



School Social Work
Association of America

28th Annual National School Social Work Conference



Donna Aguiniga, PhD, MSW (she/her) is the Assistant Dean and a Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Her research focuses on child welfare, including adoption, kinship care, and the impact of poverty on families. With a background in child protective services and community mental health, she also led UAA's Dialogues for Public Life program (2014-2022) and served as Interim Director of the UAA Center for Community Engagement & Learning, fostering community partnerships and dialogue facilitation.



Priscilla Ahearn, BSW (she/her) earned her Bachelor's in Social Work from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and is on track for her MSW. She has worked with domestic violence survivors, foster youth, LGBTQ+ community, children with IEPs, individuals with disabilities, and college students. Her research experience extends from the effectiveness of trauma informed training to understanding substance use recovery in adolescents. She believes diverse experiences are crucial for school social workers.



Megan Allen, MSW, LCSW (she/her) has worked in the field of social work since 2005. Megan is a graduate of Woodstock High School, so she is thrilled to now be working in the community where she grew up. Megan earned both her Master's Degree and Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from The University of Georgia. Go Dawgs! Megan is certified by the Georgia Department of Education in School Social Work and by the GA Composite Board as a Licensed Clinical Level Social Worker.



Dr. Michelle Alvarez, EdD, MSW (she/her) is the President-Elect of SSWAA and a member of the team that launched the first national school social work model and national certification for school social workers. She has published articles and books in the field in an effort to advance the field of school social work and continues to research and write. She was a school social worker in Pinellas County Florida and project director for a grant that employed school social workers in Evansville, Indiana.



Dr. Marina Badillo-Diaz, DSW (she/her) is an experienced school administrator and counseling director with a demonstrated history of working in community mental health and education as a social worker. Currently, Dr. Badillo-Diaz is a consultant focusing on the training of educators and social workers with MABD Consulting. She is also an adjunct professor and board member of the National School Social Work Association of America. She is also the author of the blog, "The AI Social Worker".



Kenneth L. Bourne Jr., MSW, LSW (he/him) is an award-winning social worker, educator, and advocate for equity for Black boys and men. Named NASW-PA's 2024 Social Worker of the Year, he's the author of *Anger Management for Black Male Teens* and founder of *Bourne Anew*, offering trauma-informed, culturally relevant programs. A first-gen college graduate, Bourne is a sought-after speaker on antiracist, healing-centered practices and serves on the faculty at Widener University and the University of Tennessee.



Leslie Brasfield, RN (she/her) is the Manchester City Schools Coordinated School Health (CSH) Director. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga and has worked in hospital settings in critical care areas for 16 years and as a school nurse for 11 years. Tennessee implemented CSH statewide in 2007 and she has served 2 South Central region districts as CSH Director. A member of the Rural Health Association of Tennessee since 2007, she currently serves on the board.



Lori Carmack, LMSW, LSSW (she/her), serves as the Coordinator of School Social Work for Hamilton County Schools, TN. Lori has almost two decades of experience in School Social Work, practicing in six states in both urban and rural settings. Prior to working in the schools, Lori practiced as a mental health therapist providing individual, family, and group therapy at a residential facility for adjudicated youth. She received her Master of Social Work from the University of South Florida.



Dr. Stephanie Carnes, PhD, LCSW, LL.M (she/her), is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Sacred Heart University, bilingual clinician, and advocate. With 15 years of experience, she has worked with Central American immigrant youth in shelter programs and as a school social worker in New York. Her research focuses on school social worker burnout and collective self-care. Stephanie holds a PhD in social welfare, an MSW, and an LL.M in International Human Rights Law.





Betsy Caroff, MSW (she/her) has dedicated over 26 years to the field of social work at Allegheny County Children Youth and Families. She transitioned through various roles, from caseworker to director. Currently serving as the interim director, Betsy Caroff has played a pivotal role in addressing workforce challenges and driving initiatives aimed at fostering a positive, efficient, and engaged workplace. Betsy Caroff holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work from St. Louis University and a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh.



Dr. Tasha Childs, PhD, MSW, LMSW (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Missouri and a licensed social worker trained as a school social worker. Her research focuses on eliminating racial inequities in schools, addressing teacher bias, and improving access to mental health services. Over the past seven years, she has collaborated with schools in multiple states to enhance mental health access and school improvement models. Since joining in 2023, she developed a Graduate Certificate in School Social Work and serves as an Associate Editor for the Journal of Child and Family Studies, with 17 peer-reviewed publications and 40 national presentations.



Dr. Jessica Chock-Goldman, DSW, LCSW (she/her), is the Director of Clinical Services/Social Worker at Bard High School Early College of Manhattan. She received her DSW at NYU School of Social Work, focusing on restructuring how mental health and suicidal ideation are addressed within the DOE. She is an adjunct professor at NYU School of Social Work, Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, and has taught numerous CE Workshops on Culturally Responsive Suicide Prevention and Intervention in School.



