

Speaker Profiles - FEPLN 2025 Annual Convening

Rosen Plaza, International Drive, Orlando - (Descriptions in order as they appear on the agenda)

MATTHEW FRITZIUS, FAU OELL Director of Research, Development, and Special Projects FEPLN CONVENING HOST

Mr. Matthew Fritzius serves as the Director of Research, Development, and Special Projects for OELL. His role includes establishing the OELL Leadership Micro-credential/Certificate Program and launching professional learning for school leaders in Career and Technical Education (CTE).

As the OELL Director, Matthew supports the development of current and future professional learning as well as grant proposal development. He brings a strong perspective on the current and future needs for teachers and leaders in Florida's schools and districts, with a focus on how best to provide learning success for students, teachers, and leaders in Florida and national districts.

Matthew joined the OELL team after a 17-year career in public education. He is a passionate educator who champions CTE as an avenue towards community revitalization. As a school-based administrator he was influential in strengthening CTE pathways through the establishment of high-quality community partnerships. As a district-based CTE administrator he championed the expansion of work-based learning programs and as well as industry certification offerings across Broward County Public Schools.

Matthew holds a Master of Educational Leadership from Florida Atlantic University (FAU) and is a PhD candidate in FAU's School Leaders Program. Matthew is currently an ECMC Foundation Post-Secondary CTE Research fellow and was a 2023 University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Clark Scholar. His research interests include school leaders' perspectives on CTE and their approaches to positioning and leading CTE and promotion of post-secondary pathways.

DR. DANIEL REYES-GUERRA, Professor, Florida Atlantic University & OELL Executive Director WELCOME PRESENTER: *Overview of the Office of Educational Leadership Learning* BREAKOUT SESSION PRESENTER: *Building Bridges to School and District Leadership: Cultivating a Strong and Sustainable Pipeline*

Daniel Reyes-Guerra, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology (ELRM) at Florida Atlantic University and the Executive Director of the Office of Educational Leadership Learning (FAU's School Leaders Program's professional learning arm), dedicated to providing Florida and national school districts with the professional learning they need and want. He is committed to research, learning, and support for school leaders, addressing complex socioeconomic and contextual issues that hinder the full implementation of quality preK-12 education both locally and globally. Notably, his efforts as Principal Investigator on the University Principal Preparation Initiative (UPPI) grant from The Wallace Foundation have transformed the School Leaders Program in six partnering school districts, earning him the recognition as the 2023 FAU College of Education Researcher of the Year and recently earned the distinction of 2023 Champion of Education from the Florida Association of School Administrators (FASA).

Dr. Reyes-Guerra prides himself on the development and implementation of high quality Master's/Specialist and PhD Degree programs in Educational Leadership, as well as strong, cooperative partnerships between universities, school districts, and the Florida Department of Education – always centered on meeting the learning needs of all students in Florida – especially those from historically underperforming subgroups. He currently holds and has held offices on various professional and research organizations' executive boards/committees, including the Florida Association of School Administrators (FASA), the Florida Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (FAPEL), the American Educational Researchers Association (AERA) Learning and Teaching Special Interest Group (LTEL-SIG), the Plenum of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), and the Florida Educational Leadership Exam (FELE) Steering Committee.

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RACHEL LUDWIG, Vice President, Florida Chamber Foundation

DAY 1 KEYNOTE PRESENTER

Rachel serves as the Florida Chamber Foundation's Vice President of Talent Development for the Future of Work. In this role, Rachel leads the Chamber Foundation's initiatives to improve Florida's talent pipeline from cradle to career, which is a key component in our pursuit to achieve the Florida 2030 Blueprint mission of becoming a top 10 global economy by 2030.

Before transitioning to the Florida Chamber, Rachel worked at the Florida Department of Education Division of Career and Adult Education and oversaw statewide Professional Development for Adult Education. Through this work, Rachel collaborated with educational leaders and key stakeholders to increase her knowledge of various industry and workforce needs throughout Florida. She led expansion efforts of integrated education and training (IET) programs, which accelerate the ability of adult learners to enter the workforce. Rachel has worked in K-12, post-secondary, and workforce education, serving learners across urban, suburban, and rural areas. She spent much of her career teaching adult GED and English language learners.

Rachel enjoys watching and playing sports with her husband and 8-year-old son. Her claim to fame is her first position after graduating from the University of Wisconsin, where she worked in a public relations role as a "Hotdogger" and drove the famous Oscar Mayer Wienermobile across the US.

