

Detroit Out-of-School Time Leadership Forum
Presenter and Panelist Biographies

Tonya Allen
President and CEO
The Skillman Foundation



Tonya Allen, a serial “idea-preneur,” serves as the Skillman Foundation’s president & chief executive officer. Her two-decade-long career has centered on pursuing, executing and investing in ideas that improve her hometown of Detroit and reduce the plight of people, especially children, who live in under-resourced communities. In her current role, Allen aligns the complexities of education reform, urban revitalization, and public policy to improve the well-being of Detroit’s and the nation’s children. Allen has been instrumental in many successful philanthropic, government and community initiatives, including:

- the 10-year, \$120-million Good Neighborhoods Initiative, which increased graduation rates by 25 percent (from 65 to 81 percent), youth programming by 40 percent, and reduced child victimization by 47 percent;
- the creation and expansion of Grow Detroit’s Young Talent, which increased summer jobs for youth from 2,500 to 8,200 paid positions;
- co-chairing the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, which successfully advocated for \$667 million for the Detroit Public Schools Community District, return of an elected school board to the district, and more charter accountability; and
- serving the boys and men of color field as chair for Campaign for Black Male Achievement and co-chair for My Brother’s Keeper Detroit and Executives’ Alliance for Boys and Men of Color.

Allen holds a bachelor’s degree in sociology and master’s degrees in social work and public health, all from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. She serves on numerous boards, both local and national, including Oakland University, Council on Foundations, Council of Michigan Foundations, United Way for Southeastern Michigan, and Campaign for Black Male Achievement.

Mary Ellen Caron
CEO
After School Matters



Mary Ellen Caron is the CEO of After School Matters, one of the nation’s largest and most successful providers of afterschool and summer programming for high school teens. Previously, she was Commissioner of Chicago’s Department of Family and Support Services, where she managed the transition of several human services departments while providing support for Chicago’s residents. At the Chicago Board of Education, she was special assistant to Arne Duncan, utilizing her background in education to serve Chicago Public Schools. Dr. Caron was the founding principal of

Frances Xavier Warde Elementary School and worked many years as a teacher. She earned her PhD in educational leadership and policy from Loyola University, her Master’s degree in elementary education and Type 75 certificate from Concordia University, and her undergraduate degree from Rosary College. She currently serves on the boards and advisory committees for multiple youth- and education-related organizations throughout Chicago.

Jessica Donner
Executive Director
Every Hour Counts



Jessica Donner is the executive director of Every Hour Counts, a coalition of national citywide organizations that increase access to quality learning opportunities, particularly for underserved students. The organization is a leading voice promoting expanded-learning systems, which provide learning and enrichment through afterschool, summer, and other initiatives.

Donner manages the organization's efforts to develop policy recommendations and solutions, test the feasibility of policy and practice recommendations and disseminate findings, and deliver technical assistance to communities to build expanded learning systems. Prior to joining Every Hour Counts, she directed statewide and national service-learning initiatives at the National Service-Learning Partnership at the Academy for Educational Development and the Massachusetts Department of Education. She holds a master's degree in urban policy and management from The New School, and a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania.

Priscilla M. Little
Consultant
Forum for Youth Investment



Priscilla M. Little is a consultant working closely with the Forum for Youth Investment to help communities across the country strengthen partnerships focused on youth, and expand and improve learning opportunities, with a focus on improving the quality of settings to support the whole child. She is also providing support to the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, working to ensure that a broad range of community partners, including those in the out-of-school time sector, inform the Commission's efforts. Prior to this work, she oversaw The Wallace Foundation's \$13 million effort to assist nine cities in providing more high-quality after-school programs through a coordinated systems approach. The former associate director

of the Harvard Family Research Project, Priscilla has been working in education and conducting educational research for more than 20 years, with a particular emphasis on research and evaluation to support and improve after-school experiences. She has worked with national education research firms, state education agencies, nonprofits and private foundations. Little has also led research teams to investigate policy-relevant after-school issues, such as improving access to and participation in quality programs, improving building after-school systems, and supporting expanded learning partnerships.

Outside the after-school arena, Little has worked in the areas of family engagement, early childhood, and the use of data for continuous improvement.

Little received her undergraduate degree in music history and theory from Smith College, and her master's degree from the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study at Tufts University.

David R. McGhee
Program Director
The Skillman Foundation



David R. McGhee, program director leading the Foundation’s Youth Development and Youth Employment work, joined the Foundation in 2014. He also supports the Foundation’s Cody Rouge Project work.

Prior to joining the Foundation, David served as a program director for Big Brothers, Big Sisters and as a congressional liaison for U.S. Representative Dan Kildee, who represents Michigan’s 5th Congressional District. David’s work with youth and communities and role

as a thought-leader has been recognized across the state and beyond. He was featured in the September 2012 issue of Black Enterprise Magazine and contributed to the National Urban League’s 2013 State of Black America Report. His essay *Mentoring Matters: Why Young Professionals and Others Must Mentor*, was published alongside contributors such as Marc H. Morial, Eric H. Holder, Jr., Congressman John Lewis, Rev. Al Sharpton, and many others. In 2016, he was selected as a Next City Vanguard, joining a group of 45 top urban innovators making equitable change, and was also selected to take part in the 2016 American Express Leadership Academy Alumni Summit, a gathering of the nation’s emerging nonprofit and philanthropic leaders. David received his bachelor’s degree in public administration & public policy from Oakland University and a master’s degree in leadership from Central Michigan University.

