

# CEHDconnect

THE MAGAZINE OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

*Two-time CEHD alum  
Willie Jett is Minnesota's newest  
Commissioner of Education*

## TO PREPARE AND INSPIRE

ADDRESSING GAPS  
IN MINNESOTA'S  
SEALS OF  
BILITERACY  
PROGRAM  
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SPEAKING  
TRADITION  
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A CHAMPION FOR  
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*How an OLPD program develops the very best  
PK-12 educational leaders ▶ P. 20*



SPRING/SUMMER 2023

from the  
DEAN



**JUST RETURNING** from the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, I am excited by all of the work underway in CEHD—some of which was highlighted as our faculty, staff, and students presented on wide-ranging topics at the research conference.

This year, CEHD researchers presented on reading interventions, FirstGen doctoral student sense of belonging, multilevel sta-

tistical modeling, equity in teacher preparation, science education, early language comprehension, undergraduate student research experience, accommodations for students with disabilities, side-by-side coaching, Indigenous teacher preparation, school climate, social studies teacher experiences, and much more.

And this is just one of the many conferences our researchers attend. The stories in this season’s issue of *Connect* deepen our understanding of some of this work. The stories on equity, diversity, access, and the celebration of multilingual learners, are just examples of how CEHD is meeting local and global persistent and emerging needs. We are a responsive college, one that engages with communities to solve challenges. Whether advocating for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, promoting research-based school leadership, or engaging in international exchange programs, CEHD is on the move.

Throughout this issue of *Connect*, we spotlight the work of our alumni. Some are engaged in research and discovery, helping improve lives. Some are working and transforming systems and practices. Some are collaborating through generous gifts that allow us to do even more and support our students to reach their goals. Every contribution makes a difference, and our communities are better because of it—because of you.



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
+ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
Driven to Discover®

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Minnesota Commissioner of Education and CEHD alum Willie Jett

PHOTOGRAPH BY

Jairus Davis

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# Advocating for graduate student parents

**BEING A GRADUATE STUDENT** is stressful enough, but couple that with being a parent, and the challenges seem almost insurmountable. The Graduate Student Parent and Caregiver Alliance at CEHD hopes to alleviate some of that pressure.

“The alliance is designed to provide support and advocacy for graduate student parents and resources that tend to the ways that social identity impacts their experiences,” says Leah Fulton, a PhD student in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD) focusing on higher education. Fulton created the alliance with fellow students Alex Klapperich and Zhuldyz Amankulova.

program and provided recommendations to the college.”

The group offers students peer support, institutional navigation, and an intersectional approach to address parenthood and caregiving. What makes the alliance unique, Fulton says, is its attention to the contours of graduate education. Similar groups tend to focus only on undergraduate students.

For the future, the group hopes to establish a collegewide task force to learn more about student parents’ needs and determine how resources can be allocated to meet those needs. And, since one member of the founding trio has graduated and the other two are about to complete their graduate student experience, new leadership is needed to continue this work. They have no doubt that someone will step up to take on this important task—with a child at their side.

—KEVIN MOE

For more information about the alliance, contact Zhuldyz Amankulova at [amank005@umn.edu](mailto:amank005@umn.edu).

“We were all doctoral student mothers in CEHD who encountered one another in multiple campus contexts where people were discussing the needs of graduate student parents and caregivers, but we didn’t actually see anyone actually responding to the needs,” says Amankulova, who is in the Comparative and International Development Education (CIDE) PhD program in OLPD.

The trio audited campus resources, met with administrators, and conducted a survey in CEHD during the spring of 2021 to gauge interest. They had 98 students respond.

“We shared the findings with survey participants and administrators, which showed trends and patterns that had a negative impact on the experiences of graduate student parents and caregivers in the college,” says Klapperich, who received her PhD in CIDE in 2022. “We then facilitated an orientation session for incoming students in our

COURTESY OF ICI/MNLEND

# Autistic, not sorry

**INTRODUCING HERSELF**, Isabelle Morris often shares that she has all of the American Kennel Club breeds memorized alphabetically. She’ll then joke that if you couldn’t already tell, her other special interest is autism. She’s one of a growing number of autistic researchers using their lived experience, “unapologetically,” she says, to shape the future of autism research.

A doctoral student at the Institute of Child Development who is also completing a MNLEND fellowship at the Institute on Community Integration, she leads a participatory research project called RADAR (Research on Autism Driven by Autistic Researchers) that aims to unlock new understanding about stimming, the repetitive self-stimulating behaviors sometimes used by people with autism to manage emotions.

Morris and a small group of autistic collaborators recently designed a survey of 150 U.S. adults with autism, asking them about masking (methods used to hide stimming from public view), about the ways stimming affects them, and about how they use stimming to communicate with other autistic people and express their identities. Deeply engaging autistic people to inform the research questions was critical, she says.



“Historically, stimming was deemed as purposeless behavior. Today there’s a recognition that it helps in self-regulation, but this communication aspect is new,” Morris says. “Rather than looking at it as a deficit, it acknowledges an autistic’s way of being in the world.”

Nearly 3 in 4 respondents said they understand what other neurodivergent people are feeling when stimming—remarkable for a population often characterized as unable to read emotions.

To hone her skills in involving people with disabilities in all phases of research, Morris spent time through her MNLEND fellowship working with Cow Tipping Press, teaching writing classes for adults with disabilities (pictured).

“It gave me the opportunity to presume competence and provide support,” she says. “It also will help me integrate people with intellectual disability into my research in a meaningful way. It’s all interconnected.”

—JANET STEWART

## NEW GIFTS AND COMMITMENTS

### \$500,000 TO \$1 MILLION

The late **Dorothy Bouchard Welch** named the “treehouse” in Campbell Hall, home of the Institute of Child Development.

### \$250,000 TO \$500,000

**Schmidt Futures** established the LEVI Engagement Hub Project Fund.

### \$100,000 TO \$250,000

**Gail N. Anderson** started the Gail and Dean Anderson Fund for Early Identification and Intervention of Dyslexia, named for her and her late husband.

**The Irving Harris Foundation** contributed to the Center for Early Education and Development.

**NIKE Inc.** added to its support of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport.

### \$50,000 TO \$100,000

**Elizabeth L. Craig and James J. Craig Jr.** pledged to add to the Elizabeth and James Craig Scholarship for Career Experiences.

**Cameron G. Duncan** established the Mithun Duncan Family Fund.

**Jane McDonald Black and Archie C. Black** created the JAB Foundation Fund for State Literacy Survey.

**Patrick J. and Shirley M. Campbell** added to the Patrick and Shirley Campbell Innovations Fund.

**DuWayne M. and Kay M. Witt** made a commitment to establish the Witt Family Scholarship for Math Education.

### \$25,000 TO \$50,000

**James B. Cysewski** gave to the Beverly Dumas Memorial Scholarship.

**Patricia D. Fallbeck and Thomas Timmons** added to the Patricia D. Fallbeck Scholarship and the Walter R. Higbee Memorial Scholarship.

**Heidrun B. Oshima** established the Heidi Becker Oshima World Language Teacher Scholarship.

**Anne D. Pick and Jodie M. Plumert** established the new endowed Herb Pick Applied Developmental Psychology Fund.

Dean **Michael C. Rodriguez** established the Rodriguez Salazar Family Fund.

**Sharyn and Bruce Schelske** supported the Bruce and Sharyn Schelske Endowed TRIO Director Support Fund.

*Includes gifts made between October 19, 2022, and February 17, 2023.*



# Civil rights icon Dr. Josie R. Johnson receives high honor

**MINNESOTA CIVIL RIGHTS ICON DR. JOSIE R. JOHNSON** was honored with a special luncheon on March 13 to celebrate her receiving a 2022 University of Minnesota Regents Award, one of the highest honors the U bestows. The award recognizes those who demonstrate exceptionally valuable and meritorious service to the University.

CEHD nominated Johnson and led the process to secure supporting letters from the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, the College of Liberal Arts, and Governor Tim Walz. Several media outlets covered the



efforts inspire us to this day to make the University of Minnesota a global university for ALL Minnesotans.”

Special thanks also go to Nina Brown, Jairus Davis, Sarah Jergenson, Kirsten Mortensen, and Amy Pavlick for making the event a huge success.

*In the fall issue of Connect, watch for a special article honoring Johnson’s life and achievements.*



## New open textbook on technology and families

**SUSAN WALKER**, associate professor emeritus in the Department of Family Social Science, recently launched *Critical Perspectives on Technology and the Family* (University of Minnesota Libraries). The work is an open textbook free to use under a Creative Commons license and can be exported as a PDF and e-reader.

“The book was written primarily to serve as a text for FSOS 3105 [Families and Technology], but can naturally serve a wide range of purposes,” Walker says. “Instructors can use it as a reference, select chapters, and find ways to present material. The book covers topics from technology use by children and teens, parents and children, couples and dating apps, work and family, and more. The intention is to provide a balanced view of the research as well as multiple ways to learn, including applied activities, prompts for blogging, and additional reading.” So far, Walker says, members of the general public have expressed gratitude to have such an easy-to-read source on this topic.

Walker loved her experience publishing with the U of M libraries. Offering an easy to access, free and Creative Commons book aligned with her ethics for sharing material. The U of M’s Library Course Materials Services headed by Shane Nackerud made the process seem seamless. It provided resources for copy editing and gathering permissions and skillful guidance on content delivery.