Dr. M. Annette Clayton, PhD, MSSW, ACSW (she/her) is an Associate Professor with 10 years+ experience in higher education. As an avowed practitioner-scholar, with more than 30 years of prior practice experience, her research interests are primarily school social work practice efficacy and the schooling experiences of adolescents. She has presented at numerous state and national conferences and published manuscripts in Children & Schools, Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, and the Journal of African American Studies.



Abby Cobb, LISW-CP (she/her) is a Licensed Independent Social Worker – Clinical Practice (LISW-CP) and is the Lead Social Worker for Richland School District Two. She joined Richland Two in 2007 as a school social worker and became the lead in the 2012. Abby also serves as the district's McKinney Vento Liaison, Foster Care Liaison, Attendance Lead, and Coordinator of the Healthy Choices, Positive Decisions program. Prior to joining Richland Two, she worked with children in foster care through a therapeutic foster.





Kira Collins, MSW, LCSW, RPT-S (she/her) has a passion for working with children, youth, and families. She holds a Bachelor's in Psychology with a minor in Family Studies from the University of Missouri – Kansas City and a Master's in Social Work from the University of Kansas. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor. Kira has provided individual, group, and family counseling to preschool, elementary, and middle schools in various school districts and non-profit agencies.



Kate Coulouras, MEd (she/her) is the Manager of Strategic Implementation and Training for Sown To Grow, working with district and school administrators of student support services to implement high fidelity tiered whole child supports. Ms. Coulouras has 12+ years of experience as an educator, working as a teacher (bilingual, Spanish, English), administrator, and most recently as a high school principal in Sacramento, CA. She received her Masters in Educational Leadership from the University of Notre Dame.



Dr. Monica Coverson, EdD, MSW, LSSW (she/her) brings over 20 years of experience providing individual and group counseling work. In Metro, she manages a staff of 50 social workers who serve over 83,000 students. Dr. Coverson was instrumental in building the district's robust staff of Clinical Trauma Professionals and LGBT+ Equity & Inclusion Specialists, and increasing the number of social workers across the district by 30%. Dr. Coverson holds her MSW from Western Kentucky University and Ed.D from Lipscomb University.



Dr. Matthew J. Cuellar, PhD, MSW (he/him) is a professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. He holds a PhD in Social Work from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, with a Minor in Statistics, and an MSW from The University of Alabama. With extensive experience in child-serving systems, Dr. Cuellar's research focuses on school social work leadership and safety. His interdisciplinary work has appeared in prominent journals, including Social Work Research and the Journal of School Violence.



Sharlei Deltang, BSW (she/her) is a graduate of the University of Illinois School of Social Work, pursuing her MSW in Schools. She is guided by a deep-seated belief that every individual, regardless of their background, deserves equitable access to quality support. Her passion is in de-stigmatizing mental health, focusing on marginalized communities. Sharlei has worked with foster youth, military-connected populations, AAPI, and school communities, and hopes to continue work in restorative justice!





Dr. Robin DeLuca-Acconi, PhD, LCSW (she/her), is a Clinical Associate Professor and Director of School Social Work programming at Stony Brook University. She consults with Long Island schools on trauma-sensitive practices, school avoidance, and empathetic distress. A former school social worker for 20 years, she created Stony Brook's social work program in 2024. Her research focuses on educational equity and student outcomes. She is an author and co-founder of the nonprofit What Better Looks Like, supporting education and community development in Rwanda.



Dr. Xiao Ding, PhD, MSSA, LMSW (she/her), is a postdoctoral scholar in trauma and violence prevention at the Begun Center for Violence Prevention at Case Western Reserve University. She specializes in school social work, mental health services for children and families, and brief interventions for high-needs adolescents. Her research focuses on adapting evidence-based interventions for trauma-informed care. Xiao's work is published in *School Mental Health*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, and *Research on Social Work Practice*.



Dr. April Duncan, DSW, LCSW, RPT-S (she/her) obtained her Bachelor's in Arts & Science from the University of Missouri-Columbia (2006), Masters of Social Work from Saint Louis University (2012) and Doctorate of Social Work from the University of Southern California (2021). She is the founder of BMH Connect, an organization focused on Black youth empowerment through the use of play therapy. Dr. April is a racial trauma expert and leader in her field in advocating for the mental health needs of Black children.



April Ferguson, LCSW-C, is the Children and Adolescents Senior Practice Associate at the National Association of Social Workers, providing expertise on issues impacting children and families. After transitioning from engineering, she began her social work career in child welfare, supporting foster youth. April also provided trauma-informed therapy and case management as part of the National Health Service Corps. She has testified before legislatures and helped plan a congressional briefing on youth behavioral wellness.



