT is really grounded in research,” De Sota says. “Doing any kind of evaluation had been high on our list. We knew there were areas that somebody like Stephanie could really help us underscore going forward, especially as we start transitioning the NJCT leadership over the next several years.”

To assist her project, Sisco received a grant from the University’s Research and Innovation Office and brought in two graduate students to work with her: Xun Yu, a PhD student in comparative and international development education in OLPD, and Dane Verrett, seeking a PhD in human resources development.

For a year, Sisco took a deep dive into the activities of the NJCT. She received full access to its inner workings, went to all its meetings, and frequently appeared on its agenda to give updates of where she was in her investigation: What else is out there? Who else is doing the type of

◀ Left: OLPD Assistant Professor Stephanie Sisco has been working with the NJCT to create a strategic plan that reinforces the organization’s sustainability.

work that NJCT is doing? What does the research actually say?

“I also did some interviews with members of the NJCT and some entrepreneurs and that was very insightful,” she says. With all the material she gathered, including a literature review, document analyses, observations, and the interviews, she crafted a sustainability strategy, along with some recommendations.

“Right now, they’re just looking at the endpoint, ‘we get jobs.’ But there’s more to it,” she says. “I identified four themes they need to focus on if they are going to continue their work, productivity, and growth,” she says. These themes are leadership, structure and process, communication, and impact.

De Sota says Sisco’s findings are going to have an immediate effect. “The NJCT is undergoing quite a bit of transition right now,” he says. “What are the key things that really need to be a part of that transition going forward? Stephanie and her team were able to highlight some of those key components—What is the NJCT? What are the NJCT members doing? What could they improve on?—but with some actual metrics behind them.”

### HRD AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Sisco plans to use this project more broadly in her own research. “That was shared upfront that this is mutually beneficial. I would be able to theorize what I’ve focused on for them to bring that to a scholarship and for that to be publishable,” she says.

She hopes to insert the work she has done into her field of study with a series of other publications that build upon it. What her project showed was that human resource development (HRD) can be impactful at the local level. Typically, it’s been global themed; there has not been



## THIS IS WHY I GIVE

**ELIZABETH CRAIG** (BS ’73, home economics) knows firsthand the challenges of working at an unpaid student internship. “The high school I was assigned to for student teaching was an hour from where I lived,” she says. “I stayed in a spare room at my supervisor’s home during the week, and got a ride home with a friend on weekends.”

A graduate of Eden Prairie High School, Craig says the U of M was the only college she considered, and she chose to study home economics because of the field’s focus on healthier children and families. Even though she was based on the St. Paul campus, Craig happened to meet James Craig, Jr., an engineering student based on the Minneapolis campus, and they married during spring break week of their last semester.

After 10 years of teaching at the junior- and senior-high level, she lost her position due to declining enrollment overall in the district. Due to her active involvement in the home economics profession, Craig became an entrepreneur and was hired immediately by the Pillsbury Company to assist in the creation of three Pillsbury



▲ Elizabeth Craig.

Classic Cookbooks. She was later hired by General Mills to create a wallchart that contained a week’s worth of lesson plans that reached more than four million classrooms across the country. Eventually, Craig founded ELC Global LLC Career Services, assisting people in all stages of life and career in securing meaningful and rewarding work.

In 2016, Craig was recognized with a CEHD Distinguished Alumni Award for her accomplishments as a master career strategist, speaker, and consultant. “My advice for college students

is to get involved in fields and organizations where your interests lie,” she says. “This helps you gain confidence, which is the most important and most often the missing factor in a job search and in landing your next position.”

She decided to make a real difference to help students get involved. All but one of the college’s undergraduate majors require an applied experience, but the majority are unpaid and it’s difficult for students to find time for an additional paid job.

To help provide access to these critical opportunities, she and James established the Elizabeth and James Craig Scholarship for Career Experiences in CEHD. Honoring James’ time at the College of Science and Engineering, they also established the James and Elizabeth Craig Scholarship in Engineering in the Department of Civil, Environmental, and Geo-Engineering. A few years later, they decided to give more to endow the funds. Their estate will add to both scholarships. The Craig’s philanthropy has brought them great joy. “Never underestimate the power of giving! The reward is in the smiles on the students’ faces and the smiles they bring to our faces,” she says.

—ANN DINGMAN

much documented work done at the local community development level.

“There’s not a lot of research around community-engaged scholarship or community participatory-based scholarship,” she says. “I don’t know why we aren’t engaged in that type of work. This project is an example of how we can do that. We can be engaged with our community and help them and have some meaningful scholarship that comes from it.”

When she discussed her work with colleagues at a recent conference, she says she found it fulfilling because several said that they too have worked with various community groups to help them refine their initiatives. “I think it’s part of some of our dispositions, but we don’t necessarily pair that with our skill set and bring it to scholarship,” she says about her fellow HRD researchers. “Primarily, we’ve been associated with human resource management, but the skill sets that we have, the strategic practices that we have, are very much applicable to doing that work at the community level to help grassroots initiatives solve social issues and address social inequities. That’s kind of what I’m doing to demonstrate that. We’re not just helpful for people at work or in the workforce; we can empower people in our communities.”

This is a place where the WDRL can play a large role. “This is something we hope to continue doing, especially in regard to bolstering more partnerships with folks who can benefit from the tools that we have in my field,” Sisco says. “We want more projects like this. I think one of the missions of the lab is to broaden our reach so we can help. We want to do our part.” ☺

Learn more about the Workforce Development and Research Lab: [innovation.umn.edu/workforcelab](http://innovation.umn.edu/workforcelab)

Learn more about the Northside Job Creation Team: [z.umn.edu/UROC\\_NJCT](http://z.umn.edu/UROC_NJCT)



# STRIVING TOWARD EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

The LEAD conference's marriage of practice and research

by Kevin Moe



“THE GOAL FOR US was to really marry practice and research,” says CEHD’s Executive Director of Educational Leadership Katie Pikel. “By that I mean putting practitioners and researchers in the same place and on a level footing. We know there’s a gap between research and practice and this is one way we are hoping to have two-way communication that leaves practitioners informed by research and researchers informed by practitioners who are living in schools every day.”