*For more information about the book, contact Susan Walker at [skwalker@umn.edu](mailto:skwalker@umn.edu).*

ERIC MILLER

## Honors



◀ **Dunja Antunovic**, School of Kinesiology, received the 2022 *Sociology of Sport Journal* Early Career Researcher Award. The award is in recognition of significant scholarly contributions to the sociology of sport field.

**Chalandra Bryant**, Department of Family Social Science,

received the Felix Berardo Mentoring Award and the Inclusion and Diversity Committee’s 2022 Social Justice Award from the National Conference on Family Relations.

**Mary Hermes**, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, received the annual Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Research Article Award for “Land as interlocutor: A study of Ojibwe learner language in interaction on and with naturally occurring ‘materials,’” published in the *Modern Language Journal*. The article was co-written by alumna Mel Engman of Queens University.

**Lisa Kihl**, School of Kinesiology, received an International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award 2022 in the Safeguarding Sports from Corruption category sponsored by the Rule of Law and Anti-corruption Center and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.



◀ **Barbara Kleist**, Institute on Community Integration, is a recipient of a 2023 Policy Award from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The award honors Kleist for significant contributions to public policy that have advanced the field.

**Meixi**, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, has received the 2023 George Bereday Annual Best CER Article Award from the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES).



◀ **Tai Mendenhall**, Department of Family Social Science, was recognized by the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* for having the most cited article for 2021-22. He was part of the writing team of “Couple and family interventions for high mortality health conditions: A strategic review [2010-2019].”

**Lindsey Weiler**, Department of Family Social Science, has received a 2022-23 outstanding alumni award from Colorado State University’s College of Health and Human Sciences. The award recognizes alumni who represent the mission of the college through dedication and excellence.

## Appointments

**Joan Blakey**, School of Social Work, has been named a member of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Child Safety and Permanency Division’s African American Child Well Being Advisory Council.



◀ **Rachel Hawe**, School of Kinesiology, has been appointed a 2023-25 McKnight Land-Grant Professor at the U of M. Recipients of the professorship show exceptional promise in their research.

**Ann Masten**, Institute of Child Development, received an honorary doctorate from

Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

**Tania D. Mitchell**, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, has been named the new chair of the department, effective this summer.

**Stacy Remke**, School of Social Work, has been accepted into the National Academies of Practice, a prestigious body for interprofessional practice in healthcare.

**Jodi Dworkin**, Department of Family Social Science, was named a fellow of the National Council on Family Relations.





# Addressing gaps in Minnesota’s seals of biliteracy program

Initiative aims to help school districts offer more equitable access

**MINNESOTA’S STATE SEALS** of biliteracy program recognizes students who have achieved high levels of proficiency in a language other than English. About 2,000 graduating high school students receive a seal each year, but there are large gaps in what types of students earn the award. A four-year initiative led by the Univer-

sity’s Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) aims to address those gaps and help districts offer more equitable access to seals of biliteracy.

JAIROS DAVIS

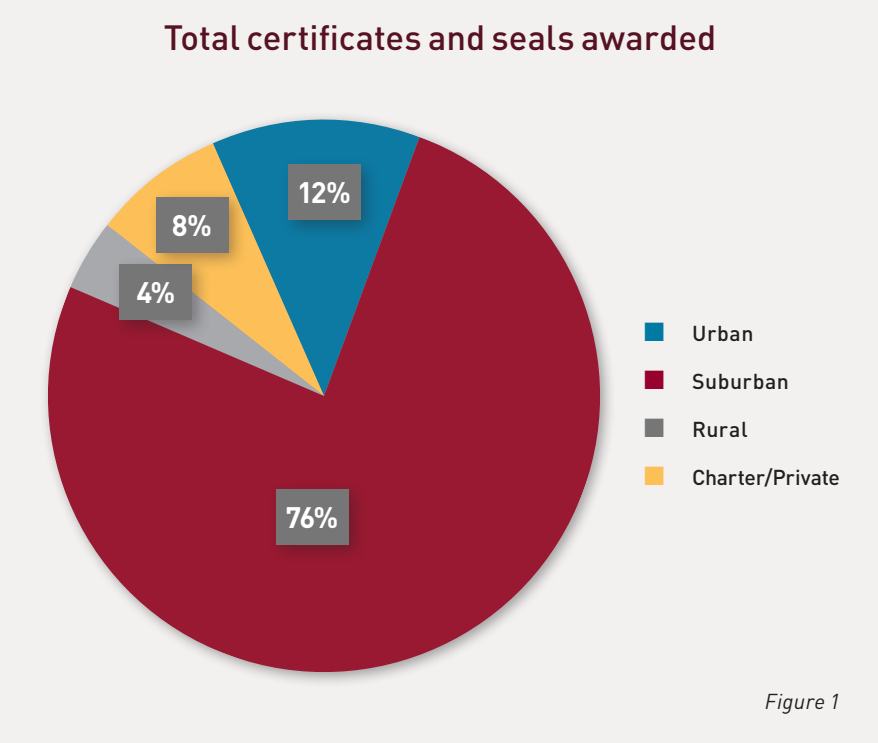


Figure 1

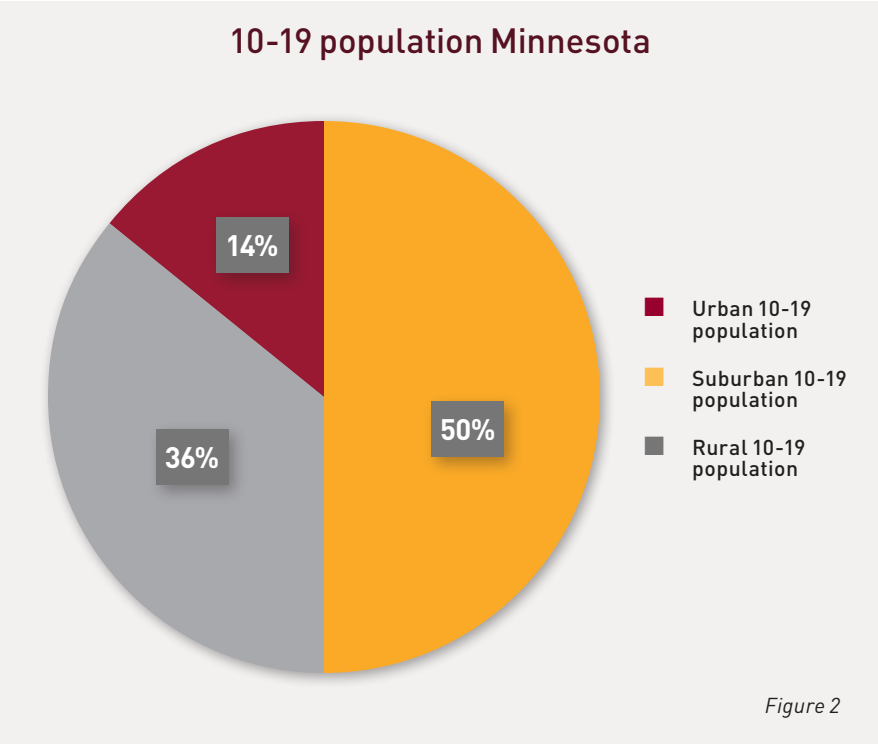


Figure 2

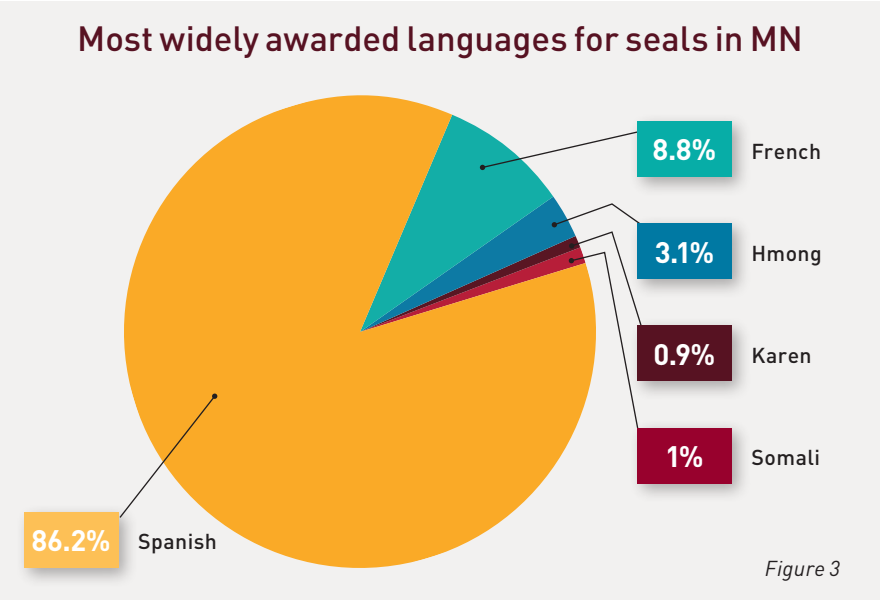
◀ Opposite page: Minnesota Department of Education World Languages Education Specialist Ayumi Stockman and Professor Kendall King are co-directing the initiative to help school districts offer more equitable access to seals of biliteracy.

Kendall King, professor of multilingual education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, is co-directing the initiative with Ayumi Stockman, world languages education specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education. King explains that the state seals program can be a bit of a “do-it-yourself” project for districts and charter schools.

“Districts on their own have to promote the seals, set up testing, and administer the seals, with no special funding,” King says. “We have hundreds of districts who are having to do this with limited resources and, frankly, limited support.”

