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12th Annual Education Justice Lecture

(Proceeds benefit the Education Law Center)

Thursday, May 6, 2021



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Education Justice Webinar

The First 100 Days:

The Biden Administration & Public Education

May 6, 2021

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Keynote Speaker

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
President & CEO, Learning Policy Institute

Response Panel

Marie Blistan
President, New Jersey Education Association (NJEA)

Bonnie Watson Coleman
NJ Congresswoman

Jamaal Bowman
NY Congressman



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Standing Up for Public School Children

Founded in 1973, ELC is the leading voice for public school children in New Jersey, and has become one of the most effective advocacy organizations for equal educational opportunity in the United States. In addition to direct litigation on behalf of disadvantaged students, ELC works to expand educational opportunities through coalition building, litigation support, policy development, communications and action-focused research in New Jersey, in other states, and at the federal level.

ELC's work is based on a core set of core values:

- All children have the potential to learn if given the opportunity to do so.
- All children have the legal right to a high quality education to prepare them for active participation in our democracy and economy.
- The quality of life in low-income communities can be improved, and the viability of public schools and outcomes for children can be strengthened, by providing children with the programs, resources and support needed for a high quality and equitable public education; and
- Effective and sustained advocacy is essential to ensure that all children have access to a high quality and equitable public education.

ELC's litigation and legislative advocacy, including the landmark rulings in the *Abbott v. Burke* case, have resulted in significant advancements in the provision of adequate funding, high quality early education, safe and adequate school facilities, and school reform for disadvantaged students and schools serving high concentrations of low-income students, students of color, and students with special needs.

Because of our expertise and success, ELC is now working to advance educational equity across the country, and our efforts have resulted in significant legal victories. In Flint, Michigan, ELC, in partnership with the White & Case law firm and the ACLU of Michigan, represents thousands of children who were exposed to elevated lead levels in Flint's drinking water and may be in need of special education services as a result. So far, attorneys have been able to negotiate a historic agreement with the state and school district to establish an unprecedented program to provide universal screening, and in-depth assessments when necessary, to all Flint children impacted by the water crisis.

In New York, ELC, representing parents from Albany, Yonkers and New York City, successfully sued NY State and gained the release of \$69 million in two-year improvement grant funds designated for 20 high poverty schools across the state.

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Who was Marilyn J. Morheuser (1924-1995)

An influential litigator of school finance issues, Marilyn Morheuser was the leading attorney for the Education Law Center, Newark, in the law suit it brought before the court in 1981. When the case, *Abbott v. Burke*, was decided by the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1990, it mandated that the state provide funding for poor urban school districts equal to that of the average of the wealthiest districts, the first time in the nation a court had so ruled. A former nun in the Sisters of Loretto, Morheuser left her order in 1963. She earned a law degree from Rutgers Law School in 1970 and continued her life of commitment to children and civil rights as a lawyer. She became executive director of the Education Law Center in 1979.

Ms. Morheuser was the agency's lead counsel for the plaintiffs in *Abbott v. Burke*, a class-action suit brought in 1981 to challenge the state's Quality Education Act of 1980. Arguing on behalf of pupils of the poorest urban schools, the suit asserted that the state had inadequately responded to a State Supreme Court ruling on school financing in 1973. That rul-

ing said that New Jersey's method of school financing violated the State Constitution by failing to guarantee parity between the poorest and the most affluent districts.

The court – the state's highest – agreed with the center, ruling in 1990 that the law was still unconstitutional because it did not meet the educational needs of disadvantaged city children. It ordered that those needs be met.

The law center returned to court the next year, this time to obtain a compliance order, which the Supreme Court in Trenton handed down in 1994. In it, the judges decided that the state must increase the financing of the 30 poorest districts to a level where their per-pupil outlays would equal the average of the wealthiest districts by fiscal year 1996-97.

The judges demanded that schools in hard-pressed cities like Newark, Camden and Paterson be provided preschool programs, health services and smaller class sizes. The state has the responsibility to provide them rather than leave it up to the impoverished districts, they wrote.