Pikel is talking about CEHD’s Leading in Equity, Action, and Diversity (LEAD) for PreK-12 System Improvement conference, in its third year this July 30 and 31. The conference’s mission of disrupting pervasive racial inequities draws hundreds of educational leaders from throughout the state.

“LEAD is a focused event addressing equity in a way that meets the needs of preK-12 educators and school leaders,” says CEHD Dean Michael C. Rodriguez. “It doesn’t profess to provide all of the answers, but to bring educators together to explore new ways of addressing common challenges and to learn from each other.”

Rodriguez says it is remarkable how common these challenges really are, whether in rural, suburban, or urban communities. “Equity challenges are uniquely experienced, given the composition of the local community, but they are also shared widely, since equity challenges reduce or prevent opportunities, experiences, and outcomes for one or more groups of students,” he says.

Every parent and every educator Rodriguez has ever met agrees that all Minnesota students deserve the best the state has to offer, he says. And LEAD is a way to contribute to equitability across the state by recognizing that more can be accomplished together.

► Cherise Ayers and Katie Pikel kicking off the inaugural LEAD conference in 2022.

MARJAN SAMADI; PEXELS.COM; JAYME HALBRITTER

“An overarching goal of the conference is that our attendees feel support from and engagement with the University,” Pikel says. “We want them to feel the U is what it is supposed to be—a land-grant institution—and a partner not only in supporting K-12, but equally important, learning from K-12. We want the conference to be a relationship builder and a way to deliver on that promise of a land-grant institution.”

## THE BEGINNINGS OF LEAD

The origins of the LEAD conference can be traced back more than a decade. In 2013, Rodriguez was named the Campbell Leadership Chair in Education and Human Development with a focus on education equity. Later that year, he collaborated with Julie Sweitzer, the executive director of the College Readiness Consortium, to create the UMN Education Equity Resource Center.

Beginning in spring 2014, they brought together a group of education equity scholars from across campus to discuss and plan a convening, initially to address education achievement gaps. “During this time, UMN President Eric Kaler called on the University to be a convenor to address these persistent challenges in K-12 education systems,” Rodriguez says. “Julie and I planned and raised funds for

the first convening, held in the summer of 2016—Educational Equity in Action, with over 600 participants on campus.”

Due to the event’s great success, a second convening took place in the summer of 2017, with 500 educators participating. “During these convenings, presenters and participants addressed research-based initiatives that provided evidence or promise in addressing education disparities and ways to address barriers and challenges to make real change,” Rodriguez says.

The COVID-19 pandemic halted things for a bit, but after its easing, CEHD leadership and school partners discussed the possibility of returning to a convening role around the topic of education equity. A new planning team led by Innovation and Partnership Officer Ryan Warren was formed and a new name was selected: LEAD.

“The focus was turned to providing evidence-based information to more directly improve education systems to meet the needs of all students, with a focus on eliminating racial harm and disparities in education opportunities, experiences, and outcomes,” says Rodriguez. “Those of us that do this kind of work know that relationships are key. This includes relationships students and family members have with teachers, school staff, and school leaders. This includes relationships that teachers have with school staff and







## LEAD and literacy

ON MAY 24, 2023, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz signed the Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act into law, with the goal to have every Minnesota student reading at or above grade level. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Heather Edelson (DFL-Edina), who was elected to the Minnesota House in 2018 and went straight to work on literacy policy.

"I was held back in third grade because I couldn't read," she says. "That experience had a lasting impact on my life. When I found out my twin sons had dyslexia, I went to work to do whatever I could to ensure they had the best interventions to help them succeed. There are so many kids that will benefit from the collaboration of honestly over 1,000 Minnesotans from teachers to parents to superintendents all across our state coming together to write the READ Act. It has been my great honor to work on this legislation."

The passage of the act was top of mind of many educators last year. For Jane McDonald Black, literacy is always in her thoughts.

McDonald Black is the executive director of the JAB Foundation, which she founded with her husband, Archie Black. She is also a founding member of the Minnesota Hunt Literacy Path Forward team. Both organizations are devoted to improving literacy in the state.

"Minnesota is behind in our literacy efforts, and we are significantly underperforming," she says. "Only 50 percent of our children are at grade level in reading." Digging deeper, the statistics show that 58 percent of White children are at grade level, as well as 42 percent of children receiving free and reduced lunch, and 28 percent of children of color.

"We are in a crisis because there is no reason why our children can't read," she says. "We're not hitting it out of the park with any of the groups. When only 28 percent of children of color can read, that's heartbreaking. In Minnesota, White children experiencing homelessness have higher reading proficiency rates than children of color."

McDonald Black sees the LEAD conference as having the potential to get the needle moving in the right direction. "It is a

unique opportunity to bring together so much of the educational leadership of Minnesota. They are highly focused and work hard every day to make a difference in children's lives," she says.

In that spirit, McDonald Black and the JAB Foundation funded the participation of nationally recognized expert Kareem Weaver as one of the keynotes of the 2023 conference. "Kareem is highly focused on literacy and really believes it's the civil rights issue of our time," McDonald Black says. Weaver is the co-founder and executive director of FULCRUM (Full and Complete Reading is a Universal Mandate), which is committed to improving literacy rates by engaging school districts, universities, government, community organizations, and parent groups to cultivate excellent reading outcomes for all students.

