



American Youth  
Policy Forum

## Presenter Biographies

*AYPF Study Tour, Advancing Equity through Deeper Learning in Rural Schools*

**Kristin Cuillia, Ph.D.**

**Senior Director for Partnerships & Communication  
New Tech Network**



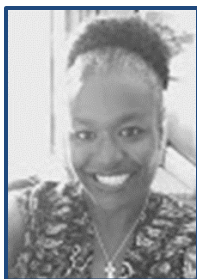
Dr. Cuillia is a first generation college graduate who has extensive experience working in underserved schools and districts, including along the Corridor of Shame in South Carolina.

As the Senior Director for Partnerships & Communication, Kristin's primary focus is to foster effective district and intermediary relationships to support New Tech implementations across the country. Prior to formally joining NTN, Kristin worked for 16 years in high schools as a teacher, principal and district administrator.

Kristin graduated Magna Cum Laude from Florida State University in 1992 and was awarded a Masters of School Administration from North Carolina State University in 2001. She earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Research and Policy Analysis in 2004 from NCSU.

**Latoya Dixon, Ph.D.**

**Director, Office of School Transformation  
South Carolina Department of Education**



Dr. Latoya Dixon is a former middle school co-principal and transformational leader. She also served as an elementary school principal in the Rock Hill School District.

As a product of Rock Hill School District 3, Latoya began her career as a middle school English Language Arts teacher after graduating from Clemson University in 1999. She received National Board Certification and continued her education receiving a MEd in Educational Leadership in 2007 from the University of South Carolina. For five of the six and a half years Latoya was principal at Mt. Gallant Elementary, the school received several Palmetto Silver and Gold awards. Latoya is known across the Carolinas not only for her expertise as a leader, but also for her inspirational spirit.

Dr. Dixon earned her Ed.S. in 2012 and PhD from the University of South Carolina in 2014. Dr. Dixon was named the 2015-2016 Rowan Salisbury Schools Principal of the Year, where she served as co-principal of Knox Middle School and helped remove the school from the state low performing list it had been on since 2008. She currently serves as a state level leader in South Carolina.

**Lydia Dobyns**  
**President and CEO**  
**New Tech Network**



Lydia Dobyns has combined careers as a technology entrepreneur and executive, with education policy and non-profit service.

She served two terms as an elected school board member, co-founded and led a local education foundation and directed replication strategies in the non-profit education sector. Her vision is a nation where we are proud of our public schools. Among the chief initiatives underway for New Tech Network are expanding and strengthening its network of 200 K-12 schools in 28 states, working with school districts and communities to start and sustain systemic change and further development of the Project-Based platform, NTN Echo.

Lydia's entrepreneurial and executive career features work in the high tech, online services, consumer products and health care industries. She graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Donald L. Gordon, Ph.D.**  
**Executive Director, Riley Institute**  
**Professor, Furman University**



Donald L. Gordon has been the Executive Director of the Riley Institute since its inception in 1999. Dr. Gordon is a Professor of Political Science at Furman where he specializes in African and Middle Eastern Politics. Under his direction the Riley Institute has grown to include the Centers for Education Policy and Leadership, Diversity Strategies, and Crucial Issues all designed to address issues critical to the future of South Carolina. On leave from Furman, he served as a Chief of Staff and Committee Counsel in the US House of Representatives. Dr. Gordon received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Florida.

**Lauren McCauley**  
**Personalized Learning Education Associate**  
**South Carolina Department of Education**



Lauren McCauley serves as the Personalized Learning Education Associate at the South Carolina Department of Education. In this role, she is responsible for supporting schools and districts in planning and implementing personalized learning for all students. Prior to joining SCDE, Lauren served as the Assistant Director for Personalized Learning at the Charleston County School District. Previously, she worked as an Education Specialist at the United States Department of Education in the Implementation and Support Unit where she supported the implementation of Race to the Top and the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund grants. She joined the federal government in 2009 as a Presidential Management Fellow. Prior to her federal service, Lauren was an Admissions Counselor at the College of Charleston. She has a Master of Arts in Education Policy from The George Washington University and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Political Science from the College of Charleston.

**Alan Richard**  
**Board Chair, Rural School and Community Trust**  
**Contributor, Hechinger Report**



Alan Richard is a veteran national education writer and editor. He's currently a contributor to the Hechinger Report, a national education news site. He formerly covered the South and rural America for Education Week, the leading national publication covering preK-12 education. He also previously was the director of communications for the Southern Regional Education Board, which works with 16 states to improve education. He currently serves as the board chair of the Rural School and Community Trust, a national policy and advocacy organization. A South Carolina native, he lives in the Washington, D.C., area.

**Christopher Shearer**  
**Program Officer, Education**  
**William and Flora Hewlett Foundation**



Christopher Shearer is a Program Officer in Education at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. He helps manage grants to improve education by advancing deeper learning knowledge, skills, and dispositions for students.

Previously, he was associate executive director of the National Geographic Society's Education Foundation, where for more than a decade he managed grantmaking, policy advocacy and public engagement. From 1993 to 1997, he was a senior staffer at the Institute for Educational Leadership's interdisciplinary National Health & Education Consortium. Before that, he served as the executive assistant to the president of the Pew Charitable Trusts. He began his career as a communications associate for the Duke University-based Pew Health Professions Commission, established to help the U.S. workforce, policy, and educational institutions respond to the nation's changing health care system.

Chris has a bachelor's degree in English literature and biology, and a master's degree in English literature, both from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, his hometown.

**Peggy Torrey, Ph.D.**  
**Director, TransformSC**  
**South Carolina Council on Competitiveness**



Dr. Peggy Torrey joined the SC Council on Competitiveness with over thirty years of experience in the fields of education and workforce development. She began her career as a middle school counselor, served as CEO of the GA Professional Standards Commission, Deputy Secretary for Workforce at SC Department of Commerce and the Deputy Executive Director for Employment and Training at SC Department of Employment and Workforce. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Research and Psychology from the University of South Carolina. Her husband, David, is a Presbyterian minister. They have one daughter, Beth, who is a law professor at the University of Georgia.