Dr. Krystal Folk-Nagua, DSW (she/her), is a Black feminist and abolitionist social worker passionate about dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and advocating for and advancing the lives of Black and Brown youth and women. She is an Adjunct Professor at NYU Silver School of Social Work and the University of Kentucky College of Social Work. Dr. Folk-Nagua sits on the board of the School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA) and the New York State School Social Work Association (NYSSWA).





Sonja Ford, LCSW (she/her) is a dedicated advocate for inclusivity in education with a strong background collaborating with the Colorado Department of Education, where she helped secure federal funding for students with disabilities. As a member of the National Association of Black Social Workers, she promotes social justice and equity in social work. Currently, Sonja serves as a school social worker and Equity Liaison in the Cherry Creek School District, facilitating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) trainings and early childhood education workshops.



Janna Fouly, BSW (she/her) earned her Bachelor's degree in Social Work from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and is currently pursuing her MSW. Her work experience includes roles as a childcare provider, facilitator for racial healing dialogues, and peer mentor. Janna is actively involved in volunteer work, including mentoring, guiding and supporting students, and reproductive justice advocacy. She values inclusion and the power of collaboration with others to create meaningful change.



Verline Gaddis, LCSW (she/her), has 20 years of experience in school social work, specializing in trauma-informed care and culturally responsive practices. Passionate about fostering resilience and social-emotional learning, she emphasizes family engagement and inclusive environments where all students feel valued. Verline holds an MSW from Loyola University Chicago and a Master's in Educational Leadership and is pursuing an Ed.D. at the University of St. Francis, focused on empowering student success.



Jasmine Gaines, MEd, LMSW (she/her), with 13 years in Grand Prairie ISD, Jasmine Gaines has held roles as a Teacher, Behavior Intervention Specialist, Counselor, and Student Mental Health & Grant Programs Manager. She is an advocate for people of color, serving in many leadership roles that focus on equity for all. She holds a Master of Education and Master of Social Work from the University of Texas at Arlington.



Elsa Garcia-Sanda, MSW, LCSW (she/her) has over 28 years of experience working in the field of social work, with the last 25 years specializing in schools. Ms. Garcia-Sanda has served in several roles through her years in education including: Psychiatric Social Worker, Pupil Services Lead, and College Empowerment school social worker. Most recently she has served as Coordinator III, Mental Health & School Counseling for the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Mental Health & School Counseling Unit.





Tamala Gore, BSW (she/her) will graduate with her Master of Social Work (MSW) from Concord University in Athens, West Virginia in May 2025. She received the CU in Schools Scholarship Award and is currently completing her advanced practicum placement in Mercer County Schools. Gore completed her BSW with a criminology minor at Concord University in May 2023. While working towards her MSW, Gore continues to work as a cosmetologist at Klassy Kuts, a salon she owns and operates.



Laura Grier, BA (she/her) serves as the Homeless Liaison for Hamilton County Schools where she brings 11 years of case management experience to serve and advocate for students and families experiencing homelessness. She has increased the Families in Transition (FIT) Program funding by over one million dollars, allowing for expanded programming to over 90 schools in Hamilton County, TN. Laura's work has gained statewide recognition, allowing her to implement new initiatives statewide in other districts.



Kim Griffin Esperon, MSW, LCSW (she/her) has over 25 years experience serving as a school social worker, with the last 13 years spent developing and managing district and school mental health programs. She is currently the Project Director III for the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Mental Health & School Counseling Unit where she oversees direct service programs as well as staff providing consultation and training around school counseling and mental health to support LA County's 80 school districts.



Dr. Irene Hegarty, DSW, MSW (she/her) earned her DSW from Tulane University in 2021, where she investigated the impact of COVID-19 on family violence crisis services. She completed her MSW in 2018, at Our Lady of the Lake University, and received a BA from West Chester University of Pennsylvania in Psychology. Irene's writing spans intervention effectiveness of mental health supports for survivors of interpersonal violence and the use of technology in identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking.



LeAnne Hale, MSW, Ed.S (sh/her) is a School Social Worker and former Elementary School Counselor in her 26th year of service to public education. Helping to empower students, their parents, and their teachers to normalize and manage anxiety in healthy ways in order to achieve their goals and live full lives is a passion of hers. LeAnne is also the mother of two children, a daughter who is a junior at the University of Louisville, and a son, a high school senior.





Theresa Harmon, MSW, LICSW (she/her) is the Founder and Director of To The Moon and Back 501 (c)3. She works full time as a high risk case manager for Mass General Brigham as well as in private practice working with adults with chronic illness, trauma, and substance use disorder. She is completing her last semesters to become a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner focusing on addiction medicine. However, her biggest accomplishment is raising two amazing children born opioid dependent who are 11 and 6 and thriving.



Heidi McCroskey Heimerl, LMSW (she/her) is a passionate community advocate, licensed social worker, and lifelong learner, Heidi Heimerl has spent over 15 years advancing public, behavioral, and community health in Alaska. Her work is driven by a deep commitment to improving access to mental health services and reducing barriers for students and families, particularly through school-based mental health service initiatives.



