University Schools Research Consortium Member Bios

Chair

Dr. Carolyn Kaldon is the Chair of the USRC and a Research Associate Professor with the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP). She has extensive experience working with districts and schools in the Mid-South and nationwide to conduct meaningful and high-quality research focused on improving preK-12 student success. Her research interests and expertise focus on school-based research related to literacy, STEM, and social-emotional wellness programs, as well as academic interventions for at-risk students. More broadly, her research specialties include research design, instrument development, project management/data collection, and data analysis--tailored to enhance partnerships between academic research and the needs of schools and districts. Dr. Kaldon’s background and training as an elementary teacher in Shelby County Schools also complements her ongoing research, and altogether, fosters her enthusiasm for promoting and supporting innovative, interdisciplinary research partnerships.

University Schools Leadership

Dr. Sally Parish serves as the Associate Vice President for Educational Initiatives at the University of Memphis where she provides leadership and strategic direction for the University’s three laboratory schools, supports the launch of new school efforts, and supports the university’s Center for Service Learning & Volunteerism which facilitates over 20,000 hours of student service and engaged scholarship each year. Each of these areas contributes to the university’s commitment to high quality community engagement and innovative research and practice in Pre-K through 12 education. Prior to her current role, Sally served as an Associate Dean of Students at the UofM and as the founding director of the Center for Leadership & Service at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. A first-generation college graduate of the University of Memphis, Sally also has her Masters degree in Higher Education Administration from Florida International University and is pursuing doctoral studies at the UofM. Sally is a Certified Strengths Coach with nearly 15 years of consulting and training experience in the corporate, education and non-profit sectors. She is active as an adjunct faculty member, chairman of the Volunteer Odyssey Board of Directors, and has been published in a variety of books and articles on best practices of leadership development and community engagement. Recently, the Memphis Business Journal named Sally as one of the “Top 40 under 40” community leaders in the city of Memphis. Most proudly, Sally is mom to daughter Nola and son Deacon, and a grateful wife to her supportive partner, Danny.
Brooke Willis is the Executive Director of the Barbara K. Lipman Early Learning & Research Center at the University of Memphis. Over the last fourteen years, she has worked exclusively in the field of early childhood education and early childhood special education in both public and private settings. Her research interests and expertise focus on student diversity, inclusionary practices in early childhood classrooms, social emotional development, STEAM experiences in early childhood, and the development of self-regulation skills in preschool children. Brooke’s background and experience as an early childhood educator and administrator drive her toward creating and supporting community partnerships that promote positive early childhood experiences for all children.

Dr. Rebecca Scott serves as the Executive Director of the University of Memphis Campus School. She is a K-12 teacher and administrator with 30 years of diverse teaching and educational leadership experience. The research interest for Campus School’s faculty and staff include early childhood literacy, STEAM education, brain-based learning, social emotional learning and student engagement, and mathematical practices. In addition, Rebecca’s professional research interest include teacher leadership, instructional leadership practices and the impact on school climate and culture, and the use of brain-based strategies to close the achievement gap. As a professional educator, Rebecca’s background and experience working with K-12 education provides her the opportunity to serve as an advocate for all children, promote access and equity, and form community partnerships that enhance the teaching, learning and growth process for students, teachers and school leaders.

University of Memphis Faculty Members

Dr. Michelle Welch Brasfield is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the School Counseling Program. She received her BA in Psychology from Rhodes College and her MS and EdD in Counseling from The University of Memphis. As an assistant professor and program coordinator of the School Counseling program at The University of Memphis, Dr. Brasfield teaches
counseling courses on topics such as examining at-risk issues for youth, school counseling program development, college and career readiness skills for PK12 students, and field placement supervision. Prior to working at the university level, Dr. Brasfield served as a school counselor for a rural, underserved population for 13 years, as well as four years as a teacher in an urban elementary school. Dr. Brasfield has research interests across a variety of areas including reducing burnout and secondary traumatic stress in helping professionals and educators, school counseling program evaluation, and creative interventions for children and youth.

Dr. Remy Debes is Associate Professor and Chair of Philosophy. He is also the co-Chair (with Kate Schaffzin) of the University Middle Steering Committee, which successfully established a new laboratory middle school at the University of Memphis. His main area of research is ethics, with a focus on questions of human dignity, respect, empathy, moral psychology, and emotion. In this context, he’s curious how reading literature related to experiences of oppressed persons might improve communication, understanding, and respect across lines of social difference in school aged children? Can we connect philosophical questions about the nature of understanding other people and respect to literary questions about the value of reading stories collectively, especially stories related to the African American tradition? More generally, he’s curious how project-based learning techniques that combine STEM pedagogical methods with humanities related project themes, components, or outcomes might advance literacy goals.