DR. JOHN CRITELLI, FAU OELL Director, Grants Development and Administration

SESSION 3 PRESENTER: *Five Keys of Coaching for Instructional Excellence*

BREAKOUT SESSION PRESENTER: *A New Vision of AI: Moving Beyond Hesitation to Action*

Dr. John E. Critelli Jr. has a passion for leadership pipeline development and district-university partnerships, a focus he has cultivated since 2018. More recently, he has explored the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational leadership. As Director of Grants Development and Administration at Florida Atlantic University's Office of Educational Leadership Learning (OELL) and Program Director for the School Leaders EQUIP Partnership Program, he leads efforts to prepare and support aspiring school leaders in high-need schools. In addition, he provides targeted professional learning for veteran administrators focusing on instructional coaching and data-informed decision-making to enhance teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.

With a strong background in securing and managing multi-million-dollar grants and external contracts, Dr. Critelli has expanded university-district collaborations and developed sustainable leadership pipelines across multiple institutions. Through his consulting work with the University of Louisville and Spalding University, he has helped establish and refine leadership development programs. His innovative use of AI in instructional leadership supports faculty and school leaders in enhancing organizational productivity and strengthening decision-making processes.

A frequent presenter at University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and American Educational Research Association (AERA) conferences, Dr. Critelli shares insights on scalable leadership development, university-district collaboration, and AI's role in educational leadership. His work drives innovation and capacity-building in leadership preparation, ensuring the next generation of school leaders is ready to meet today's educational challenges.

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DR. GINGER FEATHERSTONE, FAU OELL Consultant

BREAKOUT SESSION PRESENTER: *Leading With Purpose: Balancing Instructional and Operational Leadership*

Dr. Ginger Featherstone is a distinguished educator and strategic leader with a wealth of experience in instructional design, school leadership, and transforming educational environments. She currently serves as Business Development Manager at Positive Behavior Supports Corporation, overseeing national and international marketing, managing over 200 school contracts, and facilitating presentations on leadership and conflict resolution. Additionally, she is an OELL Consultant at Florida Atlantic University, where she develops and delivers professional learning offerings for school leaders across Florida, aligning with state and national standards. Dr. Featherstone has also contributed to the Florida Commissioner of Education's SELECT task force, advising on revisions to the Florida Leadership Standards.

As a Principal Leadership Consultant with Upbeat Education, Dr. Featherstone offers data-driven, personalized coaching to school leaders, focusing on strategic decision-making and school improvement. Her prior role as Deputy Superintendent for the Martin County School District involved overseeing 23 schools and 19,000 students, mentoring principals, and driving curriculum development and school strategic planning. Dr. Featherstone's leadership as the inaugural principal of Jensen Beach High School earned the school national recognition and numerous accolades, including the Principal Achievement Award for Outstanding Leadership.

Known for her ability to build strong professional relationships, set high standards, and drive organizational success, Dr. Featherstone is a highly regarded speaker and consultant in educational leadership and strategic planning.

DR. JENNIFER SHEPARD, Clay County Schools and OELL Consultant

BREAKOUT SESSION PRESENTER: *Leading A School District Coaching System*

As the Director of School Improvement, Professional Learning, and Assessment for Clay County District Schools, Dr. Jennifer Shepard supports educators in working together to foster collective efficacy throughout the district in support of school improvement and student achievement for teachers and leaders. Using her experience as a general education teacher, exceptional education teacher, instructional coach, reading development facilitator, and school administrator at both the elementary and secondary levels, she leads her team in designing and facilitating coherent and differentiated professional learning for teachers and leaders through a variety of formats and job-embedded learning opportunities.

DR. CYNTHIA BAUMAN, FAU OELL Associate Director

BREAKOUT SESSION PRESENTER: *Peer Coaching - Developing Novice Teachers Through Mentoring And Coaching*

Cynthia B. Bauman, Ph.D., currently serves as Associate Director, Learning Programs for Florida Atlantic University's Office of Educational Leadership Learning (OELL) and is an instructor for FAU's IDEAL School Leaders Master's Degree Program, teaching courses in education policy and instructional leadership. Her responsibilities in OELL include program outreach and grant development. She is significantly involved in research and evaluation for OELL's \$1.8 Million National Professional Development Grant (PRAISE) in partnership with the School District of Osceola County. Dr. Bauman received her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with a Cognate in Evaluation from the University of South Florida. Her research agenda focuses on organizational change for

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sustained student achievement through collaborative evaluation and shared leadership, including building collective efficacy through coaching within educator professional networks. Dr. Bauman has worked to create learning networks that build instructional capacity for all educators and result in sustained student academic growth and well-being.