A lack of capacity is likely part of why so few school districts—just 14 percent—even offer the program. And access varies widely by location. For instance, about one-third of students across the state live in rural districts, but they have received only four percent of the seals awarded in recent years. Conversely, while about half of students live in suburban areas, these students earned 76 percent of seals in 2021. And although urban students make up 14 percent of the K-12 student population, they earned just 12 percent of the state seals. Given the highly multilingual nature of many Minnesota cities, this suggests differential access across the state. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

Speakers of less commonly taught languages also earn the seals at lower rates. Although the seal is offered in 24 languages in Minnesota, including American Sign Language, Amharic, Dakota, Karen, Ojibwe, and Oromo, 86 percent of seals awarded in 2021 were for Spanish. Just three percent were for Hmong and one percent for Somali, despite Somali and Hmong being the



second and third most common languages, other than English, spoken in students’ homes within the state. (See Figure 3.)

ADDRESSING ACCESS GAPS

The initiative aims to provide support to districts to close these gaps in access.

King and Stockman, together with CEHD graduate students Jurana Aziz and Andrew Fiegen, have started with a statewide survey and targeted focus groups to learn more about all the challenges districts face and understand why districts may not offer the program. The results will inform the next phase of the project, in which they will create customizable toolkits and develop assessment supports.

“Right now every school is reinventing the wheel,” King says. “We want to have tools for them to download and customize. We hope greater coordination and more and better online tools will enable expanded access to the seal.”

These tools will include promotional materials, such as posters to display in schools and letters explaining the program to parents in their home language,

as well as support materials like practice materials and sample prompts for less commonly taught languages.

“I constantly hear from heritage language communities that they want resources for students and families available to lead to success on these assessments,” Stockman says.

A heritage language is often learned by its speakers at home as children and sometimes supported in the broader community, but these languages are infrequently formally taught in schools.

“If you’re taking the test in Spanish, there are lots of practice materials. If you’re taking a test in a less commonly taught language, there’s much less information about what the test will look like,” King explains. “We really want to do as much as we can to support teachers and kids so that they’re aware of what level of language proficiency and what types of language skills they need to be successful on the test. This is particularly true for heritage language students who typically don’t have the chance to formally study their language.”

The customizable toolkits will be avail-

able in five languages widely spoken by Minnesota students—Hmong, Karen, Oromo, Somali, and Spanish—as well as Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese, which are widely spoken across the U.S.

King and Stockman will also provide professional support to district leaders and teachers as part of the nationally known CARLA Summer Institute Program, helping them get a seals program started in their community.

Next, they plan to take this project beyond Minnesota.

“We hope to collaborate with other organizations to make toolkits widely available nationally once we have perfected them locally,” King says.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNITION

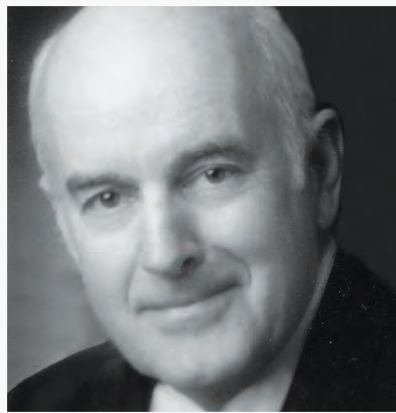
Forty-nine states have adopted a seals of biliteracy program since it was introduced in California in 2009. Minnesota is one of the very few states that offer college credit to students who earn a seal, although the program is currently limited to certain schools in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. (At present, the University of Minnesota does not recognize the seal.)

But there is more to the program than just the practical value of college credit or a resume boost, according to Stockman.

“We hope that this program being implemented well in a school district will elevate the value of multilingualism,” Stockman says. “In the end, we really want to develop language skills to understand each other, understand our cultures, and develop those soft skills that are needed for a diverse world.”

—SARA SCHUMACHER LUDTKE

Learn more: [carla.umn.edu/stateseals/index.html](https://carla.umn.edu/stateseals/index.html)



In memoriam

**WILLIAM “BILL” AMMENTORP**, former professor of educational administration and chair of the department, passed away at his home in Cannon Falls on February 4, 2023. Bill graduated from Carleton College and received a PhD in educational administration from the University of Chicago.

Most of Bill’s professional career was spent teaching at the University of Minnesota, where he was professor of educational administration for 40 years until retiring in 2006. He served as chairman of the board of trustees at St. Mary’s College in Winona and chairman of the board of trustees at Shattuck-St. Mary’s High School in Faribault. He was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow and received the Carleton College Distinguished Alumni Award. Among Bill’s achievements were founding and co-directing the Leadership Academy at the University of Minnesota from 1993-2004, and founding and co-directing the Tribal College Leadership Program from 1998-2004.

“I join with Associate Chair Fran Vavrus and all of our departmental colleagues in expressing my deepest sympathies to all of Bill’s former students, colleagues, family, and friends,” said Kenneth Bartlett, chair of the Department of Organizational

Leadership, Policy, and Development. “I was hired in 1999 into what was then the Department of Work, Community, and Family Education and interacted often with Bill during a time of close cooperation through the Leadership Academy program with the Department of Educational Administration. In some ways, that spirit of cooperation helped lay the foundation for the eventual merger of both of these departments. I have very fond memories back then as a young assistant professor of the kind support Bill always showed and the encouragement for seeking to find the joys in research and teaching rather than being overly stressed by the fickle winds of University administration.”

**DAVE CHRISTESEN**, lecturer in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, passed away on February 23, 2023. He was a core member of the department with a distinguished record of teaching, advising, and service. He taught three graduate and undergraduate classes per semester in Business and Marketing Education and Human Resource Development. He had been a member of the CEHD community since 2006.

Dave called himself a practitioner turned academic. His experience ranged from working on investment and staffing models as a mathematician to vice president-level positions leading multiple cor-

porate functions and multi-billion-dollar mergers. He also worked in consulting across numerous industries as a project manager, change consultant, and leadership coach. But after more than 30 years working in industry, including 20 as an executive at Travelers Insurance Company, he decided to focus his energy and curiosity in the academic realm. Already armed with a BSB concentrated in finance and information systems, he picked up an MEd with a concentration in human resources in 2006 and a PhD in work and human resource education in 2008, all from the U.

Dave spent the rest of his career at the U, first as a graduate studies coordinator and then as a senior fellow in the Technological Leadership Institute before becoming a lecturer in OLPD. Dave said his goal in teaching was to share his experiences in a way that tells a story about the topic. He had a significant well to draw upon.



Upcoming events

**Commencement** Friday, May 12 and Saturday, May 13

CEHD graduate and undergraduate students will be participating in University-wide Commencement events. The Graduate Student Conferral Ceremony will be held on Friday, May 12, at 5:00 p.m. The Undergraduate Student Conferral Ceremony will be held on Saturday, May 13, at 1:00 p.m. Both ceremonies will be held at Huntington Bank Stadium.

► Info: <https://system.umn.edu/commencement-2023>





◀ Associate Professor Lesa Clarkson is the facilitator of the Race, Equity, and Justice Council. She says the council’s goal is to make C&I a place that values different cultures and people and reflects that in its work.

# In support of equity and diversity

*Faculty strive to embed inclusive initiatives throughout the Department of Curriculum and Instruction*

**RECOGNIZING THE NEED** to embed diversity and equality throughout its programming, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) established a Race, Equity, and Justice Council (REJC) in 2019. The council was formed through the combination of two previous work groups: a diversity committee and a teachers of color council. REJC carries on the work of its predecessors while at the same time

going deeper and broader in scope.

“The purpose of the council was to ground the work that we do in C&I in a way that is welcoming for every student,” says C&I Associate Professor Lesa Clarkson, who serves as the current facilitator of REJC. “The whole idea here was to make C&I a place that was reflected as valuing different cultures and different people and having it also reflect in the work that we do.”

## RECLAIMING LANGUAGE

A perfect illustration of REJC’s goal is the work Professor Mary Hermes has embarked on to keep alive the Ojibwe language. One of these projects is an **early childhood education program** in collaboration with the Institute of Child Development (ICD) and several tribal colleges in the state.

The idea came about from conversations with Dean Michael C. Rodriguez, Hermes says. “Michael was asking me how we can support Indigenous people,” she says. “We should do language, as there is a booming language revitalization movement.”

The program is in the early stages of planning, but would provide tribal college students with advanced training in early childhood education, including Indige-

nous cultural perspectives. They would earn a BS in Early Childhood through ICD, as well as have an opportunity to take Ojibwe language classes. The program would be aimed at students who already have an associate’s degree from a tribal college to continue their studies and receive a bachelor’s degree.

“The target audience is a lot of the Head Start teachers who are community people who do not have a BA and want to be language activists,” Hermes says. “If we can do this, we can make an army of teachers who can speak Ojibwe and we would have a movement. When kids are small, it is the best time to speak to them in Ojibwe. And it’s much easier than to start a full-blown immersion school. That’s a ton of effort and you reach a smaller percentage of people.”

As Hermes and colleagues were meeting with tribal colleges about the early childhood program, they heard from a few individuals that they would like to work with the U of M to get a PhD. From this simple ask came the **Ojibwe PhD cohort**. “Five Ojibwe women—and a sixth is likely joining—who are all educational and Ojibwe language leaders, began a special PhD program with me last fall,” Hermes says.

The cohort uses existing CEHD program structures and courses, so it was able to be up and running in a short amount of time. And the students love it. “This is a super special group of women 20 years involved in language activism,” Hermes says. “They are leaders in their community, they are language superstars.”