Ms. Faiza Jackson, MSW, LCSW (she/her) began her career as a school social worker in Chicago, IL providing direct intervention and crisis management as well as professional development to staff and leading the implementation of school wide social emotional learning. Currently, Ms. Jackson serves as the Director of School Social Work for ACPs. As Director, she provides training, support, and supervision for the district team. Ms. Jackson earned her master's from the University of Chicago Crown School of Social Work.



Mackenzie Kelly, MPA (she/her), is the Executive Director of the Chattanooga Regional Homeless Coalition, where she oversees the strategic direction, operations, and funding to address homelessness in Southeast TN. Since joining the CRHC in 2021, Mackenzie's leadership and dedication have driven significant progress in the organization, positioning it as a national model in coordinated homeless response and community engagement. She has gained national recognition for her work to end homelessness.



Dr. Ashley Johnson, EdD, LSSW (she/her) has over 15 years of mental health experience. Dr. Ashley Johnson currently works with the Memphis-Shelby County Schools as a Licensed School Social Worker, as well as is the CEO/Director of Wheat & Johnson, LLC Education Consulting Agency. She serves as an adjunct professor for Western Kentucky University within the Social Work Department. Dr. Johnson enjoys working on her research interests centered on social policy and justice along with a great cup of coffee!





Dr. Nat Kendall-Taylor, PhD (he/him) is the CEO of the FrameWorks Institute, where he leads a team applying social science research to reframe complex socio-political issues for social change. An expert in psychological anthropology and communications science, Nat has published in journals such as *Science Communication* and *Human Organization* and has presented globally, from Harvard University to Amnesty International. He is also a senior fellow at Harvard's Center on the Developing Child and a visiting professor at Yale School of Medicine.



Sheri Koller, LCSW, LCSW-C, NCCSW, PPSC (she/her) is the 3rd individual to receive the NCCSW Certification. With over 20 years of experience as an SSW, Sheri is an expert in the field of student mental health and suicide prevention. As the owner of Brave Journeys LLC, she supports schools nationwide through her consulting business and develops programs to address the complex mental health issues facing our schools, including a fundamentally different approach to suicide prevention and intervention.



Emily Landseidel, MSW, LCSW, MBA (she/her) completed her Master of Social Work (MSW) at Simmons University in 2020, her Master of Business Administration (MBA) at Antioch University in 2011, and her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, in 2007. Emily has been a Licensed Social Worker in West Virginia since 2020, and currently holds an LCSW. Emily has a diverse employment background, including as a clinician, case manager, farm-to-school educator, and AmeriCorps Program Manager.



Abigail Levites, DSW, LCSW (she/her) , is a School Social Worker for the NYC Department of Education. She has experience working within school system for youth in juvenile detention and placement and transfer schools, sparking her passion for helping previously disengaged youth obtain their education. In 2017, she became a founding School Social Worker for Judith S. Kaye High School, a transfer school in District 79 aimed at serving youth involved in the criminal legal system. She received her DSW from NYU.



Dr. Rob Lucio, PhD, LCSW (he/him) has over 30 years of experience and research supporting youth facing heightened vulnerability to impacts in behavioral, academic, and mental health outcomes. He consults with local school districts to enhance social workers' use of evidence-informed interventions, advocacy, and school behavioral health. Additionally, he is experienced in developing youth risk and protective factors models and provides training on advocacy, data-based decision-making, and culturally relevant intervention.





Dania Martinez, MSW (she/her/ella), a proud native of Paterson, NJ, is committed to empowering women and uplifting her community. As a mother of two, she values education as a catalyst for change. She earned her bachelor's degree in Spanish with minors in Women & Gender Studies and Latin American Studies from William Paterson University. She completed her Master's in Social Work at Monmouth University. Currently, pursuing a Doctoral Degree in Social Work with a focus on Human Rights Leadership.



Dr. Gabriella McBride, DSW, LCSW (she/her), earned her MSW degree from CSSW in 2006 and DSW from NYU in 2023. She joined Mott Haven Academy Charter School in 2009, serving as a Founding Social Worker and the Director of Social Services until 2021. Gabriella has taught as an adjunct faculty member at NYU Silver since 2016. Gabriella is launching the School Social Work Training Academy at NYU Silver School of Social Work, a program dedicated to training school social workers serving youth and families in NYC.



Dr. Blanca Sanchez McGee, DSW, LCSW-S (she/her), is the Executive Director of Social and Emotional Learning for Grand Prairie ISD and a passionate advocate for integrating social work into education. She earned her Doctor of Social Work from Tulane University, is the 2022 NASW Fort Worth Area Social Worker of the Year and has led groundbreaking efforts in SEL research and implementation. Recognized nationally and locally for her contributions, Dr. McGee is also a dedicated family woman and community leader.



Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW (he/him) is the owner of Inspired Consulting Group, LLC. Chris has spent 30 years as a provider and a leader in behavioral health services for queer youth and families across a variety of settings. Chris is a nationally known speaker and expert in LGBTQ+ youth care and is the developer of the "Inspired Allies" certificate program for those seeking to advance their skills in better supporting the LGBTQIA+ community. He is cohost of the Inspired Insights podcast and lives in Maine.



Jasmin Miller, MSW, LGSW (she/her), a recent alumna of Howard University School of Social Work, specialized in school social work, conducting research on attendance patterns and punitive consequences for chronically absent students. She holds licensure as a Graduate Social Worker in the District of Columbia. Currently, Jasmin is engaged in professional endeavors at the TrueYou Center, delivering multi-tiered mental health services to Sousa Middle School students.





Dr. Brandon D. Mitchell, Ph.D., MSW (he/him), is an Assistant Professor of Social Work in the Ethelyn R. Strong School of Social Work at Norfolk State University. His research is positioned along two pathways to examine and understand: (a) the impact of policies and media discourse on education, youth development and school-based support mechanisms, and (b) research to improve the role and practice of school social workers toward healing-centered frameworks and justice-oriented action.



Natalie Mobley, MSW student (she/her) is currently a middle school counselor at Central Middle School in the Anchorage School District. She is a member of the SSWEND scholarship program that prepares students for school-based mental health. Natalie anticipated graduation date is May 2025, and she plans on working toward her LCSW.



Dr. Cindy Murphy, PhD (she/her) has been in the counseling profession, in some capacity, for 29 years. The majority of her career was spent in a school counseling role. Currently, she has a small private practice and is a full time online faculty member at Grand Canyon University where she teaches and supervises school counseling interns. She lives in Athens, GA and is the mother to a son who is a freshman at the University of Colorado.



Dr. Jennifer Murphy, PhD, MS, MSW (she/her), is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington. Dr. Murphy's research focuses on adolescent and young adult mental health, examining mental health service utilization. Her work has specifically centered around school-based mental health service use and the longitudinal impacts of service use on continued services and mental health symptoms.



Andrea Murray, MSW, LICSW (she/her) is Director of the NASW Office of Ethics and Professional Review, overseeing ethics programming and professional review. She holds an MSW from The Ohio State University and a Bachelor's from the University of Toronto. A certified project manager and mediator, Andrea began her career in D.C.'s child welfare system and later worked with Casey Family Programs. She develops NASW ethics resources, including the Ethics 8 series and NASW's 2022 online ethics course.





Dr. Stephanie Ochocki, DSW, MSW, LICSW (she/her) leads school mental health & SEL efforts for the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan School District 196. She is an experienced school mental health professional and recognized leader in the field of SSW. Stephanie's areas of interests include SEL, PBIS, suicide prevention, threat assessment, and crisis response. Stephanie has held a variety of leadership roles advocating for the needs of children, families and schools, including President of MSSWA and the Midwest rep for SSWAA.



Rebecca K. Oliver, LMSW (she/her) is the Executive Director of the School Social Work Association of America, serving in the role since 2015 after more than 20 years as a school social worker and administrator. She has presented nationally on school social work and taught as adjunct faculty at the University of Texas at Austin. Rebecca holds an MSW from UT Austin, a BA in Psychology from Baylor, and a certificate in Nonprofit Management from Northern Kentucky University. She is passionate about mental health awareness and collaboration.



Lou Paschall, LAPSW, NCSSW (she/her) has practiced School Social Work for 21 years. In 2022, she became the first Tennessean to earn the Nationally Certified School Social Worker (NCSSW) designation. She attended the Manchester City Schools as a child and is honored to provide School Social Work services there. Her research interests are the ethical use of technology, School Social Work supervision, Social Work history, self-care, play therapy, bibliotherapy, and animal-assisted interventions.



Dr. Rachel Phelps, DSW, LMSW (she, her), a dynamic force in education championing inclusivity and equity in school-based mental health programming. With over a decade in school social work and district leadership, Dr. Phelps innovates program and professional development, increasing access to mental health services in urban schools.



Dr. Kate Phillippo, PhD (she/ella) is a Professor in Loyola University Chicago's Schools of Social Work and Education, and the Associate Dean of Loyola's Graduate School. A former school social worker in Illinois and California, her work as a scholar centers youth experience of schools and schooling, and policy and practice attunement to youth needs. Her focal policy areas are equity-oriented urban education policy and student wellness policy.





Janae Ponder, LCSW (she/her), has over 13 years of experience in mental health & social work. Since 2019, she has served as a School Social Worker & DBT trainer for Volusia County Schools, addressing students' socio-emotional needs & empowering student services with effective DBT techniques. As the owner of Life-Spire Counseling Services in Deltona, FL, she specializes in helping all ages overcome mood disorders, trauma, stress, & anxiety.



