

# Early Learning in Idaho: Finding Common Ground



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## Rachel Canter

Rachel Canter completed her master's degree in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, where she was a Presidential Scholars Fellow. In 2008, Rachel co-founded Mississippi First with her fellow education advocate Sanford Johnson. Mississippi First has passed two pieces of watershed education legislation--the Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013, which established state-funded preK, and the Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013, which allows charter schools to open. That same year, Mississippi First was named Game Changer of the Year for the Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) Network. In 2014, Rachel and Sanford were named finalists for the Peter Jennings Award for Civic Leadership, an award honoring Teach For America alumni who make transformational change.



## Diane Demarest

Diane Demarest, M.Ed. completed her graduate degree in Organizational Leadership at the University of Idaho. Demarest developed a statewide parent education program called "Parents as Teachers" while serving as the Program Director at University of Idaho. She also supported the charter school movement in the state as the Executive Director of the Idaho Charter School Network. Currently, Ms. Demarest is the Chief Operating Officer for Family Advocates in Boise. Diane is also a national trainer for BLOCK Fest, a trademarked early math and science program for parents and young children that she helped develop.



## Janice Fletcher

Janice Fletcher is Professor Emerita in Child, Family, and Consumer Studies at the University of Idaho. She is a research consultant with the IdahoSTARS program. She is a past president of the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children, past chair of the Lewis Clark Early Childhood Program Board of Directors (Head Start), past director of the University of Idaho Child Development Laboratory and is currently a member of the advisory board for the Idaho Child Care Program. Janice is a key writer of Idaho's Early Learning Guidelines.



## Rod Gramer

Rod Gramer is President of Idaho Business for Education, a group of 119 Idaho businesses working to help transform the Idaho education system into one of the best in the country. Rod spent 38 years working as a reporter, newspaper editor and television news executive. He most recently served as Vice President and General Manager of Bay News 9, a 24-hour news station in Tampa Bay, Florida.



## Representative Greg Hughes

Utah State Speaker Greg Hughes is a small business owner working in real estate development and property management. Hughes was elected to the Utah Legislature in 2002 and in 2014 was elected Speaker of the Utah House. Outside his Legislative service, Greg is active in the community with positions on the Boards of Summit Academy Charter School, United Way of Salt Lake, Lone Peak Hospital, and Economic Development Corporation of Utah.



## Aaron Kunz

Aaron is a reporter, producer, writer, and host at Idaho Public Television. He co-hosts the political program Idaho Reports and is a regular contributor to Outdoor Idaho, Dialogue, and Science Trek. Aaron has won multiple awards, including a 2013 International Film and Television award for "Idaho's Salmon," multiple Press Club awards and a couple World Fest awards. He has also been nominated several times for regional Emmy's.



### **John McFarlane**

John McFarlane has been at Basin 72 in Idaho City for 27 years and currently serves as the District Superintendent and Secondary Principal. He also teaches Biotechnology, a genetics course for college-bound juniors and seniors. He has a B.S. in Environmental Studies, a M.Ed. in Secondary Curriculum from Western Washington University, and an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership from the University of Idaho.



### **Beth Oppenheimer**

Beth Oppenheimer has served as the Executive Director of the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (Idaho AEYC) since 2010. Idaho AEYC is a non-profit organization working to promote excellence in early care and education throughout the state of Idaho. Beth is a long-time advocate for the needs of our children and families and is committed to advancing opportunities for all Idaho families. In 2013, she was nominated for *Idaho Business Review's* Women of the Year.



### **Representative Christy Perry**

Since 2010, Christy Perry has represented Idaho's District 11, Canyon County. She is currently Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee. Perry supports a parents' right to choose the proper education for their own children, whether that is home school, charter school or public school.



### **Priscilla Salant**

Priscilla Salant directs the University of Idaho's McClure Center for Public Policy Research, which conducts and promotes research on public policy issues that impact Idaho, the region and the nation. For the last 25 years, she has built connections between universities and their statewide constituents, with a focus on leadership and community development. In 2014, Ms. Salant was honored with an *Idaho Business Review* nomination as Idaho Business Woman of the Year.



### **Debra Sanchez**

Debra Sanchez is Senior Vice President for Education and Children's Content Operations for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). She oversees children's content investments and educational initiatives at the national level and works closely with stations to enhance their development and execution of local educational services. Sanchez was Vice President of Government Relations for the Association of Public Television Stations (APTS). Working with members of Congress, Sanchez built bipartisan support for the Ready to Learn and Ready to Teach initiatives and worked aggressively to have them included in the No Child Left Behind Act.



### **Senator Steven Thayne**

Steven P. Thayne is a Republican member of the Idaho State Senate, representing District 8. He was first elected to the chamber in 2012. He previously served in the Idaho House of Representatives from 2006 to 2012. Thayne earned his B.S. in Political Science from Boise State University. In addition to his political career, Thayne was a dairyman for 18 years, taught Spanish for four years and currently does custom farming and hay baling.



### **Dr. Noreen Womack**

Dr. Noreen Womack has been practicing Pediatric Medicine in Boise for 15 years. She has received grant awards for her work in early education and managing infectious diseases. In 2013, she was recognized as the Idaho Pediatrician of the Year by the Idaho Chapter of the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) and in 2014, she was awarded AAP's Susan B. Aronson Award for her "significant contribution to improving the health and safety of children in early education and child care settings." She received her degrees from Loyola University and the University of Texas and completed her residency at Duke University.

# Early Learning in Idaho: Finding Common Ground

May 4, 2015 | Riverside Hotel

University of Idaho  
McClure Center for Public Policy Research



8:00 - 9:00

## Registration and BLOCK Fest Demonstration

BLOCK Fest is an Idaho-developed, nationally recognized, play-based learning activity. Presented courtesy of the Twiga Foundation.

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9:00 – 9:10

## Opening Remarks

Governor Cecil D. Andrus, President of the Andrus Center for Public Policy, Boise State University  
Priscilla Salant, Director of the McClure Center for Public Policy Research, University of Idaho  
Lieutenant Governor Brad Little

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9:10 – 10:00

## The Science of Learning

Dr. Noreen Womack, St. Luke's Treasure Valley Pediatrics

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10:00 – 10:30

## Idaho's Early Learning Landscape

Priscilla Salant, Director of the McClure Center for Public Policy Research,  
University of Idaho

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10:45 – 12:00

## Early Learning Success Stories

Moderated by Tracy Andrus, Andrus Center for Public Policy, Boise State University  
Diane Demarest, Chief Operating Officer of Family Advocates  
William Strength, Parent

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12:00 – 12:30

## Lunch

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12:30 – 1:30

## Learning Through Digital Media

Debra Sanchez, Senior VP of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

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1:30 – 2:30

## Learning from Utah and Mississippi

Moderated by Rod Gramer, Idaho Business for Education  
Rachel Canter, Executive Director of Mississippi First  
Representative Greg Hughes, Speaker of the Utah House

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2:45 – 4:00

## Towards an Idaho Solution – A Discussion

Moderated by Aaron Kunz, Idaho Public Television  
Dr. Janice Fletcher, Professor Emerita in Child, Family, and Consumer Studies, University of Idaho  
Rod Gramer, President of Idaho Business for Education  
Beth Oppenheimer, Executive Director, Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children  
Representative Christy Perry, Chair of the Idaho House Ways & Means Committee  
Senator Steven Thayn, Vice Chair, Idaho Senate Education Committee

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4:00

## Closing Remarks

*Thank you to our Planning Committee:*