The students plan to use their PhDs back in their home communities, possibly working at tribal colleges in creating master’s programs. “A couple of them

DAWN VILLELLA



# INSPIRED BY NUMBERS

**ON MINNEAPOLIS’ NORTH SIDE**, a network of University of Minnesota undergraduates, high schoolers, and middle school students take part in tutoring and other support services dedicated to students of color who have been historically underrepresented in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields. Prepare2Nspire (P2N) is a unique program coordinated by CEHD that supports urban youth and their mathematics learning experience.



P2N is designed to create an informal (non-classroom) space where students study, build their confidence, and participate in mathematics. The program serves middle and high school students with weekly mathematics tutoring and mentoring through a tiered system. Undergraduates are trained as mathematics mentors (mentors) for high school algebra 2 students. The high schoolers, in turn, tutor and men-

tor eighth grade algebra 1 students. Participants at each level become deeply involved as both learners and mentors in a community of peers centered around mathematics in secondary and post-secondary opportunities.

P2N has improved academic outcomes for hundreds of students and inspired tutors to enter STEM-related U of M programs. Students gain confidence and skills through their participation, such as for this high schooler: “Pre-calculus was very hard for me because I couldn’t get the hang of it. But with the help of my mentor, I gained confidence through practice and support.” Some successful P2N students who are now attending the U of M are returning to become the next group of mentors for the program.

3Mgives, the charitable arm of 3M, has supported its growth over the past five years as part of its focus on education, with a special interest in building more diverse future leaders in STEM.

3Mgives Global Communications Manager Jackie Berry says, “As a science-based company, we want to build equal representation in the next generation of thinkers, and ensure that students of color who want to access and participate in STEM have an opportunity to do so. 3M’s partnership with P2N helps build the pipeline of underrepresented students engaging in mathematics.”

“We are building persistence and success in a field where next-level jobs are available,” says Associate Professor Lesa Clarkson, who started P2N in 2013 and volunteers her time as director. “The generosity of 3M makes it possible for us to serve more students, build their confidence, and strengthen their mathematics skills and achievement.”

—ANN DINGMAN





want to start grass-roots community efforts to start something that is language based, which could be an after-school program or a charter school,” Hermes says. “Educational language for young people.”

A third language project Hermes is involved in doesn’t yet have an official name, but it is being described as **games for Indigenous languages**. Located on the first floor of Peik Hall, the initiative has so far amassed \$1 million in bids and grants. An innovative product presently being developed is Reclaim!, a point-and-click adventure video game in the Ojibwe language. The game is designed to give learners a fun and engaging way to

develop their competence and confidence in using a new language. The project boasts eight Indigenous developers, writers, and artists. “That is huge,” Hermes says. “I feel super proud of that.” Hermes says she hopes the game will find broad appeal in both schools and homes.

“The purpose of the council was to ground the work that we do in C&I in a way that is welcoming for every student.”

**NORMALIZING EXPERIENCES**

An important aspect of REJC is for the C&I community to learn more about each other. “Upon looking at some of the experiences of people in the department—students, staff, or faculty—we found it wasn’t always the same set of experiences,” Clarkson says. “We wanted to normalize what these experiences should

be.” Examples abound of inclusive initiatives within C&I which demonstrate this desire:

**RACIAL JUSTICE IN URBAN SCHOOLING MINOR**

This significant curricular effort supports students’ exploration of their interest in graduate studies in education or activism on educational issues. This undergraduate minor is designed for students interested in how race, social class, language status, gender, or sexual orientation impact educational equity and social justice. Whether or not they want to become a classroom teacher, students who are deeply interested in education as a social issue find this major intriguing. Currently, C&I is working to deepen and make more explicit how the minor’s courses explore and examine the intersections of social class and race.

COURTESY OF MARY HERMES



◀ Opposite page, clockwise from upper left: At the initial Ojibwe PhD cohort in-person retreat are Govinda Budrow, Amy McCoy, Kim Anderson, and Mary Hermes; Mary Hermes and Anangookwe Hermes Roach at a game developer’s conference; Amy McCoy and Nyleta Belgard are hard at work at the first Ojibwe PhD cohort writing retreat. Below: Keith Mayes speaking at the 2022 Leading in Equity, Action, and Diversity (LEAD) conference.

**DIRECTRACK TO TEACHING**

This program gives undergraduate students early exposure to the culture of teaching and schools through in-school experiences and prepares them to enter MEd and teaching license programs. The program especially encourages applications from those who are racially or ethnically diverse, multilingual, and have an interest in teaching for social justice to meet the diverse needs of today’s students. The program is also currently facilitating affinity groups for aspiring teachers who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQ+.

**TEACHER SCHOLARS OF COLOR (TSOC)**

Many teachers in the Twin Cities and surrounding areas do not reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of their students. It is C&I’s position that young people should have more teachers who look like them, especially when those teachers also have the knowledge and expertise to build on the cultures and identities of their students to promote academic success. TSOC is open to all teacher candidates of color in the teacher licensure programs and provides mentorship, support, and advice among its many impactful offerings.

JAYME HALBRITTER

**REJC TALK SERIES**

This series of informative and engaging seminars crosses program areas. Recent events included Associate Professor Keith Mayes of the Department of African American and African Studies speaking on “Disability Rights and the Invention of Black Special Education,” doctoral student Bisola Wald sharing “How Your Background and Experiences Can Advance Racial Equity Work,” and a panel discussion on “Innovative Anti-Racist Educational Policies and Practices for a More Just Tomorrow” featuring Assistant Professor Ramon Vasquez from C&I and Assistant Professors Nathaniel (Nate) Stewart, Meixi, and Darrius Stanley from the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT PLAN**

In Senior Lecturer Cynthia Zwicky’s Introduction to Elementary Teaching course, she has helped students create culturally relevant interdisciplinary unit plans that teaches the Elementary Education majors to consider all students’

learning modalities and ways of engaging their own students in the learning process. “They create meaningful lessons that diverge 180 degrees from a passive and worksheet-heavy style to one that can showcase multiple assets of how children learn and produce knowledge,” she says. “In this way they foster inclusivity as they learn to build classroom communities that are welcoming to all children.”

**ONWARD AND FORWARD**

This small selection is by no means exhaustive or can be considered finished. “Our work is ongoing and forward-looking,” Clarkson says. “I think we are forging a path for everybody. We did not just get here—these are years’ worth of energy and effort, and the work is not done. But it is beginning to develop momentum.”

—KEVIN MOE

Visit [connect.cehd.umn.edu](https://connect.cehd.umn.edu) for an expanded version of this story.







by  
LORA HÖRGEN  
photographs by  
JAIRUS DAVIS

# Speaking tradition

The voices of children  
will save the  
Dakota language

A GROUP OF SIX PRESCHOOLERS chatter excitedly as they settle into a circle to begin their morning. The beat of a drum starts a series of songs, and the children join in, taking turns saying their names and sharing how they’re feeling today. They pass a shell with smoldering sage to smudge—a traditional practice akin to a quiet reflection or prayer.

Every word spoken by the teachers is Dakhóta iápi, the language spoken in Dakota homelands since time immemorial. The children nod along knowingly and sometimes respond in Dakota. Each word they speak is a sign of hope for the future of the Dakota language—a critically endangered language that is being revitalized by a dedicated group at the University and across the region.

Here at the Dakhóta iápi Wahóhpi (Dakota Language Nest), a small group of 3- to 5-year-old children and their teachers spend each day immersed in the language.

◀ Opposite page: Circle time at the Wahóhpi is spent learning traditional songs, as well as practicing interacting in Dakota. Below right: Assistant Teacher Justis Brokenrope prepares the drum for the children.

The Wahóhpi opened last September in a section of the Child Development Laboratory School (CDLS), which is administratively housed in the Institute of Child Development.

“This is Dakota land,” says Brenda Toscano, a first language Lakota speaker from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation who is the lead teacher for the Wahóhpi. “It saddens me that they’re really losing the language. It’s a race against time. When we’re all gone, who’s going to be here?”

## From an idea to reality

The idea for the Wahóhpi was planted several years before it became a reality and it took nearly four years before the doors opened. Šišókadúta, who is Dakhóta from Bde Hdakínŋyaŋ Oyáŋke (Lake Traverse Reservation), is a Dakota teaching specialist in the College of Liberal Arts’ Department of American Indian Studies. He had been looking to start a language nest in the Twin Cities for several years, partially because he knew there was an urgent need for teachers who were proficient in Dakota language and also had

classroom experience.

“If we can start getting a lot of our students going to the Institute of Child Development, getting licensed, and getting student teaching experience in the language nest, then they can go back to their communities and they can start working in immersion nests themselves,” says Šišókadúta.

That is what led Šišókadúta to the CDLS. He worked closely with CDLS Director Sheila Williams Ridge to find funding for the program and get it ready to open. Finding teachers was a challenge, but they were able to hire both Toscano and Justis Brokenrope, a member of the Sičhángŋu Lakhóta (Rosebud Sioux tribe) who graduated from the University with a BA in American Indian studies and Dakota language focus in May 2022.

Brokenrope says that the children have absorbed so much of the language even in just a few months. The walls of the Wahóhpi are covered in colorful posters featuring the Dakota words for wiškate (toys), óŋŋčhaġe (shapes), thiwáhe (family), and more.







◀ The children of the Wahóhpi have a dedicated outdoor space where they continue to hear only Dakota spoken.