Karen J. Pittman
President and CEO
Forum for Youth Investment



Karen J. Pittman is president and CEO of the Forum for Youth Investment, a national nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” that combines thought leadership on youth development, youth policy, cross-system/cross-sector partnerships and developmental youth practice with on-the-ground training, technical assistance and supports. Karen is a respected sociologist and leader in youth development. Prior to co-founding the Forum in 1998, she launched adolescent pregnancy prevention initiatives at the Children’s Defense Fund, started the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, and served as senior vice president at the International Youth Foundation. Karen was involved in the founding of America’s Promise and directed the President’s Crime Prevention Council during the William Clinton administration. Most recently, Karen received the Lifetime

Achievement Award from Partners for Livable Cities, joining previous awardees such as President William Clinton and Lady Bird Johnson. Karen was recently selected to join the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development with the Aspen Institute.

Sara Plachta Elliott, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Youth Development Resource Center



Sara Plachta Elliott has served as the founding Executive Director of the Youth Development Resource Center in Detroit since 2013. She began her career working in out-of-school time, mentoring and neighborhood organizing organizations in Kalamazoo and Ypsilanti. She combines her love of participatory evaluation and continuous learning with her practice experience to support youth programs. She holds a MA and PhD in Social Policy from Brandeis University, focused on children, youth and families, as well as a Bachelor’s of Social Work and a MA in Applied Sociology.

Chris Smith
President and Executive Director
Boston After School & Beyond



Over the past two decades, **Chris Smith** has created, scaled, and led cross-sector partnerships in education and workforce development. Under his leadership, Boston After School & Beyond has developed a nationally recognized model of summer learning that improves student outcomes, built a citywide program performance measurement system, and cultivated a network of 230 programs serving nearly 18,000 students.

Previously Chris worked at the Boston Private Industry Council, where he collaborated with business leaders to integrate work and learning in order to help thousands of students graduate, with universities on Boston's first-ever study of college graduation rates of Boston Public Schools students, and with legislative leaders to address the dropout rate in Massachusetts.

Chris began his career at the US Department of Education in Washington, DC, where he coordinated partnerships for the Secretary of Education.

A native of Worcester, MA, Chris earned a BA in American Studies from Trinity College in Hartford, CT and an MBA from Babson College in Wellesley, MA.

Dr. Nikolai P. Vitti
General Superintendent
Detroit Public Schools Community District



Dr. Nikolai P. Vitti is the General Superintendent of Detroit Public Schools Community District, chosen by the reestablished elected DPSCD Board of Education in a unanimous 7-0 vote in May, 2017. Dr. Vitti brings to this position decades of expertise in education and improving academic performance for children. He recently launched Blueprint 2020, DPSCD's strategic plan for rebuilding Detroit's public schools with the school board. In his short tenure, he has raised student enrollment, actively engaged internal and external stakeholders, and improved teacher shortages. Dr. Vitti is currently focused on rebuilding the district's systems and processes in all areas but with a focus on recruiting, retaining, and developing teachers and leaders, addressing the whole child through expansion of the arts and wraparound

services, transforming the district's culture, and improving fiscal stewardship.

A native of Metro Detroit, Dr. Vitti previously led Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) in Jacksonville, Florida. As the nation's 20th largest school district, he served nearly 130,000 students within 200 schools through a \$1.7 billion dollar budget. Under his leadership, the school district reached an historic high in graduation and college readiness rates through the expansion of accelerated programming and early warning systems. DCPS also surpassed the performance of the seven large Florida urban school districts in African-American, English Learner, and Exceptional Student graduation rates; possessing the narrowest achievement gap between African-American and White students in reading, math, and Algebra; the participation of students in arts courses. Dr. Vitti successfully secured \$40 million dollars in local philanthropy to transform the district's historically lowest performing schools with a focus on human capital and technology infusion. Seventy-five percent of schools directly supported by these efforts maintained, exceeded, or improved to a "C" status, and ninety percent of "F" schools districtwide have improved their school grade performance. The district has maintained a "B" status for two consecutive years for the first time since 2010.

(Dr. Vitti continued)

Dr. Vitti received the prestigious Presidential Scholarship from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and was a member of the Urban Superintendent Program, which has developed a number of successful superintendents throughout the country. He has served on the cabinet of three National Superintendents of the Year. In 2012, he completed his doctorate from Harvard in Education, Administration, Planning and Social Policy. He received his masters in the same field from Harvard. Dr. Vitti also holds a Masters in Education from Wake Forest University where he was awarded a Master Teacher Fellowship, and a B.A. in History. As an undergraduate, he earned Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa recognition. Dr. Vitti is married with four school-age children.

Terry Whitfield
Program Officer
The Skillman Foundation



Terry Whitfield joined the Foundation as a program officer in 2017. He supports the Foundation's Literacy & Numeracy and Present & Ready to Learn work. He also supports the Foundation's Youth Development work.

Prior to his role with the Skillman Foundation, he served at a youth development worker and community organizer for 10 years for organizations such as Southwest Counseling Solutions and Alternatives for Girls. He is a board member of the Michigan Afterschool Association, a statewide organization dedicated to building a field of professionals that develop, support, and promote quality out-of-school-time programs for children and youth, and a member of 100 Black Men of Greater Detroit, a group working to improve the quality of life in the African American community through their collective resources, abilities and experiences.

Terry was born and raised in Detroit, MI. He earned a master's degree in youth development from Michigan State University. He enjoys cooking, golfing with his father, going to the movies with his wife, and volunteering with his parents to feed the homeless population in Detroit.