Ms. Morheuser did not start her professional life at the bar; a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Webster College,

she first was a nun. She spent 16 years teaching high school and college around the country, wherever her teaching Roman Catholic order, the Sisters of Loretto, sent her.

Being of a rather radical bent on social issues, she decided that she could achieve more on the outside. She quit the order in 1963 and became an advocate for racial equality in Milwaukee.

In 1973, she received her J.D. at the Rutgers-Newark School of Law. Before she joined the Newark law center she represented such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey (ACLU-NJ), the Urban League, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Her work attracted many honors, including a Special Achievement Award from the New Jersey Education Association in 1993, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Award from the National Education Association in 1994. In May 1994, she was cited as Woman of the Year in Education by the New Jersey League of Women Voters. In 1995, she was cited as Woman of the Year in Education, by the New Jersey League of Women Voters.





Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond

President & CEO, Learning Policy Institute


Keynote Speaker

Linda Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University and founding president of the Learning Policy Institute, created to provide high-quality research for policies that enable equitable and empowering education for each and every child. At Stanford she founded the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and served as faculty sponsor for the Stanford Teacher Education Program, which she helped to redesign. Most recently she was appointed President of the California State Board of Education by Governor Gavin Newsom.

Darling-Hammond is past president of the American Educational Research Association and recipient of its awards for Distinguished Contributions to Research, Lifetime Achievement, Research Review, and Research-to-Policy. She is also a member of the American Association of Arts and Sciences and of the National Academy of Education. From 1994–2001, she was executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, whose 1996 report *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* was named one of the most influential reports affecting U.S. education in that decade. In 2006, she was named one of the nation's ten most influential people affecting educational policy. She led the Obama education policy transition team in 2008 and the Biden education transition team in 2020. She was appointed President of the California State Board of Education in 2019.

Darling-Hammond began her career as a public school teacher and co-founded both a preschool and a public high school. She served as Director of the RAND Corporation's education program and as an endowed professor at Columbia University, Teachers College before coming to Stanford. She has consulted widely with federal, state and local officials and educators on strategies for improving education policies and practices and is the recipient of 14 honorary degrees in the U.S. and internationally. Among her more than 600 publications are a number of award-winning books, including *The Right to Learn*, *Teaching as the Learning Profession*, *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World* and *The Flat World and Education*. She received an Ed.D. from Temple University (with highest distinction) and a B.A. from Yale University (*magna cum laude*).

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A photograph of a person running on a large sand dune. The person is wearing a white tank top and green shorts, and is running away from the camera. The dune is a light tan color, and the sky is a clear blue. The person's shadow is cast on the sand.

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Marie Blistan

New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) President

Marie Blistan, a high school special education resource center teacher in Washington Township public schools, is the president of the New Jersey Education Association. Blistan previously served as NJEA's vice president and secretary-treasurer. She was re-elected to a second two-year term as president effective Sept. 1, 2019, which she will serve until Aug. 31, 2021.

Blistan's focus as NJEA president remains for NJEA and all its members — certificated, support professionals, retired, and student members — to continue to take the lead on the discussion of New Jersey's educational progress in order to provide the best experience possible for all public school children. Blistan was a founding member of the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative and helped lead a statewide effort to pass teacher leadership legislation.

Blistan has been recognized many times by various publications and has won many awards of distinction for her tireless work as an education and student advocate. Throughout her time as an elected union leader, Blistan has focused on winning social, racial and economic justice across the state. Blistan successfully led the 200,000-member NJEA in a one of the most historic fights in its history, the fight for legislative relief from Chapter 78 and Job Justice for Educational Support Professionals (ESPs). The passage of all three bills was the result of years of a new, member-driven approach to unionism that Blistan fostered and encouraged as the leader of NJEA. As a result of these historic accomplishments, as well as her measured leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, Blistan was named New Jersey's sixth most powerful person on NJ Biz's Education Power 50 list in September of 2020. In November of 2020, Insider NJ ranked Blistan as New Jersey's seventh most powerful advocate on their annual "Power 100" publication, noting her deft political moves during the pandemic. In December of 2020, Blistan was ranked 11th on the 2020 New Jersey Globe Power List. Sen. Loretta Weinberg named Blistan to her annual "The Powerful Women of New Jersey" list, a distinction which Blistan earned for the second consecutive year. In February of 2021, Blistan's leadership and political influence were acknowledged again when she was ranked 8th on ROI-NJ's 2021 Influencer Power List. and featured on NJ Biz's 2021 Power 100 list, an honor which she earned for three consecutive years. Blistan's political advocacy was instrumental in the state making its first full pension payment to Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF) after more than two decades.