"Literacy is our greatest civil right because, rather than being conscripted into the will of others, it promotes self-determination and empowers us to make informed choices," Weaver says.

At LEAD, Weaver presented "The Quiet Parts Out Loud: Politics, Assumptions, and Literacy Growth." In addressing what needs to be done to move Minnesota's literacy rates forward across groups, he highlighted actions, sacrifices, and levels of change that need to be identified and held.

"He really took time to get background information on Minnesota and what's happening here," McDonald Black says. "He really spoke to how we can start to improve the outcomes of all students, but specifically children of color."

McDonald Black says equity is not possible when children cannot read. "And we need to start there," she says. "We can deliver. Places are starting to deliver the way reading is taught in evidence-based ways and it makes a significant difference."

She is optimistic about the future. "With the passage of the READ Act, a significant number of things are happening with literacy," she says. "There are a lot of questions and there is a lot of need to understand and find resources. The LEAD conference has connected people to some of the answers and I fully believe we will start to see reading scores raised for everybody in the state and hopefully will significantly narrow gaps. There are great people working on this and it is extremely possible that 98 percent of our students can read."

While LEAD 2023 had a strong focus on literacy, McDonald Black can envision other themes for future conferences, such as math. "I see LEAD giving everyone an opportunity to take a deep dive into other areas of educational challenges," she says. "And hopefully, create a more equitable distribution of educational resources."

*View Kareem Weaver's keynote address and other 2023 LEAD presentations at [cehd.umn.edu/lead/keynote-videos](https://cehd.umn.edu/lead/keynote-videos)*

MARJAN SAMADI

COURTESY OF WITT FAMILY

school leaders. And of course, relationships among peers and among colleagues are critically important."

## TOGETHER WE ARE WISER

What should attendees expect to take away from the conference? Rodriguez says there are practices and knowledge that continue to improve opportunities, experiences, and outcomes of students throughout their education careers, including those with the least experience in formal education settings or those that have had prior negative experiences, sometimes multigenerational. "Those practices and knowledge, often based on local culturally grounded ways of knowing and doing, can be adapted and tailored to meet local needs in other areas," he says. "This requires commitment from leadership, engagement of management, and implementation from all—where implementation is no light task."

There is a science to implementation and much has been learned about how to secure successful and meaningful implementation with integrity that acknowledges and fits local conditions, engages stakeholders, and leads to continuous improvement, Rodriguez explains. But the major takeaway for attendees can be expressed simply: "Mostly, participants gather to be in community and learn and explore together. We all recognize that together we are wiser," Rodriguez says.

Pekel says that while you always want attendees to take away something useful and practical, there is also the desire that faculty participants see that their work is valued. "Sometimes we joke that Darrius Stanley wrote an article and 12 people are going to read it because it is in an academic journal that's behind a paywall," she says about the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development assistant professor and LEAD presenter. "We're trying to show that the research



# THIS IS WHY I GIVE

"SOMETIMES OPPORTUNITIES will find you," says DuWayne Witt (BS '72), "I know that was the case for me."

Witt started at the U of M in the Institute of Technology (now called the College of Science and Engineering), thinking he wanted to become an engineer. The first in his immediate family to attend college, he always found satisfaction in working with numbers, and after some reflection, changed direction to pursue a mathematics education degree with the intent to teach high school.

After graduating, he worked while looking for a teaching position and thinking about what he wanted to do. He was hired at 3M in 1974 as a quality control engineer, retiring 38 years later as a supervisor of manufacturing engineers in New Ulm. Witt's career path utilized his math background and connected back



▲ DuWayne and Kay Witt.

to his original goal of being an engineer. "You could say that I made the full circle in achieving my aspirations," he laughs.

Witt also stayed true to his interest in teaching while working for 3M. He helped start and coached for a MATHCOUNTS program for middle schoolers, and filled in for a local high school calculus class. He also taught quality control in partnership with South Central College. After retirement, he spent nine years tutoring as an AmeriCorps Foster Grandparent.

When Witt reached the age when he needed to take required minimum distributions from his retirement account, he decided to use some of that money to help others.

DuWayne and his wife Kay established the Witt Family Scholarship for Math Education to benefit students who plan to make teaching mathematics a career and inspire young people to enhance their interest in mathematics as well.

His monthly donations also benefit several other areas across campus, including the mathematics school, the libraries, and incoming student scholarships. Witt is a longtime fan of Gopher basketball and has held season tickets for over 50 years. He also stays connected through his alumni association life membership and the MN 201 advocacy program.

Witt looks forward to learning about the CEHD students who receive his scholarship. "What better way to give back than to support those aspiring to be teachers?" he says. "Math is a critical subject that is the foundation of a technical career, and we need young people with strong skills who are going to pave the way in an increasingly high-tech economy."

—ANN DINGMAN



and ideas Dr. Stanley shares—while they rise to the level of being included in rigorous academic journals—they also are for the purpose of improving what is actually happening in communities and schools. I’m hoping that the researchers who engage in the conference feel validated that their work is useful and impactful.”

### A FIXED POINT ON HER CALENDAR

Lesa Clarkson feels such validation. Clarkson, an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I), hosted two breakout sessions last year: “An Equity and Excellence Framework for Mathematics” with former C&I grad student and current assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Fawnda Norman, and “Eighth Grade Algebra? YES!”

“This is a fixed point on my calendar,” Clarkson says of the LEAD conference. “I find it that important.” From her perspective, Clarkson feels LEAD is essential to participate in because of the attendees—administrators, superintendents, and principals. “It’s really nice to be able to keep in contact with those people and to find out what is going on in K-12 educa-



tion,” she says. “What are the challenges and what do they see? What are some of the ways they need support and what are the ways we can support them?”

