

SPRING LITERACY ECOSYSTEM SUMMIT LUNCH PANEL

Bridging the gap between policy and implementation: What is needed to reach our 2035 goal?

This panel unites expert leaders from policy development, educator workforce planning, and school-level execution. They will analyze how these critical junctures in the policy-to-practice continuum can establish robust collaborations to significantly enhance literacy instruction.



Troy Closson, Education Reporter with the *New York Times*, Moderator

Based in Brooklyn, Troy Closson is a metro reporter for The New York Times focusing on students, families, and schools in the New York City region. He joined the paper in 2020 and for the last three years, has covered K-12 education and the lives of youth in and out of the classroom. A Northwestern University graduate and former editor of The Daily Northwestern, Troy was named the National Association of Black Journalists' Emerging Journalist of the Year in 2023.

Troy's favorite children's book is *Goodnight Moon*.



David Cintron, Superintendent of District 14

Superintendent David Cintron is the Superintendent for Community School District 14 in Brooklyn, serving Williamsburg and Greenpoint. A veteran educator with over 20 years of experience in New York City Public Schools, he began his career as an English teacher before serving as a long-time principal in the Bronx. Through his collaborative approach, David focuses on disrupting inequities and strengthening community-school ties.

David's favorite children's book is *Girl Dad*.



Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon, Assembly District 52

Jo Anne Simon has been a New York State Assemblymember for District 52 in Brooklyn since 2015. She chairs the Mental Health Committee. She has advocated for affordable housing, literacy reforms (including New York's first dyslexia law), better transit, and climate protections. A disability civil rights lawyer, educator, community activist, and progressive NY State Assemblymember, she has dedicated her life to fighting for equal rights. Jo Anne fought a landmark case on behalf of a dyslexic law school graduate that went up to the Supreme Court and changed the landscape for disability rights.

Jo Anne's favorite children's book is *Heidi*.



Ashleigh Thompson, University Dean for Education at CUNY

Dean Ashleigh Thompson serves The City University of New York as University Dean for Education, with a portfolio encompassing more than 15,000 education students pursuing associate to doctoral degrees. She supports CUNY's Schools and Departments of Education, creating and implementing University-wide strategy for teacher preparation both internally and with outside partners, notably NYC Public Schools and NY State Education Department. Ashleigh oversees CUNY-wide education initiatives including CUNY Reading Fellows, NYC Men Teach, CITE, and the Path Forward. A 2016 Fulbright recipient, she holds a Ph.D. in Urban Education from the CUNY Graduate Center.

Ashleigh's favorite children's book is *Islandborn*.

Speakers



Elizabeth Chu, Executive Director, Columbia’s Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL)

Liz Chu is the Executive Director of CPRL and Senior Research Scholar and Lecturer of Law at Columbia Law School. Liz oversees all aspects of the organization’s operations and strategy with a focus on growing CPRL’s efforts to build the leadership capacity of current and aspiring education sector leaders. Before joining CPRL, Liz was an Assistant Professor of Practice at Relay Graduate School of Education. Liz began her career in education as a middle and high school English teacher in the South Bronx.



Sandra Escamilla-Davies, Commissioner, NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

Sandra Escamilla-Davies was appointed Commissioner of the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) by Mayor Mamdani in January 2026. Commissioner Sandra Escamilla-Davies formerly served as Executive Vice President of Children’s Aid, overseeing a wide portfolio of community schools and center-based programs and initiatives. Additionally, Commissioner Escamilla-Davies spent 15 years with the Youth Development Institute, where she helped key city agencies embed youth development principles into policy and practice. She holds an M.S.W. from Columbia University and a B.A. in sociology from Hunter College.



John B. King, Chancellor, The State University of New York

John B. King Jr. is the 15th Chancellor of the State University of New York, the largest comprehensive system of public higher education in the United States. As Chancellor, King and the SUNY Board of Trustees have established four pillars to guide SUNY’s progress: student success; research and scholarship; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and economic development and upward mobility. As part of SUNY’s commitment to student success, Chancellor King has championed a System-wide Civics and Service Agenda, which includes the launch of the Empire State Service Corps to provide paid community service opportunities to hundreds of SUNY students each year.



Kamar H. Samuels, Chancellor, New York City Public Schools

Kamar H. Samuels is Chancellor of New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the largest school system in the nation. An educator of more than two decades and an NYCPS parent himself, Chancellor Samuels started out as an NYC Teaching Fellow in the Bronx. He later served as a principal, deputy superintendent, and superintendent, most recently leading Brooklyn’s District 13 and Manhattan’s District 3. As Chancellor, he is committed to building schools that are safe, academically rigorous, and truly integrated.