Dr. Zalia Powell, PhD (she/her) is an academic at the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) in Australia. Zalia's research interests focus on lived experiences of perinatal anxiety, well-being of diverse young people and their families. Zalia has presented the findings of her research both nationally and internationally. Prior to her appointment with UniSC, Zalia was a clinical social worker with experience in child and family mental health, health, and women's and family's services.



Dr. Tara Quinn-Schuldt, PhD, MS, MSW, LMSW (she/her) has worked in the field of social work since 2005 in a variety of settings including the public school system, medical social work, higher education, and private clinical practice. Tara currently serves as a Student Support Specialist for the Cherokee County School District managing and supporting district initiatives and interventions related to the social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health for both students and staff. Tara is a licensed Master Level Social Worker.



LaVernda Ragins, LMSW (she/her), is the Lead Attendance Interventionist at Richland School District Two. She holds a Master's in Social Work from the University of South Carolina-Columbia and has over 20 years of experience in educational social services. Her career includes roles as a School Social Worker, Regional Program Director, and Lead School Social Worker. LaVernda's expertise in attendance intervention reflects her dedication to ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed in their educational journey.



Dr. Jim Raines, PhD, LCSW (he/him) calls himself an accidental academic with the heart of a practitioner. He is the author of over fifty publications and five books: Evidence-Based Practice in School Mental Health (2008); School Social Work (2010); and Ethical Decision Making in School Mental Health (2011, 2021) and Evidence-Based Practice in School Mental Health (2019). He has held numerous leadership positions including President of the Midwest Council for School Social Work (2009-2010) and SSWAA (2017-2018).





Diana Rarich, LCSW (she/her) is a school social worker with 20 years of experience, having previously supported youth and families in residential, foster care, and child protection services. She has served as an adjunct professor at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work and volunteers with the American Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Services. A Certified Daring Way™ facilitator, Diana integrates yoga and bodywork into her practice. She is a former conference coordinator for the Colorado School Social Work Association and currently serves as the Social Emotional Learning Coordinator in Cherry Creek Schools (CO).



Ken Rautiola, LCSW, NCSSW, EdS, MSW (he/him) is a Nationally Certified School Social Worker (NCSSW). He earned his MSW degree from the University of Maine and is currently an EdD candidate at Liberty University. In 2024, Ken served as the Mental Health Distinguished Educator at the Maine DOE. Ken serves on the SSWAA Standards & Practice committee, NASW School Social Work Specialty Practice Committee, and is a lead rater for the NCSSW process. Ken serves on the NASW-ME Board and is co-chair of their school social work committee.



Dr. Terriyn Rivers-Cannon, EdD, MSW (she/her), from Savannah, GA, excels as an author, speaker, and school social worker with a focus on human trafficking, mental health, and DEIBJ. Her advocacy supports at-risk students nationally. As SSWAA's 2023 President, she's the first Georgian and African American in the role. Holding a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and an MSW, her professional life is rich with honors, including features on major networks and numerous awards. She also founded "Soar with K.A.T.I.E."



Randall Robinson, EdS (he/him) earned his Bachelor of Science in Secondary and Special Education from Middle Tennessee State University and his Master in Curriculum and Instruction and Education Specialist in Administration and Supervision from Tennessee Technological University. After 19 years of teaching, he became Instructional Supervisor and then Assistant Principal. As Manchester City Schools' Director of Student Management and Attendance, he works with local organizations to serve runaway, immigrant, youth and families.



Dr. Sara Rodrigues, DSW (she/her) is the founder and Executive Director of Balanced Learning Center, a neurodiversity affirming non-profit organization, an adjunct professor at several universities, and a national speaker and consultant. She earned her DSW from Simmons University in 2023 and has over 20 years of experience working with children and families in across multiple settings.





Ali Rollason, BA (she/her) is a counsellor and certified national mediator in Australia. She is currently completing her MSW at the University of Tennessee. She is working as a school social worker and has a passion for working with children and young people who are struggling with stress, social and family issues, trauma and the many challenges faced by young people. She works with a compassionate and non-judgmental approach, Ali is dedicated to creating a safe and supportive environment for young people.



Dr. Nina Ruffin, DSW, LCSW-R (she/her) is a NYS Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She holds a Doctorate in Social Work and a Trauma Counseling Certificate from the State University of New York at Buffalo, and has been a School Social Worker, Clinical Supervisor and Lead Social Worker at a large, urban K-12 district for almost 10 years. Dr. Nina also has 10 + years of experience providing individual, couples, family and group counseling to adolescents and adults in private practice and community based settings.



Lisa Sanchez, BSW (she/her) earned her Bachelor's in Social Work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and is currently pursuing her MSW degree. She is actively involved on campus through LSWO and SWSA due to her commitment to serving the communities she is a part of. Her experience is in working with diverse populations including latinx college students, children, and individuals experiencing substance use issues.



