



Ashling Preston is the Associate Director for Public Policy at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, where she staffs the Bishops on USCCB's Committee on Catholic Education and oversees the Secretariat of Catholic Education's federal policy and advocacy efforts on education issues. Previously, she served as Education Policy Advisor in the United States Senate for 5 years, staffing Senator Tim Scott and then-Senator Marco Rubio on issues including school choice, federal appropriations, and higher education policy. She holds a Master of Education from Johns Hopkins University. Ashling is a wife and mother, a parishioner at St. Patrick's parish in Washington D.C., and is a native Californian.

Bruce Hermie serves as the National Director of Implementation at the American Federation for Children. Bruce is the central hub and organizer of AFC's implementation work across the country, from policy advice to tangible support and connections. He has built a national reputation as a trusted expert and top leader in this space, combining policy expertise with hands-on experience. He founded and directs AFC's School Leader Fellowship, which provides training to school leaders to help them engage the legislative process and advocate on behalf of their students and families. Bruce formerly served as a school principal, dean of students, and high school English teacher in the Diocese of Phoenix. He is the author of *From the Schoolhouse to the Statehouse: The Role of School Leaders in Legislative Advocacy through the Lens of School Choice*

Father Jeff Putthoff, SJ, has over 30 years of experience using data, strategic planning, and Salesforce to strengthen education and organizations. A youth nonprofit founder turned tax-credit consultant, he has driven scholarship funding, including tax credit scholarships, for over 150 U.S. schools. He currently works with the Dioceses of St. Petersburg, Venice, and Salt Lake City. He can be reached at jeff@putthoff.com

Ricky Austin currently serves as the President of the Aim Higher Foundation, a Minnesota-based non-profit that provides scholarships to children to attend Catholic schools. Born and raised in Southern California, Austin began his career as a teacher and administrator in Catholic schools in Oklahoma City and Chicago. Later, he led the K-12-focused communications and marketing efforts at the University of Notre Dame and at the Partnership Schools in New York City. Since 2016, Austin has served as Directors of Scholarships, Vice President of Advancement, and now President of the Aim Higher Foundation. He lives in Saint Paul, MN, with his wife and two children.

Established in 1987, the Catholic Education Foundation (CEF) continues to provide tuition assistance to the most financially deserving students attending Catholic elementary and high schools throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Its purpose is to make a quality Catholic education accessible and affordable to students in need, as our Catholic schools lay the foundation for academic achievement and develop values of faith, family, community, and service.





Doug Cooper has served as the Executive Director of the Catholic Education Foundation since 2021. A native of Southern California, Doug is a product of Los Angeles Catholic Schools, graduating from St. Paul the Apostle School and Loyola High School. He received a B.A. in Government and International Studies with a minor in Theology from the University of Notre Dame and a Juris Doctor from Southwestern Law School.

Andrew Garcia has been with the Catholic Education Foundation for over a decade and is currently serving as the Associate Director of Programs. He received his B.A. in Political Science from California State University Northridge and his M.A. in Theology and Leadership from Gonzaga University. A lifelong Angelino, Andrew prides himself on being an advocate for students and families of underserved communities. During the 2023-2024 School Year, CEF provided more than 15,000 tuition awards in excess of \$24 million to students attending over 200 schools throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, spanning the counties of Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Los Angeles.

Lauren May is a collaborative educational advocate with a proven track record of enhancing educational and operational performance through visionary leadership, staff development, and strong community partnerships. As the Director of Advocacy for SUFS, Lauren is knowledgeable in research-based practices and education choice policy, dedicated to driving continuous process improvements.

Shawn M. Peterson is President of Catholic Education Partners, a national Catholic apostolate whose mission is to serve the Catholic community by advancing policy that empowers families and children to enjoy the benefits of a Catholic education. Before joining the staff at Catholic Education Partners, Shawn served as Associate Director for Public Policy with the Minnesota Catholic Conference. Prior to that he spent two decades working on numerous legislative and policy issues, including parental choice in education. During that time he was president of his own government relations firm and worked in state government serving in the administrations of two governors, and as senior staff in the Minnesota state legislature.

Shawn is a Consultor to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Catholic Education, a member of the USCCB Advisory Committee on Catholic Education Policy, a member of the board of directors for the Institute of Catholic Liberal Education, and serves on the Advisory Board of the Catholic Talent Project. He has a wife and three children, resides in Lake Elmo, Minnesota and is a member of Transfiguration Catholic Church.





Lance Christensen is the President of California Policy Partners, a 501(c)(6) business membership association based out of the greater Sacramento area that is dedicated to protecting the family's business. Christensen has two decades of public policy and political experience working in and out of the state legislature, the Department of Finance, and a few educational nonprofits such as Reason Foundation, FixCalifornia, California Policy Center and School Boards for Academic Excellence. He was also a candidate for State Superintendent of Public Instruction on the November 2022 statewide ballot. Christensen earned his bachelor's degree in English from Brigham Young University and a master's degree from Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy, specializing in international relations. He is a happily married father of 5 children, all of whom are seventh-generation Californians.

Peter Murphy is a Senior Advisor at the Invest in Education Foundation and Coalition, based in Washington, D.C., which advocates in Congress for K-12 education freedom and choice and develops a national coalition in support of such policies. He previously served as Policy and Communications Director at the New York Charter Schools Association, the statewide membership organization of charter schools in New York, and served in the Office of New York Governor George Pataki, where he helped develop the New York Charter Schools Act and the School Tax Relief (STAR) program. Mr. Murphy received his master's degree in public administration from Rockefeller College of the State University of New York at Albany, and his B.A. in economics from the University at Albany.

Rachel ElginSmith After a rewarding career spanning several industries from advertising to finance, Rachel ElginSmith joined the BASIC Fund as Executive Director in 2009. Now CEO, she leads The BASIC Fund overseeing all scholarship and development operations, having supported more than 27,000 students in the San Francisco Bay Area with over \$175 million raised to date. Rachel is a graduate of Pomona College in Claremont, CA and enjoys spending time with her two daughters, playing her cello and swimming in the San Francisco Bay.

Matt Richardson Born and raised in Ohio, Matt Richardson has dedicated his career to expanding educational opportunities. He studied at Baldwin Wallace College, focusing on admissions office modernization and educational innovation. In 1992, Matt joined PSAS Private School Aid Service in Cleveland as a co-owner of the company, pioneering Need Analysis formulas and Tuition Assistance Award Models that ultimately supported over 3,500 private and faith-based schools and multiple SGO programs across the country. He also played a key role in shaping the best practices for application and eligibility best practices for the first K-12 Tax Credit Scholarship programs in Pennsylvania and Florida.

In 2017, PSAS was acquired by FACTS Management Co., where Matt now serves as Director of Scholarship Programs. He leads the FACTS Scholarship Specialty Team, supporting over 120 scholarship programs and advancing Scholarship, Tax Credit, and ESA (Education Savings Account) application services. Matt lives in Medina, Ohio, with his wife, MJ, and their two daughters, occasionally fishing and landscaping, and always continuing his lifelong mission to enhance educational access and equity.