“The University has done a lot of negative things to our people,” he says. “It’s a land grant institution so the land was taken from our people and granted to them. If we don’t do anything now, what are we going to say to the future generations to come?”

### Absorbing language like sponges

On a cold winter day, the children bundle up to head out for a walk to the nearby park. The challenges of early childhood are evident as they struggle into their cold weather gear, sometimes breaking down in frustration. One of the most common words heard in the Wahóhpi is wašté—a word of encouragement meaning “good” or “it is good.”

“Preschoolers are not just language learners,” Williams Ridge says. “They’re learning everything. How to do that in the language has been such a learning curve. We’re starting with language as the core and then building early childhood skills around it.”



“The kids speak English as their home language and that’s how they interact with each other, but their comprehension is good,” Brokenrope says. “They understand what is going on. Kids are sponges, they kind of just suck everything in and they spit it out however they want to.”

### Learning on Dakota homelands

Williams Ridge says the nature-based

learning focus at the CDLS also has a natural synergy with teaching in Dakota. The children spend between one-third and one-half of their day outside. Native plants like sage and sweetgrass were planted in their outdoor space, so the children can also learn traditional plant knowledge.

“The children are immersed in this place,” says Williams Ridge. “They are learning to love Minnesota. This Dakota homeland, they are learning to care for it.”

Šišókadúta says the building that houses the CDLS is located near an old Dakota trail that was used for trade and traveling. He says it’s important that the University continue to invest in Dakota language revitalization, especially because it is such a critical time for the preservation of the language. There is not an exact number of how many Dakota first-language speakers are alive, but most estimates say only a handful remain and they are elderly.



## FIVE DECADES OF FRIENDSHIP LEAD TO GIVING



**THE NEW HOME** of the Institute of Child Development, Carmen D. and James R. Campbell Hall, is ushering in a new era for ICD’s hallmark programs—human development and early childhood education. But buildings are only as good as the people working inside them, and a cohort of ICD alumni has come together to help ensure top doctoral students continue to choose the U of M.

Dana Fox (PhD ‘85) wasn’t expecting to attend Minnesota, despite ICD’s high ranking, but visited on the advice of an undergraduate mentor. She was impressed by how she was treated by faculty, saying, “The level of respect and interest

in graduate students really stood out. I realized the importance of this kind of support and decided this was where I wanted to be.”

Fox quickly bonded with her peers. She recalls many late nights studying and having fun with her classmates in the Florence Goodenough Library and the influence of advisers such as Michael Maratsos, W. Andrew Collins, and Richard Weinberg.

While in school, Fox received a fellowship that enabled her to focus on her dissertation research without needing a job. Fox went on to spend several years at Washburn Center for Children, creating a team that transformed the organization into a state leader in children’s mental health. A few years ago, while reviewing her estate plans, she recalled the financial award, which included encouragement to give back in the future. After talking with the CEHD development office, she decided to establish a fund specifically for ICD students.

With the goal of creating a larger endowment, she approached others who had been at ICD with her. Many were excited about helping establish the ICD Alumni Doctoral Fellowship. Other founding donors are Nancy Hazen (PhD ‘79), Bruce Bobbitt (PhD ‘79), Emily Bushnell (PhD ‘79), Jeffrey Lockman (PhD ‘80), Amy Lederberg (MA ‘77, PhD ‘81), and Celia Brownell (PhD ‘82). To date, they have raised over \$50,000; several also are making estate commitments. They intend to grow the fellowship to eventually provide full funding for a student.

Fox hopes future students will be inspired to give back, advising them to “work hard, be true to yourself, and after you achieve success and stability, remember to donate to the ICD Alumni Doctoral Fellowship.” Visit [z.umn.edu/ICDAlumni-DoctoralFellowship](https://z.umn.edu/ICDAlumni-DoctoralFellowship) for more details.

—ANN DINGMAN



Toscano’s own experience with language in early childhood has been invaluable. Her family spoke Lakota, which is another dialect similar to Dakota. Her first setting outside of the home was a Spanish immersion school, where she picked up that language. Her first exposure to English was in kindergarten, where she then picked up her third language. After working as a nurse for years, she was approached by a Dakota community member who asked if she would consider bringing her language knowledge to the classroom. Since 2010, she has taught the language in early childhood settings around the Twin Cities.

“It’s such a treasure to work with little ones because this is where we need to start them at,” Toscano says. “They absorb it like sponges.”

Most of the day, the children chatter away in English. They clearly understand

the Dakota spoken by their teachers because they respond to questions or follow directions given in Dakota. There is very little translation in the classroom. The teachers rarely break from Dakota, only if it is needed for safety. Little by little, the language is taking hold.

As the children raced around the playground, tossing snow and playing with their teachers, suddenly one of them shouts out “Wajná waškáté!”—“Now I’m playing!”

**Growing teachers**

In February, Šišókadúta, Toscano, and Brokenrope presented at the Dakota and Ojibwe Languages Symposium. Brokenrope shared that the goals of the Wahóhpi

“Being in the nest and hearing all these little babies speak Dakota to you, it’s amazing.”

are not only to create early childhood language learning opportunities for Dakota students and families, but also to increase enrollment by Indigenous students into the University’s early childhood program.

“We have student teachers now that come in and spend several hours a week in the classroom,” Brokenrope said at the symposium. “That’s not an opportunity I had when I was studying language.”

RickyMae Kitto, a Santee Dakota sophomore, is studying Dakota language with Šišókadúta and started working in the Wahóhpi last fall. She says she grew up knowing about her Dakota lineage and that her ancestors had been exiled from Minnesota after the



▲ The walls of the Wahóhpi feature posters in the Dakota language. There are very few printed materials available in Dakota, so the staff has plans to create more educational resources for other Dakota language programs.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, but she never heard the language spoken in her family. The legacy of Indian boarding schools, a federal Indian policy that began in the 1800s to assimilate Native children and continued well into the 20th century, resulted in several generations being forbidden to speak their Native language.

“Being in the nest and hearing all these little babies speak Dakota to you, it’s amazing,” Kitto says. “They don’t even know they are the future and they’re the ones who are going to break the cycle of us growing up without the language.”

Kitto says her goal now is to study both early childhood and Dakota language. She grew up taking care of younger children and now works at the Wahóhpi and another preschool part-time, all to fulfill her dream of someday leading her own classroom.

**Planning for the future**

As the Wahóhpi wraps up its first academic year, there are many goals ahead for the program. This spring, Williams Ridge, Toscano, and Brokenrope traveled to Hawaii to visit Hawaiian language immersion programs, some of which have been operating for about 40 years and have contributed to a massive resurgence of their language. They plan to spend the spring and summer developing

curriculum, translating books, and expanding the parent education program that meets weekly with the families of the Wahóhpi children.

The Wahóhpi is currently funded by a grant from the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, as well as tuition from families. Williams Ridge says building the program may take years, but it is critical work that they hope to expand a little at a time.

“If we don’t do it, who’s going to do it?” asks Šišókadúta. “We are the ones who have to do this and this is the time to do this.”

To learn more and make a gift to support the Dakota Language Nest, visit [z.umn.edu/DakotaNest](https://z.umn.edu/DakotaNest).

# Common Dakota phrases

**Hau/Han**  
Hello and yes  
(male/female)

**Anpétu wašté**  
good day/  
good morning

**Phidámayaye**  
thank you (you have  
made me grateful)

**Yahí kiŋ wašté**  
welcome (you're here  
and that's good)

**Tókšta akhé**  
goodbye (a shortened  
version of a longer  
phrase that means "I will  
surely see you again")





◀ At left: David Law, Minnetonka Public Schools superintendent, connects with students at one of the district's elementary schools. Below: Northfield Superintendent of Schools Matt Hillmann meets with the District Youth Council.

# To prepare and inspire

*How an OLPD program develops the very best PK-12 educational leaders*

**WHEN THE MINNESOTA** Association of School Administrators selects its annual Superintendent of the Year, it's a good bet that the honoree has some connection to the PK-12 Administrative Licensure Certificate program in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD). In the last four years alone, each winner was either a graduate or an instructor of the program. "That's quite a record when you consider the entire state of Minnesota," says Program Director Gary Prest, who himself was superintendent of the year in 2006, representing the Bloomington School District.

Prest has been director of the licensure program since 2014, but the program itself has been around for half a century in some form or another. "It had a variety of different monikers over the years, but all with the same purpose: inspiring leaders to lead district educational organizations at the national, state, and local levels," Prest says. Besides preparing aspiring school and district leaders for a superintendent license, the program also prepares educators for K-12 principals, directors of special education, and directors of community education licenses. There are 13 univer-

sities in the state that have licensure programs approved by the Minnesota Board of School Administrators. "The University of Minnesota is one of only four institutions in the state that offers programs for all four licenses," Prest says. The program is unique in its access to cutting-edge research as well as to the researchers themselves. "We have the ability to harness and apply multiple resources from the U of M, which offers, through CEHD and OLPD, an array of top-flight resources to support graduate-level instruction, facilities, and collaborative efforts with the Education Policy and Leadership

program, of which this licensure program is a part," says Program Coordinator and Lecturer Chris Sonenblum. Many students enrolled in the program are practicing teachers, and most complete it in one or two years. "The program is cost effective because it doesn't require students to procure a particular degree, and allows them to seek a certificate for 23 credits," Sonenblum says. "Students may also apply coursework from the licensure program to another advanced degree later on if they choose to do so, but it doesn't obligate them to add additional credits beyond state requirements for licensure." Prest says licensure is a recent phenomenon. When the program started, a person would receive training for a master's degree or a doctorate. "They were an entrée to the role of an administrator," he says. "Back around the 80s or 90s, the degree became the entrée to the license."