Clarkson says she particularly enjoys looking at those challenges and helping find strategies for individuals. “Every school is not created the same,” she says. “There might be overarching challenges, but to hear about what is going on in specific schools or districts is really important. That feeds me as far as what I need to continue to do.”

For those who attend her sessions, Clarkson wants them to see connections among higher education, research, and practice in real time. “I just don’t see where we have time to do the work of finding good methodologies and pedagogies and getting them in print and then getting them to people where it would make a difference,” she says. “For these administrators to attend the presentations, it means we’re able to make those connections faster and make change happen to impact students in the classroom right now as

JAYME HALBRITTER

◀ Opposite page: Attendees at a breakout session at the first LEAD conference in 2022.

opposed to a year or two down the line.”

That potential for immediate impact is what makes the timing of the conference—mid-summer—perfect, Clarkson says. “Right before school starts people are energetic and motivated. It’s a really good time to start thinking about what is going to make that particular academic year special.”

### EDUCATOR TAKEAWAYS

Roseville Area Schools Assistant Superintendent Melissa Sonnek says the mission and vision of her district is around excellence, innovation, and equity, which makes the LEAD conference a must-attend event. So much so that she also was a presenter last year with Delon Smith, the district’s director of equity and innovation.

In their presentation, “Cultivating Equity Minded Instructional Leaders,” the duo hoped to instill that mindset in their audience. “If we want our principals and instructional leaders to be equity leaders, then we have to model that same approach as a district, from hiring to onboarding to

principal evaluation to supporting professional development,” she says.

As for the rest of the conference, Sonnek was inspired. “I had this moment of hope when I was sitting in that big conference room,” she says. “I looked around and saw all the educators across our state who are doing the same critical, important work. In the educational system, it can feel isolating—and it was this moment of realizing there are so many people who are committed to doing this work collectively. It’s not just one person in a system. It’s hundreds of thousands across our whole state.”

Besides hearing different perspectives from fellow educators, Sonnek also was pleased by the attendance of several legislators. “When we were engaging educators and legislators in a dialogue around the educational system in Minnesota, it really felt like a true partnership,” she says. “Because we were all working together in terms of a common goal or outcome.”

What makes LEAD refreshing to Sonnek is its focus on racial equity. “I’ve been to a number of conferences that have smart logistical approaches, whether it’s around professional learning communities or coaching adults, but they can do a disservice to the

very system that we’re trying to service if it’s not grounded in racial equity,” she says.

A few things gleaned from LEAD were brought back to the Roseville district. “We hosted a literacy symposium where we had educators from around the state talking about literacy, the science of reading, the READ Act, and how we’ve approached shifting our literacy instruction to align more with the science of reading,” Sonnek says.

Another work-in-progress for Roseville came from Professor Stanley’s 2023 keynote address. Stanley spoke on “Community Engaged Leadership: A Call to Action for Educational Leaders.” Roseville took the call.

“We are working on a grant in partnership with another school district and the University of Minnesota,” Sonnek says. “The focus is around how schools and districts can be transformed through community-engaged leadership, which actually re-centers communities. His keynote laid out the mindset of why this matters. It provided a springboard to this grant project.”

Sonnek also reflects on a breakout session from St. Louis Park Schools, “Centering Our Community’s Hopes and Dreams through YDA,” in which students were the main driving force in gathering and

## Collaborating with the Department of Education

**FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS**, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Assistant Commissioner Angela Mansfield has helped advise the LEAD conference content with CEHD. “It’s been a really nice partnership opportunity with the U of M,” she says. “We’re able to lend our perspective of what we are hearing in the field and what legislators are deeming as their priorities as well.”

Mansfield says what gives the LEAD conference its value is its connection to what’s happening in the field and what leaders are grappling with. “We’re really listening to what the needs are and what the leaders at the district and school level want,” she says. “And giving them what they are asking for through support

and through the best people in the field who are finding results.”

Being state-centric is what gives LEAD its uniqueness and special power, Mansfield says. “When we are thinking about putting together the list of speakers and the breakout sessions, it is extremely relevant to the Minnesota context,” she says. “Whatever we’re grappling with across the state, from the urban core to the northernmost or southernmost tip of greater Minnesota, whoever is coming through the door is going to find a connection.”

And the connection that develops between attendees is also valuable, Mansfield says. “It’s that opportunity to be around other educators who are coming for the same reason—a real intense willingness to learn and partner and network,” she says. “There are so many people in there at that conference wanting the same thing. So, there’s that energy and that motivation.”

The conference is becoming a heavy draw for educational leaders. “From the speakers who are going to be coming in to the local-level presenters, it’s just a high-quality event,” Mansfield says. “With the U of M comes with it that trust in the field that what is being offered is high-level and connected with what we need to know.”

Mansfield calls particular attention to the expertise and dedication of Executive Director of Educational Leadership Katie Pekel and Dean Michael C. Rodriguez. “Katie Pekel is very well known in the leadership ranks at the Minnesota school level among principals and superintendents and there is a very positive attachment,” she says. “Michael Rodriguez—people highly respect his leadership and work as well. I think people see them and say, ‘We want to be where they are. We know there’s going to be

MARJAN SAMADI



good things coming from a conference attached to those two.”

Mansfield counts herself among that group. “I love to see what’s working, getting to hear different examples from districts of things that are working

for them,” she says. “I’m really curious and excited to see what people bring to the table around literacy, Indigenous education, how people are imagining their system, and imagining solutions in their system. I get extremely motivated. And I know it’s going to be the same this year.”



presenting school data for the project.

“It was a really interesting approach. It expanded my conceptual framework around how we can use student voice,” she says. “Oftentimes we’ll have students on a panel giving feedback around something that we’re working on. This was different. It has students working through something, building it from the ground up. That’s something we’d like to explore more.”