DR. KATHERINE POLICASTRO, Broward County Public Schools and OELL Consultant

BREAKOUT SESSIONS PRESENTER: *Unleashing Potential: Principals Fueling Coach Success for Maximum Impact AND Principal Leadership: Supervision Strategies for Student Success*

Dr. Policastro has had an extensive and impactful career in education within the Broward County Public School system. She earned her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education from the University of Central Florida. Dr. Policastro then pursued a Master's degree and Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Florida Atlantic University, further refining her skills and expertise in school leadership.

Dr. Policastro's career trajectory within Broward County is marked by her dedication to fostering academic success and cultivating strong educational environments. She began her leadership career as an Assistant Principal. Following her time as Assistant Principal, Dr. Policastro was appointed as the Principal of Park Springs Elementary, where she led the school through critical growth and transformation. Her leadership extended beyond Park Springs, as she also served for two years at Boulevard Heights Elementary as a school turnaround principal.

In July 2023, Dr. Policastro transitioned into the role of Teaching & Learning Director in the South Region, where she now works alongside principals and school leadership teams to elevate the academic performance of schools. In this capacity, she helps to build high-performing leaders, focusing on creating inclusive environments that address the needs of diverse student populations.

DR. KEVIN FOREHAND, Florida State University

BREAKOUT SESSION PRESENTER: *Alien Superstar: Crafting A Plan for Resilient New Teachers from Alternative Places*

Dr. Kevin Forehand is an Assistant Teaching Professor and Program Director for the nationally ranked College of Education's Educational Leadership and Administration (M.S./Ed.S.) programs at Florida State University. He was also the inaugural Board Chair for The Collegiate School-FSU @Panama City. Before this, Dr. Forehand was the principal of Crossroad Academy Charter School (CACS) from 2007 to 2022 after serving five years previously as a teacher.

As CACS principal, Dr. Forehand led phenomenal teams to earn 12 High-Performing School grades including nine A grades, seven of which were consecutive, two distinguished Title-one school designations, and the only National Blue-Ribbon School designation in Gadsden County. Under his leadership, CACS has had multiple Best School rankings on US News charts. Dr. Forehand is the Chief Education Officer for "The Knowledge Firm: Knowledge & Fidelity Consulting" a start-up educational leadership consulting firm.

Forehand earned a certificate in School Leadership & Management from the Harvard Business School and Harvard Graduate School of Education; a doctorate in Organizational Leadership; M.S. in Educational Leadership; and B.S. in Computer Information Systems. Dr. Forehand is a member of the Florida Association of School Administrators (FASA), the Association for School Curriculum Development (ASCD), The Florida Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (FAPEL), The University Council of Education Administrators (UCEA), and has served as the Education Chair of the National Education Law Association.

He coins the phrases, "Faith-Focus-Finish-Forward," and #KeepSmiling as mantras of motivation.

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JAIME SUAREZ, 2025 FDOE Teacher of the Year

DAY 2 KEYNOTE PRESENTER

Jaime Suarez is a High Impact 6th – 8th grade math teacher at the Challenger K-8 School of Science and Mathematics in Hernando County. Jaime was selected as the 2025 Florida Department of Education Teacher of the Year, standing out among nearly 185,000 Florida public school teachers across the state. Her exceptional instructional skills are evidenced by her remarkable 100% pass rate among her 2022-23 Algebra students on the end-of-course assessment!

As the Christa McAuliffe Ambassador for Education, Mrs. Suarez passionately advocates for the teaching profession, elevating, celebrating and showcasing the invaluable contributions of Florida's educators.

Jaime earned her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Troy University. Throughout her career, she has had multiple leadership roles, including grade level team lead, new teacher mentor, the Math Field Day coordinator and district's science textbook selection committee member. She strongly believes in the importance of extracurricular activities for building relationships. This belief is reflected in the varying clubs she has initiated, such as the Video Productions Club in Clay County and the Rubrik's Cube Club at Challenger K-8, in Hernando County. Additionally, Jaime brings her enthusiasm and energy to her role as the Cheerleading coach at Challenger K-8.

Jaime is a proud mom of two, a 15-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter. She and her husband, Neil, have just celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary, marking two decades of partnership and shared joy. Her dedication to fostering a love of learning is evident in her belief that every child has the potential to succeed.