Besides the course credits, licensing depends on other criteria. To be licensed as a principal, for example, a person needs a minimum of three years of teaching experience. Another requirement required by the state of Minnesota is a 320-hour administrative internship. "We put in considerable rigor, so the internship provides the opportunity to meet the required administrative competencies in real-world settings," Prest says. "They are required to complete a series of projects that benefit the school. That is a unique feature of our program. Not all programs have that same kind of standard."

## FACULTY FROM THE FIELD

As for courses, the program emphasizes instruction by adjunct faculty members who are currently working in or have very recently been in school administrator roles, such as Matt Hillmann, the superintendent of schools in Northfield. He has 30 years of public school experience as a teacher, coach, principal, and district-level leader in nearly every aspect of

school administration. He is also the 2023 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year and was one of four finalists for National Superintendent of the Year. Hillmann's focus is on leadership. He has taught the program's Leaders of Human Resources Administration course and will begin teaching the Leaders in Superintendency and Central Office course this summer. "In the past, I have also taught courses in school finance and education technology," he says. "I've been lucky to have worked in leadership roles at the building and district levels, so I am comfortable teaching most educational leadership courses. I want people to learn new leadership skills to help them be effective school administrators. I want them to understand that effective school districts prioritize relationships and systems." Having taught for many years, Hillmann has noticed many significant changes in the field, such as communication. More specifically, its velocity nowadays. "The speed of communication has impacted school leadership," he says. "In my view, judgment is the most critical administrative competency," he says. "We used to have the gift of time—we could 'sleep on' a decision or have the space to create strategic communications about an issue. Communication is instantaneous. Text messaging and social media can spread information about school issues before leaders learn about them. We must have excellent judgment with far less time to make those judgments." Sonenblum says having adjunct faculty in the field such as Hillmann is a strength that sets the program apart from others because it builds networks. "They are people students can go back to," she says. "They know they can come back and connect with faculty as well as student colleagues they worked with. It's a very vital and living network for support and connection that continues after they leave the program."



CT RYAN PHOTO

COURTESY OF MATT HILLMANN



## CREATING CONNECTIONS

David Law, the superintendent of Minnetonka Public Schools, says the program is the perfect combination of high-quality learning and relationships. “The professors were practitioners, experts, and great teachers,” he says. “Several of my U of M professors stayed in contact with me for the past 25 years. I recently received recognition for something professional and was surprised to see them in attendance.”

Law, the Superintendent of the Year for 2020, served as an adjunct instructor at the U of M for more than a decade. Through connections he made at the U, he was hired in White Bear Lake, first as a principal and then assistant superintendent. He then moved into the superintendency in Anoka-Hennepin prior to

his current position. “The U provides high-quality education and networking that have served me incredibly well,” he says about the program. “I took away the belief that we are constantly evolving and improving in our professional life and in public education. The reflection opportunities embedded in the program still play a role in my professional life.”

Ty Thompson, assistant superintendent of North St. Paul, Oakdale, and Maplewood Schools, was serving as a fourth-grade dual immersion teacher in an elementary school before she started the program. “A mentor spoke to me about considering leadership,” she says. “Since completing the licensure, I have also earned a master’s degree and my superintendent’s license through the University

► At right: Ty Thompson, Sarah Godfrey, and Renee Corneille are all proud graduates of the PK-12 Administrative Licensure Certificate program.

of Minnesota. Professionally, over the past 10 years, I have transitioned from teacher, to MTSS [Multi-Tiered System of Supports] coach, administrative intern, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent.”

Thompson adds that she did not expect to meet so many lifelong friends and colleagues in the program. That sentiment is becoming a common thread, echoed by Sarah Godfrey, director of special education for Columbia Heights Public Schools. “The program has helped me create connections across districts and I still stay in touch with people I met



in my classes,” she says. “It’s been fun seeing people I met as teachers become administrators.”

Godfrey completed her director of special education, K-12 principal, and superintendent licensure all at the U of M. “The best part was having instructors that had been in the role that I was trying to move into as a leader,” she says. “The three internships I completed across li-

cence areas were invaluable and helped me grow as a leader. They provided me with the experiences I needed to be prepared for the job I have today.”

Renee Corneille, the superintendent of St. Anthony–New Brighton Public Schools, says she recommends the program for teachers considering an administrative license. “Because the U of M is a research university, having access to sem-

inal work in the area of educational policy and administration cannot be found in other places,” she says. “I find that people who select the U of M for their administrative license want to transform education. They are not interested in the status quo. They are going to this research institution to learn deeply to execute change that will impact our students, and ultimately our nation.” 🍷

Learn more: [cehd.umn.edu/olpd/graduate-programs/administrative-licensure](https://cehd.umn.edu/olpd/graduate-programs/administrative-licensure)



## From teacher to commissioner

Willie Jett has filled just about every educational role you can think of. He taught high school in the Anoka Hennepin, Osseo, and Minneapolis school districts. He was an assistant principal at Park Center Senior High School and a principal at Hopkins High School. He served districtwide as an assistant superintendent for St. Paul Public Schools and as a superintendent for St. Cloud Area Schools.

In each successive role, Jett served a greater number of students. Now, in his current position as Minnesota Commissioner of Education, he has more than 2,200 educational facilities and upwards of 880,000 students in his purview.

“I am grateful to have worked in so many roles during my time as an edu-

cator, because each taught me something new and prepared me for the role I’m currently in,” he says.

Throughout his varied roles, Jett says his focus has always been on protecting a child’s spirit and ensuring access and opportunity for students.

It was this focus, a desire to make an impact on more students as well as staff, that initially led him to the PK-12 Administrative Licensure program at CEHD. “I knew I could do this through a role as an administrator,” he says. “I chose the U of M because of the top-tier education, reputation for excellence, and the ongoing mentorship provided through the program.”

Jett enrolled in the program twice, earning his principal’s license in 2001 and a superintendent’s license in 2011. He came back to the program a third time in June of last year, but this time on the other side. He joined the teaching faculty as a program coordinator and lecturer.

“I believe in giving back to those who’ve supported me in my journey, like the U of M,” he says.

Jett says his goal was to assist young leaders on their path to self-discovery and to support the development of well-rounded, grounded administrators who care about supporting all students. “I am committed to mentoring and supporting young leaders, particularly those who have a passion for educating

underserved youth,” he says.

In coming back to the program, Jett was encouraged by seeing a wider diversity in students, whether location, gender, race, or perspective. “The caliber of students I worked with greatly encourages me when I think about the future of our schools,” he says. One thing that remained constant, however, was that the program’s commitment to preparing excellent administrators remained as strong as ever. “I am confident that the program will continue to serve students and schools well,” he says.

Jett’s tenure at CEHD turned out to be short-lived, because it was only six months later—December 2022—that Gov. Tim Walz tapped him for his new role as Commissioner of Education, and the opportunity to serve on a greater scale. “Although he was with us just a short time,” said Dean Michael C. Rodriguez upon Jett’s departure, “I am excited to know his leadership expertise is being leveraged for a greater purpose in Minnesota.”



In early April, aspiring teachers from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction sat down for a discussion with Commissioner Jett. Watch a video and read about the event at [z.umn.edu/WillieJettVisit](https://z.umn.edu/WillieJettVisit).

JAIKUS DAVIS





## A champion for inclusion

*Ed Psych student brings Best Buddies program to the U*

**WHEN I WAS IN KINDERGARTEN**, my teacher asked me to work with one of my peers with autism, Vince. So, I left class during nap time to work on writing with Vince. He and I played games on dry erase boards and spent quality time together. Ever since working with Vince, I knew I wanted to continue working with people with special needs. I was introduced to Best Buddies in middle school, and Vince and I were buddies in eighth grade. Little did I know

this organization would change my life.

Best Buddies is an international organization advocating for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). It is dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation for people with IDD. Best Buddies offers four main opportunities: one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living. There are one-to-one friendship

programs in elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as in colleges. There is also a post-college program called Citizens. Best Buddies offers individuals of all ages the opportunity to make a friend and be involved. Its integrated employment program solidifies occupations for people with IDD and teaches them how to pay taxes and independently support themselves. Leadership development teaches leadership, public speaking, and how to advocate for those with IDD. Lastly, inclusive living offers inclusive housing across the country. These four pillars enable and enhance the unique abilities of individuals with IDD.

My biggest involvement in Best Bud-

► At right: Last November, Best Buddies had a match party where buddies and their peer buddies met each other for the first time. Each member was given a pair of socks and the person with the same pair of socks was their buddy for the rest of the school year. Pictured (left to right) are Mia Sassano, Corey Hughes, Katie Timmer, Aidan Coughlin, Emma Jester, and Reilly Hawley.

dies has been through the one-to-one friendship program. This kind of program consists of three different types of members. First, are buddies. Buddies are individuals with IDD that are paired up with an individual without an IDD. Peer Buddies are individuals without an IDD that are matched with a buddy. Finally, associate members are not in a buddy match but still participate in meetings and events. A school with a Best Buddies program is in charge of planning monthly events for their members to go to.