Staci Allmaras, the director of school support of Lakes Country Services Cooperative in Fergus Falls, also has a special affinity for the St. Louis Park Schools student presentation. “I always think the sessions for me where young people’s voices are there sharing their experiences

are so important,” she says. “The school district hired young people for an internship over the summer and the students learned how to look at the school data and then set goals for the staff. Professional development goals. I have brought that example up in so many places.”

Allmaras has attended the last two LEAD conferences. “We always hope to get—especially when we go as a team—resources and tools that we can then use in support of our schools. We’ve used so many nuggets from different sessions,” she says. “You make connections too, and that’s always helpful.”

Connections such as Paula Forbes’ session “Listen to Heal,” featuring Bridge-

makers Youth, which Allmaras attended in 2022. “I have continued to stay in touch with that group and it has done some work with the community group I work with in Pelican Rapids,” she says. “The LEAP [Listening, Engaging, Advocating, and Partnership] framework from Dr. Stanley has been a helpful resource in our work with schools and community engagement.”

Allmaras was also excited to hear keynote speaker Ghody Muhammad in 2022, who will be returning to the conference in 2024. “We used her literature in a curriculum course that I have taught at the graduate level,” she says.

Perhaps what Allmaras appreciates the most about LEAD is its size and offerings.

“It’s not super big. So many of the conferences we go to, there’s just too many people. I love having it at the U. I make so many connections,” she says. “And the content is unique compared to other conferences I’ve been to because it really is around inclusion, embracing multiple perspectives, and how we can do better within the systems.”

## THE FUTURE OF LEAD

CEHD has committed to hosting the LEAD conference for five years, after which time, its future is open. “Since we have two years of experience with the conference, we are now able to use participant feedback a bit more to shape future efforts,” Rodriguez

says. “I hope we can continue to be responsive to participants and bring to LEAD activities that will meet their needs.”

Pekel says the conference has strived to deliver sessions around what is really relevant in K-12 at the time. “For example, in year two of the conference we really built off of and engaged in literacy because of what was coming out of the legislative session relative to the READ Act,” she says. “As we were thinking toward this upcoming year, we have legislation around American Indian culture and language. After that, I speculate we will probably move into mathematics.”

After LEAD’s fifth year, CEHD may consider alternate forms of its delivery.

“Perhaps it will include shorter events throughout the year,” Rodriguez says. “Perhaps it will include events in other areas of the state. Perhaps it will offer shorter gatherings for specific types of participants. I think there are many ways in which we can continue this work and gather to share common experiences, knowledge, and practices. Together, we learn more.”



Learn more about LEAD:  
[z.umn.edu/cehd-lead](https://z.umn.edu/cehd-lead)

This year’s LEAD conference takes place July 30 and 31 at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

## A conversation with Darrius Stanley

*Darrius Stanley is an assistant professor in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development and the Carmen Starkson Campbell Endowed Fellow for Innovation in Teacher Development. He has been a familiar face at LEAD, presenting the breakout session “Introducing Community Engaged Leadership: How Schools Can Serve Communities” in 2022 and giving the keynote address “Community Engaged Leadership: A Call to Action for Educational Leaders” in 2023. He will be presenting a facilitated session on the importance of Black educators in 2024. We asked him to provide some thoughts about the conference.*

### Why is it important for you to be involved in the LEAD conference?

The LEAD conference is critical for bridging the pervasive research-practice divide in the field of education. As such, I am involved because I am committed to ensuring that the research, which is so often housed in the “ivory tower,” makes it to the frontlines where educational practitioners can do the work of contextualizing and eventually operationalizing new knowledges and perspectives. Further, I see myself as a community-engaged scholar. Simply put, that means that my research, teaching, positionality, community situatedness, and connectedness are inextricably linked; research is for and with the communities I

am connected to. LEAD is a space to broaden and deepen those connections.

### What do you hope attendees get out of your presentations? In your mind, what are the key takeaways?

My work is focused on bridging historically disenfranchised communities and schools through Community-Engaged Leadership approaches and practices. Hence, I always want attendees (practitioners) to walk away recognizing the historical and contemporary fissures and fractures that have created the kind of distance we see between schools and communities which have been disenfranchised; we must see this as a form of state-sanctioned, systemic harm and recognize our roles in redressing these inequities. Further, I hope that attendees leave my presentations committed to seeing their work through the lens of community; that is, educational leadership committed to justice and liberation must center community knowledges, dreams, histories, expertise, and context over state-sponsored and school-centric goals. School-centric goals often have little to do with the liberation of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other peoples who experience oppression in school-community contexts. I recognize that this is tough to do given the state-level mandates, messages, and accountability measures; if we are committed to justice and liberation, commu-



MARJAN SAMADI

nities must be at the center of school decision-making.

### What have been some of your takeaways from the conference?

What has been most inspiring is that school and district leaders are committed to learning the “how” and the “why” of equity-focused educational leadership. I walk away from the LEAD

conference hopeful that change is both in progress and imminent in many Minnesota school and district contexts. I guess that hope and inspiration are my biggest takeaways.

### What is your favorite part of the conference?

I always love to hear the questions from practitioners after the keynotes. So many of our state’s educational leaders are trying to increase their (and district personnel) capacities for equity-focused leadership. The questions often create the space or at least plant the seed for additional, more nuanced dialogue relevant to the specifics of the school district.

### What do you think makes the LEAD conference unique?

I think this conference is unique because it draws a diverse array of experts: nationally recognized scholars, local, equity-focused scholars, and state practitioners. In my experience, it is rare to have such a unique set of knowledges in the same space. So often, conferences are dominated by singular or even monolithic perspectives; this conference helps break the hegemony and groupthink present in different conference spaces. LEAD creates ripe opportunities to historicize, contextualize, and operationalize ideas from multiple perspectives. Moreover, I think there is enough room for disagreement, variance, or even dissent, which is always a plus when it comes to learning.