A graduate of Glassboro State College (now Rowan University,) Blistan earned a master's degree in reading. Blistan has taught in New Jersey for 35 years.



Bonnie Watson Coleman

New Jersey Congresswoman

Bonnie Watson Coleman is serving her fourth term in the United States House of Representatives, the continuation of a career in public service advocating for the needs of New Jersey families and the equitable treatment of all people. The first Black woman to represent New Jersey in Congress, Watson Coleman is a member of the Appropriations Committee, the Homeland Security Committee, where she serves as Chair of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, and serves as Vice Chair at Large of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Watson Coleman's work in the House centers on her belief that, in the United States of America, there's a floor below which we should never allow any child, any family, any person to fall. Knowing that millions struggle every day just to make ends meet from the first to the last of the month, her legislative work seeks to bridge the gap for these Americans, making sure that the richest nation in the world doesn't allow millions to live below the poverty line; doesn't allow vulnerable groups to suffer the fallout of environmental violations; doesn't allow profit margins to define the standards or the motivations for incarceration; and doesn't allow bias to push everyday needs like car insurance out of reach for working families.

Watson Coleman is the daughter of legendary state legislator John S. Watson, and her services in Congress continues a family legacy of public service, fighting for women, economically and socially disadvantaged populations, and other vulnerable groups in our society. Prior to her election a Representative for New Jersey's 12th Congressional District, Watson Coleman served eight consecutive terms in the New Jersey General Assembly and shattered racial and gender barriers to become the first Black woman to serve as Majority Leader, and as the Chair of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee. During her time as Majority Leader, Watson Coleman convened a year-long series of public hearings on reforms to prisoner re-entry programs while shepherding legislation through the Assembly that the New York Times called "a model for the rest of the nation," on prisoner rehabilitation and release.

In 2016, Watson Coleman founded the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls alongside two of her colleagues, the first caucus aimed at bringing both the tremendous challenges and incredible successes of Black women to the fore in Congress's policy debates. In addition to continuing to co-chair the Caucus on Black Women and Girls and the role she serves with the Progressive Caucus, Watson Coleman is an active member of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, The Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

Watson Coleman is a graduate of Thomas Edison State College, and has received honorary doctorate degrees from the College of New Jersey, Rider University, and Stockton University. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and co-chair of the Girl Scouts of America Capitol Hill Honorary Troop.



Jamaal Bowman

New York Congressman

Congressman Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D., represents New York's 16th District, which includes the Northern Bronx and parts of Westchester County, including Yonkers, New Rochelle, and Mount Vernon.

Bowman was born and raised in New York City, spending his early years in public housing and rent-controlled apartments. He was raised by his mother, who supported them with her post office worker's salary. After graduating from the University of New Haven, Rep. Bowman began his career as a crisis intervention teacher in a Bronx public school and went on to earn a master's degree in guidance counseling from Mercy College and a doctorate in education from Manhattanville College.

In 2009, Bowman founded Cornerstone Academy for Social Action, a Bronx middle school focused on unlocking the natural brilliance of all children through a holistic curriculum, where he served as principal for a decade. At CASA, Bowman worked to center students' voices, cultural awareness, and love. He worked to ensure advanced student involvement in science, technology, engineering, art, and math. Bowman has also been an outspoken advocate for rethinking education, including ending state-sanctioned yearly standardized testing.

Bowman was elected to Congress in 2020, running on a platform of transformative progressive policies that will improve the lives of those who have been legislated out of the American dream. Congressman Bowman is dedicated to passing visionary policy that infuses climate justice with economic and racial justice, and to highlighting the importance of research and investing communities of color.