In high school, I developed a one-to-one friendship with three amazing individuals sophomore, junior, and senior year. These friendships genuinely changed my life and I'm so grateful for them. My buddy and I would attend the monthly events and hang out outside of school. Some of my favorite activities that I would do with my buddies were getting ice cream, baking at one of our houses, going out to eat, and watching movies! The biggest takeaway from being in a one-to-one buddy match is that both the peer buddy and buddy create a meaningful and lasting friendship that exists even beyond the organization.

I was fortunate to be chapter president my junior and senior year of high school. My responsibilities included sharing ideas for monthly events, having a one-to-one buddy, and leading monthly club meetings. I met with the other officers and planned out how our club could be successful throughout the entire school year. As chapter president, I got to attend the Best Buddies Leadership Conference at Indiana University for two years in a row. At this conference, it was an amazing experience to meet with other Best



Buddies leaders from across the country and world. There were many opportunities to share ideas from our own chapter, listen to other suggestions, and learn how to be an exceptional leader. This conference taught me to look for the good in everyone and understand that everyone is different in their own ways.

### BEST BUDDIES AT THE U

I wanted to continue making these friendships throughout college but was surprised to find that Best Buddies was not a club offered at the University of Minnesota. So, I decided that during my second year of college I wanted to start it. With the help of a friend, we found initial contacts and brought Best Buddies to the University of Minnesota. It has now successfully been a club for three years and has grown more and more each year. Best Buddies at the college level is a little different than high school because you must partner with transition schools in the area in order to find buddies who are interested in joining the program. At the University of Minnesota, we partner with three transition schools: Next Step Transition in North Saint Paul, SAIL transition program in Minnetonka, and Quora Education Center. From these three schools, we currently have 14 buddies that participate in our club. Each of our

buddies is matched with a student at the University of Minnesota.

Each month, the officer team that consists of eight individuals plans an event. Some of our events have been a Gopher hockey game, talent show, movie night, holiday song trivia, bingo, and more! A few of the events that we attend are also put on by Best Buddies Minnesota. This means that all Minnesota chapters are invited, and we get to collaborate with other schools. Some of these events include a winter prom and a friendship walk in May. In addition, any chapter president will attend a leadership training conference that usually has been held for a long weekend in the summer, but since the pandemic, it has changed to a day event in the fall.

In Fall of 2022, I learned that I had been nominated as a Champion Candidate for the 2022 Best Buddies Minnesota Champion of the Year campaign which recognizes the community's most active leaders. I am extremely honored to have been nominated and I took on that opportunity to use my voice to spread the word of Best Buddies and to raise funds for this life-changing mission.

Best Buddies at the University of Minnesota is such a unique club because our members are not all students that attend the University. Our program allows multiple communities to come together and create friendships and opportunities amongst one another. As a college student it can be difficult to create relationships with individuals with disabilities. Best Buddies allows individuals with and without disabilities to connect and form a friendship. I am incredibly grateful for what Best Buddies has done for me and my school community.

*Corey Hughes is a fourth-year student in the special education program in the Department of Educational Psychology.*

JAIKUS DAVIS

COURTESY OF COREY HUGHES



# Return to travel

*CEHD education abroad experiences resume post-COVID*

**PRIOR TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**, close to 300 CEHD students enrolled in education abroad programs annually. Students participated in a variety of programs, from short-term ones lasting only a few weeks, to those lasting an entire semester.

“As a college, we recognize the value of study abroad,” says International Initiatives Director Marina Aleixo. “CEHD is fortunate to have generous donors who provide scholarships for undergraduate students enrolled in a degree-seeking program and participating in an approved University of Minnesota study abroad program.”

When COVID swept the world in 2020, it effectively put a halt to international experiences for students. Now, as travel has opened up again, CEHD looks to reestablish its programs and make study abroad more robust than ever. Many students consider international studies as one of the most significant and life-changing events in their lives.

“We are currently rebuilding our study abroad programs and working to increase student participation to pre-COVID numbers,” Aleixo says. “Last academic year—the first time programs were fully operational after COVID—we sent around 80 students abroad.”

Students traveling last academic year still had to navigate several challenges, such as COVID entry requirements, in-country quarantines and testing, masking, and adjusted schedules. “As a college, we also adjusted our programs in consideration of our global partners and local communities, making sure we were not exposing or putting others at risk,” Aleixo says. “Keep in mind that students traveled abroad from September 2021 through August 2022, and there were still strict COVID requirements and protocols in place for most countries, including the U.S.”

As careful as these precautions were, they were not perfect, as Jack Pham knows

all too well—his study abroad experience was cut short due to himself testing positive for COVID. Pham (’22 BS), who studied business and marketing education in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, studied in Cuernavaca, Mexico, for three weeks during winter break last year.

“For the short time that I spent there, I learned a tremendous amount about myself, experienced the culture of a different country on my own, and gained a great sense of independence and desire to travel more,” he says.

Pham always wanted to study abroad, and Mexico was ideal. “I have previous experience speaking Spanish, since I went to a Spanish-immersion elementary school and studied Spanish throughout middle and high school,” he says. “Mexico was a perfect fit for me.”

▼ Below left: Caroline Gosselin (back row, far right) and classmates take time to give a shout out to their home state in an elementary education lecture in France. Below right: Jack Pham enjoys a group dinner with his study abroad classmates in Mexico. Opposite page: Abigail DiTolla (in purple mask) and colleagues on top of the Montpellier Arc de Triomphe in France.



COURTESY OF JACK PHAM, CAROLINE GOSSELIN



Pham’s study abroad experience involved an accelerated Spanish class with readings, writings, and presentations. “After classes, we would explore the cities, like Mexico City,” he says. “We would eat authentic foods, visit historical sites, and immerse ourselves in a rich and unique culture.”

Before COVID, CEHD sponsored five to seven short study abroad programs a year. Last year, it sponsored two, one to Thailand and one to South Korea.

The program in South Korea is a long-standing exchange partnership between Seoul National University of Education (SNUE) and CEHD. Many students enroll in the program to explore future teaching opportunities in the region. Lexi Wolt, an elementary education foundations major, says “I learned so much when I was in Korea. We had the best hosts at SNUE who helped us navigate a foreign country. It is one of my career goals to teach in a foreign country, and before this trip I had never been outside the U.S. I feel so much more prepared to achieve that goal now.”

For semester-long programs, CEHD students visited Thailand, Italy, the UK, and

France. The France excursion is a teaching practicum and was created by instructors from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in collaboration with the U’s Learning Abroad Center.

Abigail DiTolla, an elementary education major with a minor in racial justice in urban schooling along with a certificate in autism spectrum disorder, spent three months in a student apartment near the center of Montpellier, France, a city by the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

“It was so interesting to compare and contrast the United States and French school systems,” she says. “I was able to work with students whose first language is French and not English. This was challenging, as I did not have previous knowledge of the French language. However, I learned that there are other ways to communicate and build relationships without sharing a first language.”

DiTolla says her experience in Montpellier was one of a kind. “I never thought I would have the opportunity to do all of the amazing things, travel to all the places that I did, and gain beneficial experience for my future career,” she says.

Caroline Gosselin, who also took part

in the Montpellier experience, agrees. “It was the best version of being on your own but with substantial support systems built into the experience,” she says.

An elementary education student minoring in teaching English as a second language, Gosselin was placed in a fifth-grade classroom. “We participated twice a week in their English program as assistant teachers,” she says. “Besides the academic part of my experience, we were encouraged to travel with peers in our program. We were supported by the staff to explore France and neighboring countries.”

Gosselin says the experience was challenging at first because it required her to place herself in situations outside of her comfort zone and develop a sense of independence that she did not have before.

“I developed a new sense of self and learned how to adapt to the changing world around me,” she says. “It is an experience that I still reference now in my teaching English as a second language minor classes, where we engage about cultures, language development, and how language is taught through various lenses.”

She adds that if she had the chance to redo the semester trip, she definitely would. “Studying abroad was my favorite part of my college experience,” she says. “It gave me opportunities that were once in a lifetime and taught me more about myself and the world around me than I originally expected.”

This year, CEHD is sponsoring the South Korea program and is collaborating with the International University of Rabat to offer a program in Morocco. For academic year 2023-24, the college is developing additional short-term programs to France, Puerto Rico, and Brazil.

—KEVIN MOE

Learn more: [cehd.umn.edu/global](https://cehd.umn.edu/global)



ALUMNI

from the  
PRESIDENT



**LA TASHA SHEVLIN**  
BS '08, Human Resource  
Development and MEd  
'13, Family Education  
*Executive Director,  
UpTurnships*

DEAR FELLOW ALUMNI

As the sun is quickly setting on my year as president, it is with great joy and humbleness that I pause and look back on all that we have accomplished this year. To go further and reach more, we welcomed one of the largest groups of incoming board members ever. With the help of these new and existing board members, we had a record-setting Give to the Max Day campaign, raising crucial scholarship funds for CEHD students! We also set intentional goals on how best to engage graduates both near and far. In the spirit of expanding access to the board, one third of our board members are serving remotely from various parts of Minnesota, the United States, and the world, and we have experienced record board attendance at CEHD events virtually and in person. It has been invigorating and inspiring to lead such an active and dedicated group.

Our work is not yet done—there are still amazing happenings yet to come in spring. We recognized outstanding alumni at the Exceptional Alumni Awards in April. Equally, we eagerly await welcoming more CEHD graduates into our alumni society following Commencement in May. Leading up to these celebratory events, we are giving back through the University's Day of Service ([umnalumni.org/dayofservice](http://umnalumni.org/dayofservice)).