### How do you see the conference evolving over the next few years?

As someone who has experienced it on multiple levels (participant, presenter, and keynote), I think that the opportunities are endless. The key for me is staying committed to the journey of equity; that is, I hope LEAD continues to expand and attract educational leaders from all over the state. The work of equity has to be central to the praxis of all educational practitioners. Maybe more in the way of networking and sharing of ideas is on the horizon.

View Darrius Stanley’s keynote address and other 2023 LEAD presentations at [cehd.umn.edu/lead/keynote-videos](https://cehd.umn.edu/lead/keynote-videos)





## A doctoral journey of community and support

*Jacquelyn Sertic reflects on her PhD path through the School of Kinesiology*

**IN THE WORLD OF ACADEMIA**, the path to becoming a scientist is often portrayed as a linear progression, characterized by deliberate steps and premeditated decisions. However, my journey through academia has been anything but conventional. As I stand on the cusp of completing my dissertation and embarking on a post-doctoral position, I reflect on the twists and turns that brought me here, and the invaluable role that supportive communities have played in my success.

My name is Jacquelyn Sertic, and my

research delves into the intricate realms of sensory function and motor control, particularly in aging adults and individuals with Parkinson's disease. Throughout my doctoral tenure, I have been fortunate to seize numerous opportunities that have enriched my academic and professional growth. From being awarded prestigious fellowships like the NSF Research Trainee Program in Translational Sensory Science and the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, to interning at the National Institutes of Health and organizing conferences, each

experience has contributed to shaping my trajectory as a scientist.

Yet, my journey began with a divergence from the conventional path. Originally aspiring to pursue a career in medicine, I found myself at a crossroads during my senior year of college. The prospect of sacrificing work-life balance in pursuit of a medical degree led me to reconsider my aspirations. It was during this uncertain period that I received a pivotal piece of advice: "It will all work out." Little did I know this mantra would guide me through the subsequent chapters of my academic journey.

Following the culmination of my collegiate softball career, fate intervened as offers to serve as a graduate assistant coach at both the University of Minnesota and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) presented themselves. Opting for the latter, I embarked on a new academic

JAIRUS DAVIS

► At left, Jacquelyn Sertic (left) and Shelby Ziccardi (right) at CATSS Spring Research Day 2023, along with keynote speaker Laurie King (middle).

venture, enrolling in UNLV's Master of Science Kinesiology program. Despite my background in zoology and chemistry, I found myself captivated by the study of movement and motor skills.

A pivotal moment arrived during my first year at UNLV when I encountered the field of motor control and development. Instantaneously, I was drawn to its complexities and potential for impactful research. This newfound passion guided my master's thesis, exploring different psychological manipulations to improve throwing accuracy in college softball players, and ultimately led me to the University of Minnesota where I found a supportive research environment aligned with my interests.

The transition to doctoral studies brought its own set of challenges, as the demands of the program and starting the program during peak pandemic in fall 2020 tested my resilience and determination. Yet, amidst the rigors of academia, I discovered the power of community and camaraderie. The NSF fellowship in Translational Sensory Science introduced me to a cohort of like-minded scholars from diverse disciplines. Despite our disparate fields, we forged deep connections both professionally and personally.

I've had the privilege of collaborating and enjoying the company of these remarkable individuals. Shelby Ziccardi and I co-chaired the Center for Applied and Translational Sensory Sciences (CATSS) Spring Research Day in 2023. Together, we meticulously organized the recruitment of student speakers, ensuring a diverse range of presentations on sensory disability. Additionally, we orchestrated



**"I found myself at a crossroads during my senior year of college."**

10 workshops covering various topics, from data collection methods to ethical science within disability communities. Throughout the planning process, our foremost priority was to prioritize disability accessibility. Despite the demanding workload, collaborating with Shelby felt effortless. We complemented each other's strengths and communicated seamlessly

about our shared objectives. Our joint efforts resulted in an event that was embraced by over 80 attendees. Building upon this collaboration, Shelby and I continue to stay connected, regularly meeting for lunches or writing sessions. Similarly, with my friend Harley Wheeler, our bond revolves around staying

active. Over the past few years, we've enjoyed cross-country skiing in winters and biking during summers. Completing this circle of support is Michael Smith, with whom we often explore new breweries in the cities. As a collective, we revel in each other's triumphs and extend unwavering

support through setbacks we encounter.

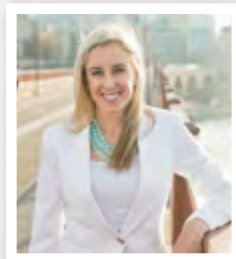
As I reflect on my journey, I am reminded that success in academia is not solely determined by the linear progression of one's path, but by the strength of the communities that sustain us along the way. The friendships forged and the support networks cultivated have been instrumental in navigating the uncertainties of doctoral studies. As I prepare to embark on a new chapter in rehabilitation science, I carry with me the invaluable lessons learned and the enduring bonds formed within the halls of the University of Minnesota.

My journey may have been marked by its unconventionality, but it is the support of my academic community that has enabled me to thrive. As alumni, let us celebrate not only the achievements of individuals but also the communities that nurture and sustain them on their path to success.

*Jacquelyn Sertic is a fourth-year PhD student in the School of Kinesiology. Her areas of interest include biomechanics and neuromotor control.*



from the  
**PRESIDENT**



**DR. JENNA MITCHLER**  
PhD '15,  
curriculum & instruction  
Assistant Superintendent,  
Bloomington Public  
Schools

**DEAR FELLOW ALUMNI**

As my term as president of the alumni society board draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on the journey we've undertaken together over the past year. It's truly remarkable to see the impact the CEHD alumni society board has on our community and the strides we've made in strengthening our own relationships with one another.