Dr. Jessica Schoonmaker, DSW, LCSW (she/her) is passionate about trauma-informed practices, particularly with children and adolescents, as she believes that all children and students have the right to feel connected and supported, regardless of life circumstances. She has over 7 years' experience working as a school social worker and has previously worked in the child welfare system and emergency mental field health.



Alexis Scurry, MSW, BSW (she/her) is a Social Work Professor and Director of Social Work Field Education at Columbia College in South Carolina. She joined as an adjunct in Spring 2021, teaching in the Masters in Education in Trauma-Informed Practices program. Alexis earned her Bachelor's in Family and Consumer Sciences from Winthrop University and her Master of Social Work from the University of South Carolina-Columbia. With ten years of experience in training, curriculum development, and child welfare, her motto, "each one, teach one," reflects her commitment to sharing knowledge with her students and community.





Claire Sharp, BA, AA, MSW student (she/her) is passionate about supporting young individuals in their goals, the therapeutic benefits of outdoor experiences, social justice and physical sciences, most recently fjords! She's looking for new ways to blend those passions and find a personal balance while doing good in the world. Claire is a wilderness guide in the summers and is hoping to start a career in school social work after graduating with her MSW in May 2025.



Dr. Peter Sherman, MD, MPH (he/him) has been caring for children and adolescents of the Bronx for 30+ years. He is Chair, BronxCare Department of Pediatrics and Founder/Director of the Bronx Human Trafficking Task Force. Dr. Sherman is treasurer of AAP Section II, Chapter 3 and is President-Elect. He has sat on and continues to part of many boards/committees focusing on advocacy for children's health and prevention of violence. He is Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine.



Dr. David J. Schonfeld, MD, FAAP (he/him), directs the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement at Children's Hospital Los Angeles and is a Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine. With over 30 years of experience, he consults and trains schools on supporting students during crises and has responded to events like the COVID-19 pandemic and numerous school tragedies. An author of over 150 scholarly works, he frequently speaks on crisis topics. Dr. Schonfeld is involved with the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Children and Disasters and has held leadership roles in national commissions on children and disasters.



Lindsay Singewald, BS (she/her) completed her Bachelors of Science degree in psychology/sociology from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and she is currently completing her MSW and trauma certification at the University of Tennessee. She has experience as a school social worker in Knox County Schools, and she is currently working in the area of child-centered play therapy. Lindsay is committed to working in the area of mental health with children and young people.



Kennesha Smith, LMSW (she/her) earned a Master of Social Work from Georgia State University. Throughout her career, she has served different populations in a variety of roles, but her passion resounds with school social work practice. She served as a School Social Worker for five years in Metropolitan Atlanta prior to transitioning to Louisiana State University in pursuit of a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work. Her research interests include students experiencing homelessness and school social work practice.





Dr. Shericka Smith, DSW (she/her) is from Lexington, KY and is a mental health coordinator at her local school district. Most recently, she obtained her Doctorate in Social Work at the University of Kentucky where she researched the impact of childhood trauma and the lack of mental health resources for Black families. She is passionate about helping minorities navigate a path to better and more equitable mental health resources.



Emilie Souhrada, MSW, LISW (she/her), is a licensed independent social worker who received her MSW in 2005 with a school social work specialization from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is a school social worker for Central Rivers Area Education Agency. Emilie is a Past President of the Iowa School Social Workers' Association (ISSWA) and Past Vice President of the Midwest School Social Work Council. She is also the Advocacy Legislative Committee Chair/Co-chair for ISSWAA and SSWAA.



Dr. Dee Stalnecker, DSW, LSW, BCBA (she/her) is a school social worker at Derry Township School District in Hershey, PA. She completed a DSW through Millersville University. Her published work and professional development presentations are focused on areas of home visiting, perceptions of school colleagues about SSW, and educational funding. She is also an MSW graduate of Temple University, PA licensed SW, and a BCBA. She is a board member of the Pennsylvania Association of SSW personnel.



Rachel Studebaker, MSW student (she/her) is a MSW student at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Rachel is from Denver, now settled with her family in Anchorage and learning to love the north. Currently focused on the intersection between youth and families, wellbeing, and environment. As a SSWEND scholar she is making connections to how these things play out in the school environment. Her social work dream would be to see a social worker and mental health clinician at every school in Alaska.



Alexis Staunton, BA (she/her) received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from West Virginia University in 2019. Currently, Alexis is pursuing her Master of Social Work at Concord University in WV, with an emphasis on school social work. She works as a Child Protective Service Worker (CPS) and is registered with the WV Board of Social Work. Alexis finds fulfillment in working with CPS to help children and families involved in the system and create positive change in their lives.