Dr. Alfred Hall is the Associate Dean for the College of Education. Dr. Hall is interested in replicating components of his NSF CAREER Award research design, particularly in the context of University Middle, as follows: This project will determine to what degree the success of a newly established middle school with an emphasis on STEM education correlates with factors identified by national reports on exemplary STEM practices. He will also serve as a liaison to the College of Education.

Dr. Stephanie Ivey is the Associate Dean for Research with the Herff College of Engineering and a Professor with the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Memphis. She directs the U of M’s Intermodal Freight Transportation Institute, the Southeast Transportation Workforce Center and the West TN STEM Hub. She has a strong record of STEM workforce and
education research, with special emphasis on recruitment, retention, and persistence of STEM majors, partnerships between industry and academia, and increasing representation of women and underrepresented minorities in STEM.

Dr. Donald "Chip" Morrison is a Faculty Affiliate (external) at the Institute for Intelligent Systems (IIS). Since coming to the University of Memphis in 2008 as a researcher at the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP), he has run school quality evaluations for the Memphis City Schools, Milwaukee City Schools, and the Mississippi Virtual High School program. While at CREP he also developed, and served as Co-PI on a multi-site, randomized field trial of an inquiry-based science curriculum developed by the Smithsonian Institution and funded by US Department of Education. Since coming to IIS, Dr. Morrison has helped run two “big data” studies funded by the U.S. Army’s Advanced Distributed Learning initiative, using supervised machine-learning techniques to analyze transcripts of chat-based human tutoring sessions. A graduate of Dartmouth College (Drama), Morrison holds an M.A. in Language Studies from the University of Hong Kong and an Ed.D. in Human Development from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His forthcoming book, On the Coevolution of Language, Teaching, and Civil Discourse, reflects a lifetime of thinking and learning about language and how we use language to teach, learn, and think cooperatively with other humans.

Dr. John Sabatini is a Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of Psychology and the Institute for Intelligent Systems at the University of Memphis. He was formerly a Principal Research Scientist in the Center for Global Research at the Educational Testing Service. His research interests and expertise are in reading literacy development and disabilities, assessment, cognitive psychology, the learning sciences, and educational technology. He has worked with schools on projects exploring the reading, writing, and critical thinking capabilities of adolescents, aiding English language learners to develop reading, language, and content area learning skills, and understanding and instructing adolescents and adults with reading difficulties. He has been the principal investigator of Institute of Education Sciences funded grants to develop pre-K -12 comprehension assessments, as part of the Reading for Understanding initiative, and to adapt those assessments for use in adult education programs. He has completed an NICHD funded Learning Disabilities Research Center project studying subtypes of reading disabilities in adolescents and a NICHD/Dept of Education/National Institute for Literacy grant studying the relative effectiveness of reading programs for adults. He provides technical and research advice to national and international surveys including the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC),
Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PISA), the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and National Assessments of Adult Literacy (NAAL).

Dr. Andrew Tawfik is Assistant Professor of Instructional Design & Technology at the University of Memphis. His research interests include problem-solving and learning through failure. In particular, he is interested in case-based reasoning, which is the study of how people use their prior experiences to solve new problems. He is also interested in the ‘theory to practice’ challenge of problem-solving strategies. That is, how educators adapt approaches to problem-solving in light of their own unique educational challenges.

Dr. Deborah Tollefsen is a Professor of Philosophy and Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Her areas of research include philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and epistemology and she also has interests in the philosophy of education. She is the faculty advisor for Philosophical Horizons, a program in which graduate students facilitate philosophical discussions with students in K-12 classrooms. She is interested the ways in which epistemic virtues, such as open mindedness and critical reflection, develop in children and what interventions could be introduced to help facilitate the acquisition of these virtues.

Dr. Kenneth D. Ward is a Professor and Director for the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences School of Public Health. The School of Public Health has 27 full-time faculty members who are committed to improving the health of our community and promoting health equity through interdisciplinary education, research, service, and community engagement. Several of its faculty members engage in research that aligns well with potential collaborative projects with University Schools.

Dr. Todd Zoblotsky is a Research Associate Professor and head of the CREP Statistics Department. Dr. Zoblotsky has broad experience in the areas of quantitative and qualitative research design and statistical analysis (including experimental (RCT) and quasi-experimental designs), in addition to instrument design and development, data collection, project management, data visualization, and report writing. In his role as head of the CREP Statistics Department, Dr. Zoblotsky has worked with representatives from numerous states to collect and house personally identifiable data for both minors and adults, and has experience and knowledge related to the collection, storage, and reporting of sensitive data. Dr. Zoblotsky brings to the Research Consortium guidance on research design, data collection and analysis considerations, and data interpretation.