One of the highlights of this year was undoubtedly the Homecoming festivities, where we welcomed back countless alumni to our beloved campus. The energy and enthusiasm shared among old friends and new acquaintances alike served as a reminder of the enduring spirit of our alma mater. Another standout moment was our record-setting Give to the Max Day. The outpouring of generosity for scholarship support demonstrated a commitment to the next generation of educators and leaders within CEHD, ensuring that our legacy continues to thrive. Additionally, our Exceptional Alumni Awards Celebration in April was a testament to the incredible work of our graduates. Recognizing their outstanding contributions not only honors their accomplishments but also inspires current and future students to reach for greatness.

Looking ahead, I am eager to see what the future holds for our alumni society board. You'll notice I said "our" alumni society board—we want you to be part of our work! As we continue to plan events, recognize alumni achievements, and advocate for CEHD, I invite each of you to join us in this endeavor. Your involvement is crucial in maintaining the vitality of our alumni community and ensuring that the college remains a beacon of excellence in education.

Whether it's through attending events, volunteering your time, or simply sharing your feedback and memories, there are countless ways to stay connected to CEHD. I encourage you to explore the opportunities available on our website ([cehd.umn.edu/alumni](http://cehd.umn.edu/alumni)) and reach out to us with your ideas and suggestions at [cehdas@umn.edu](mailto:cehdas@umn.edu). Your loyalty and support are what make our community so special, and I am grateful for each and every one of you. Thank you for your dedication to CEHD. Together, let's look forward to a future filled with continued growth, success, and camaraderie.

Wishing you joy,

**CEHD alumni can be found everywhere**

**DEPARTMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP, POLICY, AND DEVELOPMENT** Associate Professor Christopher Johnstone (third from left) was recently in the United Arab Emirates capital of Abu Dhabi for a meeting convened by Special Olympics International. As an organization, it is trying to move away from being a segregated institution and engaging in more work to try to make education inclusive through sports. While there, Johnstone met up with (from left) comparative and international development education (CIDE) PhD Sara Musafer, now a postdoctoral associate at NYU Abu Dhabi; CIDE PhD Emily Morris, a senior research fellow at the Brookings Institute; and Dana Downey, a current CIDE leadership for intercultural and international education (LIIE) student who serves as an assistant dean at NYU Abu Dhabi. Another CIDE PhD, Tiffany Lachelle Smith, the director of scholarships and student programs at the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research in Ras Al Khaimah, was in the area but couldn't make the get-together.



The 2023 DAA recipients include (front row, left to right) Cheri Collins Sims, Ronald Schaefer, Jennifer Sampson, Dean Michael C. Rodriguez, Arunya Tuicomepee, and James Frazee. In back row (left to right) Dante Cicchetti, Elizabeth Franklin, Darnell Logan, Eric Decker, and Ronald Schaefer.

**Congratulations, distinguished alumni!**

- ESTABLISHED IN 2010**, the CEHD Distinguished Alumni Award (DAA) honors alumni who have brought distinction to their professions and communities. Recipients span a diverse range of academic disciplines and career paths: business and civic leaders, counselors and social workers, educators and activists, entrepreneurs, and the most dedicated of volunteers. All are community builders and leaders who make a positive difference in the lives of children, youth, families, schools, and organizations, and whose achievements bring honor to the college. A special ceremony honoring the 2023 Distinguished Alumni took place at McNamara Alumni Center in November. The honorees include:
- Dante Cicchetti (psychology)**  
Conducted a field-changing study of interventions for depressed and maltreated children and made tremendous contributions to the areas of developmental psychopathology and attachment relations.
  - Cherie Collins Sims (family social science)**  
Visionary who made strategic efforts to advance racial economic justice and create transformative systemic change within families, organizations, and communities.
  - Eric Decker (business and marketing education)**  
Made philanthropic contributions to veterans, children, mental health, and other causes.
  - Elizabeth Franklin (social work)**  
Committed to community-based mental health services by supporting young people and their parents in healing from trauma,

JAIRUS DAVIS

- and building a culturally affirming and equitable system for future social workers.
- James Frazee (natural science)**  
Made notable contributions through a variety of careers and passions, including marketing, website development, entrepreneurship, teaching, and writing.
- Darnell Logan (educational psychology, school psychology)**  
Dedicated to helping improve communities and equip today's students for the future through education, psychological support services, consulting, and community organizing.
- Ronald Salazar Sojo (educational policy and administration)**  
Made an impact on underrepresented communities through educational leadership that promotes student learning.
- Jennifer Sampson (family social science)**  
An innovative leader who prepared therapy professionals; promoted social justice; and conducted important research, advocacy, and practice in the areas of hoarding disorders and reproductive mental health.
- Ronald Schaefer (English)**  
Conducted groundbreaking work as a linguist to document unwritten languages, and is tireless in encouraging international study and experiences in higher education.
- Arunya Tuicomepee (counseling and student personnel)**  
Made achievements as a scholar and leader in Thailand in the psychological and educational areas and facilitated collaborations between CEHD and Chulalongkorn University.





## Public service is her calling

*FSOS grad elected to St. Paul City Council*

**GROWING UP** in Worthington, Minnesota, Cheniqua Johnson (BS '17) wasn't particularly into politics. Her family would discuss issues when it went to cast ballots for presidential elections, but that was about it. "I had never really heard of Hubert Humphrey or Roy Wilkins or Josie Johnson, or really taken the time to look further into elected officials or anybody

who is really civic-minded," she says.

Today, things are a little different. On January 2 of this year, she began a four-year term as a member of the St. Paul City Council. Johnson is part of an all-women council—the first in St. Paul's history. She represents the east side area of Ward 7, which includes the neighborhoods of Dayton's Bluff, Swede Hollow, Battle Creek,

Mounds Park, Highwood, Conway, and Eastview.