Diane Strom, LCSW-R, MSW (she/her) has been a social worker in the BronxCare Health System for more than 30 years. She is presently the Assistant Director of the Department of Pediatrics for Grants and Community Engagement and the Coordinator of the Bronx Human Trafficking Task Force. Ms. Strom is also an adjunct lecturer at Lehman College School of Social Work where she teaches Social Work Practice, Health Counseling and Substance Use in the Urban Environment.



Dr. Elaine Chavez Swain, DSW, LMSW, BA (she/her) is a Filipina-American, born and raised in New York City. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 1995 and a Masters Degree in Social Work in 1999 from the University of South Carolina. After 26 years of professional experience in the social work field, Elaine achieved a Doctorate in Social Work from Capella University in 2023. As a licensed social worker, she worked in many areas of social work including foster care, hospitals, and psychiatric care.



Dr. Kevin Tan, PhD, MSW (he/him) is a leader in school social work, focusing on social emotional learning (SEL) for Pre-K to 12th-grade students. With six years of practice experience in Singapore and the U.S., he has secured over \$2.5 million in grants, collaborating with educators and organizations to support SEL and youth risk prevention. He played a key role in revising the National School Social Work Practice Model with the School Social Work Association of America. Currently, he is the Editor-in-Chief for Children & Schools and serves as Associate Dean for Engagement, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Laura Tompkins, MA, BA (she/her) is working towards completing her Master of Social Work at Concord University, WV, with a special focus on school social work. Laura completed her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Psychology from Marietta College in Ohio in 2005 and 2006, respectively. Laura's professional experience includes clinical work, managing an emergency children's center, case management for children, and working as a Mental Health Technician in an adult in-patient psychiatric unit.



Citali Tovar, BSW (she/her) recently graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with a Bachelor's in Social Work and is actively pursuing her MSW there. She has worked with students with disabilities, and volunteers at a food pantry in her community to address food insecurity. She is passionate about ensuring all students have access to the resources they need to thrive in school.





Dr. Leticia Villarreal Sosa, LCSW, PEL SSW (she/her) is Associate Dean and Professor in the School of Social Work at UTRGV. Her current research focuses on utilizing Photovoice as a tool for advocacy, and an immigrant student equity project. Her forthcoming book focuses on the testimonios of older adult Latina trailblazers in Chicago. She was awarded a grant from New York Life Foundation to develop a culturally informed response to grief and loss certificate for school based professional.



Patrick Walker, EdS (he/him) is a Behavior Intervention Strategist for the Cherokee County School District. Patrick has spent much of his tenure working with the most difficult behaviors in a Psycho Ed Program, trained under the Marcus Autism Center, TEACCH, Wired Differently and Trust Based Relational Intervention. Patrick is also a certified Trainer in Mindset and Dialectical Behavior Therapy. Patrick earned a B.A. in Vocal Performance, MAT in Special Education, and an Ed.S. in Curriculum and Instruction.



LeeAnn Weaver, BSW, MSSW, LSW (she/her) is enrolled in Concord University's Master of Social Work Program and expects to graduate in July 2025, with a focus on school social work. In addition to pursuing her MSW, LeeAnn works as a Social Services Supervisor for a Skilled Nursing Facility in West Virginia. She completed her Bachelor of Social Work in 2004 and obtained a Master of Science in Strategic Leadership in 2012 from Mountain State University. LeeAnn has been a Licensed Social Worker since 2004.



Mary Wood, MSW student (she/her) Mary is pursuing a masters degree in Social Work, expected graduation to be May 2025. She is a member of the SSWEND scholarship program.



Maxanne Wordell, MSW, LSSW (she/her) is a licensed school social worker with over 20 years of experience supporting children and families in Massachusetts and the UK. She holds an MSW from Boston University and post-master's trauma-informed education training from Lesley University. As a mother, foster, adoptive, and birth parent, her personal experiences fuel her advocacy for children who've faced trauma. Maxanne's work emphasizes intergenerational healing, social-emotional well-being, and creating nurturing environments for all children.





Jing Zhang, MA, BA, EdD student (she/her) earned her B.A. and M.A. degrees in English and English Education before pursuing her doctorate at West Virginia University. Her major is Curriculum & Instruction, focusing on DEI in higher education. Currently, Jing works as a Racial Equity Fellow at the Allegheny County (PA) Department of Human Services (DHS). Her project is to establish a Competency-Based Selection Model for caseworkers across all the offices within DHS.

School Social Work Association of America SSWAA, #1789, is approved to offer social work continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. Organizations, not individual courses, are approved as ACE providers. State and provincial regulatory boards have the final authority to determine whether an individual course may be accepted for continuing education credit. School Social Work Association of America SSWAA maintains responsibility for this course. ACE provider approval period: 07/27/2023 – 07/27/2026. Social workers participating in this conference (Pre-Conference and Full Conference) will receive up to 21.5 continuing education credits.



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