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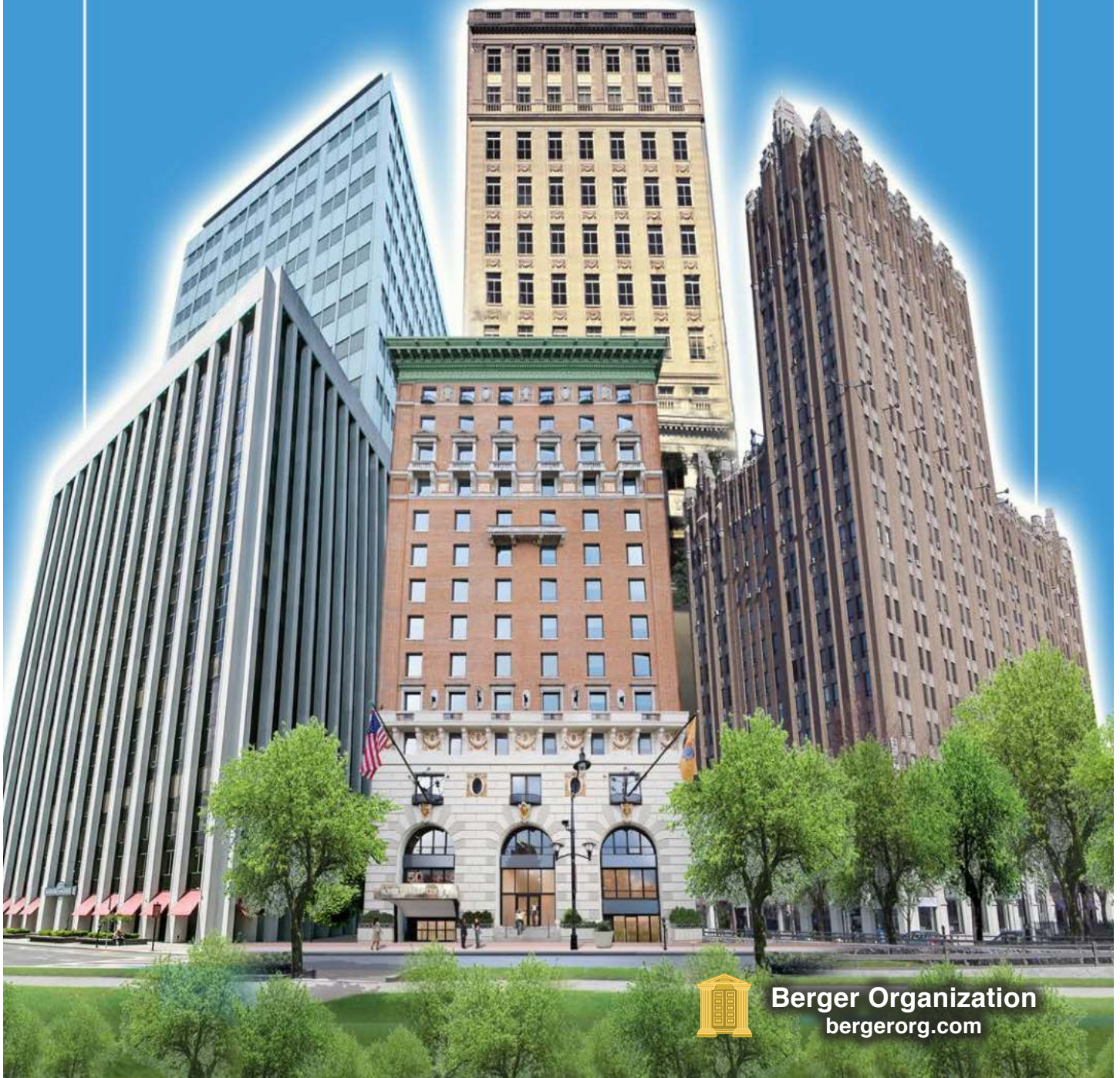
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