"It feels like a college experience again," she says about her first few months in office. "You're like a small fish in a big pond, or a big fish in a small pond, depending on the day."

Johnson was a first-generation college student. She started in CEHD and in the

TRIO program as a freshman, not really knowing yet what she wanted to do. "I explored a lot of different majors and minors and took a lot of classes," she says. "I had planned out going to college, but when I got there, I hadn't really planned much further out than that."

She quickly found her interest piqued in the Department of Family Social Science (FSOS). "I really appreciated the dialogue in the classrooms and what I was reading," she says. "It helped me make a lot of sense of my upbringing and my experience. I really felt seen. And so, I stayed with it because I really enjoyed digging deeper into not only my family story, but also the story of so many families worldwide."

Her experience at CEHD helped Johnson realize that public service was where she belonged. She soon took on many roles—legislative assistant, field orga-

nizer, campaign manager—and served on various boards and committees in the political arena. Her degree in family social science has been a great asset as she moved into politics, particularly now as a St. Paul City Council member.

*"In order to be approachable, I have to understand how to respond to them."*

"You're serving 46,000 people and there'll be a variety of different issues ranging from potholes to the next big development that's going to happen," she says. "I'm talking to people from a variety of different spaces and lived experiences. In order to be approachable, I have to understand how to respond to them."

And they come to her in different forms. Sometimes they don't come as nicely as they should. Sometimes they come in anger or frustration, sometimes in desperation, sometimes they come from a place of grief.

"I found that to be really helpful in the work that I do, it's about being adaptable, flexible, understanding, and responsive to the human that is speaking to me," she says.

Part of that empathy comes from what she's learned at CEHD. Part of it comes

from reflecting on political gatherings she's attended. "Sometimes I'd be in spaces where people didn't look like me. They didn't have my lived experience. There are so many people who have yet to see themselves represented in public office of any sort," she says. "Yes, I'm the first person of color to be elected in Ward 7. I'm the third Black woman elected to the St Paul City Council and we are part of an all-women council. But it's taken a very long time to even get representation."

Since her election, Johnson has been selected for the 40 under 40 list by the *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal* and was named a 2024 Minnesota Educational Opportunity Association (EOA) TRIO Achiever.

She stays close to her CEHD roots. So much so that her TRIO advisor is going to walk her down the aisle this August at her wedding, as he is considered an extension of her family. "A lot of folks have made a direct impact on me," she reflects on her time at CEHD. "It's part of the reason I still stay in touch and continue to invest in young leaders that come after me, because my community did that for me too."

—KEVIN MOE

▼ Below: Johnson, middle, bottom front row, with her TRIO community; Far right: Johnson was an involved student as part of CEHD Block Party 2017.



JAIRUS DAVIS

COURTESY OF CEHD TRIO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES; SETH DAHL SEID



## For the love of the game

BY KEVIN MOE | PHOTOGRAPH BY JAIRUS DAVIS

**AS A BOY IN SHANGHAI, CHINA,** Kevin Gu had an early obsession. “I love sports,” he says. His love is pure. While many people enjoy the competitive nature of sports—striving to win and aiming for the championship—Gu has a fondness for the games in and of themselves.

While in high school and looking for the direction in which to aim his life, he followed his passion. “I wanted to learn more specific things about sports and I took a few internships in Shanghai,” he says. One was with a soccer team, the Shanghai Shenhua. “That team was my favorite. I was pretty lucky to get an internship opportunity.”

During the internship, Gu learned about the many challenges involved in running a sports team, including all the things a team can improve upon. At the time, he didn’t know how one would go about identifying and implementing methods of improvement and saw that as an opportunity for growth.

He began looking at a sport management major and decided on Minnesota and the School of Kinesiology, where he is now a sophomore with a double major in sport management and special education.

Gu chose Minnesota for a few reasons. One was the U of M’s proximity to downtown Twin Cities and four major league sports teams, including the Minnesota United FC at Allianz Field in St. Paul.

Gu’s sport management focus is easy to understand. His special education major came about as he thought of what he may want to do with his degree.

“In high school, I volunteered in my community’s physical disability organization,” he says. “It was pretty fun. We organized several sports events. So, I thought I can connect those two majors.”

He has worked as a classroom assistant at the U’s Child Development Laboratory School and as a game day intern for the Gopher Sports marketing team. He hopes to use his experience and degree to find a job either here in the states or back home in China.

Helping him on his way is the Elizabeth C. Blenman Endowed Scholarship, which is for students pursuing unpaid internships, and the Gordon and Lois Robertson Scholarship, which grants equal access to financial assistance.

“I am so grateful,” he says, adding that unpaid internships are especially challenging for international students. “With the scholarships, I have no hesitation just to dive into these activities. I can use my time for more meaningful things.”

“With the scholarships, I have no hesitation just to dive into these activities. I can use my time for more meaningful things.”



Support CEHD student scholarships at [cehd.umn.edu/giving](https://cehd.umn.edu/giving).  
Contact us at 612-625-1310.





**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
+ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

105 Burton Hall | 178 Pillsbury Drive S.E.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455


NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT #90155  
TWIN CITIES, MN



► CEHD holds both undergraduate and graduate commencement ceremonies on May 10, 2024.

***Welcome, new Alumni*** 

Congratulations to all of our 2024 graduates!  
Landed a new job? Celebrating a professional milestone?  
We want to share your news! All our alumni class notes are now published online. Go to [cehd.umn.edu/alumni/notes](https://cehd.umn.edu/alumni/notes) and send us your news—with photos if you have them. Read about people you know from CEHD.

 College of Education and Human Development | University of Minnesota | @umcehd

 CEHD Alumni & Student Networking Group

 @UMN\_CEHD