You are an important part of the CEHD community. Our alumni and friends are powerful ambassadors and advocates for the University, and we want to provide programs that are useful, meaningful, and fun for all stages of your life and career. We are always looking for phenomenal alumni to share ideas, come to an event, or take a leadership role as a board member.

Your connection to CEHD can be sustained in many different ways. Check out [cehd.umn.edu/alumni](http://cehd.umn.edu/alumni) to find opportunities to get involved both on campus and online, and please reach out with your ideas, memories, and feedback anytime at [cehdas@umn.edu](mailto:cehdas@umn.edu). Thanks for your loyalty and support.

*LaTasha Shevlin*



Give to the Max Day

**GIVE TO THE MAX DAY** is Minnesota's online giving day, held annually in November. Through the generosity of 127 donors, we raised nearly \$90,000 for CEHD. Donor support helps fund student scholarships, start new initiatives and programs, and so much more. Thank you to all who participated!

Share your news

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](http://cehd.umn.edu/alumni/notes) and send us your news—with photos if you have them. Read about people you know from CEHD.

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At the 2022 CEHD Distinguished Alumni Award event are (front row, left to right) Lily Christ, Marti Erickson, Jelena Obradović, Melanie Nelson, and Judith Ray. In back are (left to right) Paul Ramseth, Sekou Robertson, Luke Carlson, Dean Michael C. Rodriguez, and Almas Merchant. Not Pictured: Jon Hubbard.

Congratulations, distinguished alumni!

Established in 2010, the CEHD Distinguished Alumni Award 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 2022 Distinguished Alumni took place at McNamara Alumni Center in November. The honorees include:

**Luke Carlson (Kinesiology)**

An entrepreneurial spirit in starting Discover Strength, a Minnesota-based boutique fitness studio, and enthusiasm for leadership development.

**Lily Christ (Mathematics education)**

A passion for mathematics education at the college and pre-college level as a professor and director of HI-TECH PREP.

**Marti Erickson (Educational psychology)**

A commitment to research, advocacy, and sharing with general audiences on a range of family issues, especially parenting.

**Jon Hubbard (Child and developmental psychology)**

Led international efforts to treat survivors of torture using research on resilience.

**Almas Merchant (Special education)**

Passion in teaching and leadership to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Melanie Nelson (Home economics education)**

Visionary founder of Learning ZoneXpress, creating educational material that promotes healthy nutrition, child development, and literacy; and lifelong investment in empowering others.

**Jelena Obradovic (Child and developmental psychology)**

Led field-changing study of children's stress physiology, self-regulation, and impact of caregiving practices.

**Paul Ramseth (Education policy and leadership)**

Dedicated to personal achievement, education, and equity as a successful teacher, principal, coach, and volunteer.

**Judith Ray (Kinesiology)**

Has a lifelong tenacity to overcome gender and racial barriers in sport and higher education, and impacted a variety of fields, including biomechanics, recreation, and law.

**Sekou Robertson (Elementary education)**

Led innovative work to provide children with the academic foundation and ambition to earn a college degree as principal of LEARN Excel Charter School.



# A system-level change maker

Courtney Bell-Duncan promotes educational equity through her consulting work

WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING education more equitable and culturally relevant, Courtney Bell-Duncan is not interested in low-level changes. “I’m definitely a system-level change maker,” she says.

And Bell-Duncan (’14 MEd, ’20 PhD—education policy and leadership) says creating change that is sustainable requires changes in policy. If not, you will not change the system and you will not change the output. It’s that simple.

“And we’re not just talking about big P policies like school board policies. We’re talking about little P: people, practices, procedures, protocols. These things lead the behaviors of educators and leaders

that ultimately impact their students for better or for worse,” she says.

Her knack for identifying the structural components necessary to enact meaningful, lasting change has made her and her company, Courtney S. Bell Consulting LLC, a must-call for school leaders seeking equity in education.

Bell-Duncan helps school directors and superintendents align their curricular and instructional leadership and policy goals with cultural and moral responsiveness. The ultimate goal is to execute a plan to bring forth equity in the four little-P areas.

“I believe in the innate ability of educational leaders to do what is right by the

students they serve,” she says. “I consider this to be a fact. It’s a belief that drives me. If I didn’t believe it was possible to create change in educational leadership, I wouldn’t do this.”

Bell-Duncan tells leaders that if they are on the right side of justice, everything will take care of itself. “They have to be comfortable to make the impact,” she says. “What’s right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right. Doing what is right is going to stand the test of time. Everything else will fall by the wayside.”

Bell-Duncan grew up in North Minneapolis and says leadership was always her



▲ Above left: Bell-Duncan celebrates with CEHD classmates at her PhD commencement; above right: Bell-Duncan, back row, center, accepting an award at the 2015 CEHD Rising Alumni event.



forte. She was a member of a leadership group, CityWide Student Government, and got to know her peers in all seven public high schools in Minneapolis. When she was co-president of the group in her senior year, she had the opportunity to travel to state-level conferences with schools such as Orono and Wayzata. It was eye opening. “I immediately recognized the difference between the facilities, the curricular offerings, and the living experiences of my peers,” she says.

Seeing these disparities for students going to school in the same state, but within different zip codes, lit a fire in her. “I was passionate as a young person about education because I always felt it was the great equalizer,” she says. “Providing quality education heavily depended on the pedagogy of the teacher, so I decided to become that teacher.”

Courtney-Bell received a BA in sociology of law, criminology, and deviance from the U of M and was working as an associate educator at North High School

in Minneapolis when she decided to enroll in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at CEHD. Graduating with her MEd, she returned to North High as an African American history/human geography teacher. She was a CEHD Rising Alumni award recipient in 2015, and in 2018, she was a finalist for Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

At this time, she was two years into her PhD program in education policy and leadership. Since her first year of teaching, she had been coaching and training leaders and knew that it was something she was gifted at and was called to do. So, she stepped out of the classroom into larger educational leadership roles. She worked as an academic advisor in the College of Liberal Arts, was a program manager of culturally responsive instruction for St. Paul Public Schools, established a consulting firm, served as an assistant principal of a middle and high school in Brooklyn Center, was an assistant professor of educational leadership at Minnesota State University–Mankato, and is now consulting full time.

She got the chance to hone her ability in

building leadership skills in others when she was hired as a program manager in the St. Paul Public Schools. “I had the honor of training instructional leaders from teacher coaches to principals to district-level leaders,” she says. “That role was instrumental for me to develop as a leader of leaders. I did this when I was writing my dissertation. A couple weeks before I finished, I resigned my position from St. Paul and did consulting full time.”

Bell-Duncan is motivated by taking a big-picture view. “What has allowed me to move forward is the fact that I know I am servicing the greater good,” she says. “My God-given purpose on Earth is fighting for system-level change for our young scholars. That inspires me.”

She also likes to give credit to CEHD. “As a first-generation college student—the first in my family to have a doctoral degree—I am extremely grateful to the faculty and staff of CEHD,” she says. “I am grateful for the training and the education that I received, and I am grateful for the opportunities that have been extended to me as a result of my education. And a special thank you to [Professor] Nicola Alexander. She’s a great mentor to me. It has been my great honor to know her, learn from her, and be able to impact social change.”

Learn more: [courtneysbellconsulting.com](http://courtneysbellconsulting.com)



JAIRUS DAVIS

NICOLE NERI



# Fellowship and friendship

BY KEVIN MOE | PHOTOGRAPH BY JAIRUS DAVIS

“**YOU CAN LEARN AMAZING THINGS** about people if you simply listen and watch,” says Chalandra Bryant, a professor in the Department of Family Social Science. “Consequently, I am always observing people.”

Watching and listening comes in handy with her research, as Bryant studies relationships. “I’m interested in how people form and maintain close ties,” she says. “I do that with a focus on context—the context in which those relationships are embedded.”

She is especially interested in how stressors impact human behavior and emotions, with a particular focus on ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss refers to a type of loss where an emotional closure is unlikely. The term was coined by Family Social Science Professor Emeritus Pauline Boss, who studied the phenomenon for many years. It’s only fitting, then, that Bryant holds the Pauline Boss Faculty Fellowship at CEHD.

The goal of the fund is to support continued research and teaching about ambiguous loss and creating a legacy of support for this important theory. “I have always wanted the opportunity to develop different ways of assessing ambiguous loss,” Bryant says. “This fellowship provides me with an opportunity to meet with and talk with Dr. Boss on a regular basis about my work. I have been able to incorporate ambiguous loss in studies that I’m conducting.”

Bryant was a professor at the University of Georgia when she first met Boss, who came down to present her work. “We discovered that we share an interest in studying family stress,” Bryant says. “We kept in touch and one day I received a call from her asking if I would like to co-author the third edition of the book, *Family Stress Management: A Contextual Approach*. Of course, I said ‘Yes!’”

Since 2020, Bryant has been at CEHD, closer to Boss both professionally and personally. “Dr. Boss is more than a colleague. She is more than a mentor,” she says. “She has met my husband, my sister, and even my parents. She regularly asks me how they are doing, and they regularly ask me how she’s doing. That is a heartfelt reminder that there is a human aspect to our professional relationship, which is also a deep friendship.”

Bryant says fellowships such as hers are incredibly important, for both the receiver and the donors. “I have had the honor of meeting a few donors,” she says. “They graciously shared their reasons for giving back,” she says. “Their experiences are so moving, so poignant.” It’s as Bryant says: You can learn amazing things about people if you simply listen and watch.

“I’m interested in how people form and maintain close ties.”



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