



40 Years of Imagination & Wonder

2016-17 Childsplay Advisory Panel

Andrea Benkel, Director of Early Childhood Education Summit School of Ahwatukee

Andrea Benkel, Summit's Director of Early Childhood Education, earned a bachelor's degree in Child Development from Ohio State University and a Master's in Education from the University of Phoenix. She has more than 20 years' experience leading and teaching preschool, kindergarten and Gymboree Play/Music/Art classes. Andrea was selected to serve as a mentor for preschool directors, through the Chase Emergent Leader's program, a statewide early childhood education leadership institute. She has been invited to present several times at conferences for the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She is the mother of three girls, and has been married to her "preschool sweetheart" Jeff for twenty-five years.

Anne Jones, Kindergarten Dual Language Immersion Mandarin Co-Teacher, Tarwater Elementary School, Chandler School District

Anne Jones has been teaching for twenty five years in the Chandler School district and loves getting students off to a positive start in school. She teaches in a Kindergarten Dual Language Immersion Mandarin program at Tarwater Elementary, and has always been a strong proponent of the Arts in education. She received a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration/Spanish from Minnesota State University, a Post Bacc. degree from ASU in Elem. Ed., and a Masters from NAU. She is married and a proud mother of two. Her son recently graduated from Villanova and is pursuing his dream of playing MLB baseball. Her daughter attends Boston College and is in the nursing program and performs with the Boston College Dance Ensemble.

DaNeil Olson, Librarian, Marana Unified School District

DaNeil Olson is a librarian in the Marana Unified School District. She has worked in the field of education for over 18 years and has taught students ranging in age from kindergarten through 7th grade. In addition, she has worked with the Center for Teacher Success (formerly AFRE) to provide professional development opportunities for teachers. DaNeil believes a child's education is not complete without exposure to theater, music, and the arts and she works diligently to provide such opportunities for her school and students. DaNeil lives in Marana with her husband, their two children, and a menagerie of pets.

Jacque Radke, PreK Teacher, Kenilworth Elementary, Phoenix Elementary School District

Jacque has a BA in Psychology from Point Loma Nazarene University and a MEd from Arizona State University. She is a longtime early childhood educator, primarily teaching Kindergarten or First Grade in a variety of school settings in Central Phoenix. Her current assignment is teaching pre-Kindergarten for Title 1 and special needs children. Jacque is a children's literature enthusiast and enjoys using literature to inspire learning and imagination in children.

Jo Hanken, Vice-Principal, Kyrene de la Paloma, Kyrene School District

Close to the Field of Dreams, Jo Hanken grew up in the land of Iowa with rolling fields, tornadoes and sweet corn. She graduated with a B.S.W. from the University of Northern Iowa, and then attended graduate school at the University of Iowa. A long time teacher and administrator in the Kyrene School District, Jo feels fortunate to be the assistant principal at Kyrene de la Paloma, where integrating arts is an essential piece of what teachers do every day. As a National Board Certified Teacher, she recognizes the value of employing the arts as tools to connect learning and engaging students in a creative thinking process. The practices, classes and performances provided by Childsplay are an essential piece of educating the whole child, and as a long-time drama/theater advocate, Jo is thrilled and honored to be a member of the Childsplay Advisory Panel.

Katie Syracuse, Retired English Language Arts Teacher, Western Valley Middle School, Fowler School District

For the last thirty four years, Katie has been an elementary and middle school educator in Phoenix, Arizona. She transferred to the middle school level because she found herself drawn to teaching students who were highly capable, some gifted learners but mostly high achievers always motivated to try anything new and different. Along the way, her students have participated in many academic competitions such as Odyssey of the Mind, Regional Math Challenges, Spelling Bees, Essay and Poetry Writing Competitions, and Poetry Out Loud Contests. As a Language Arts teacher, getting middle school students to think "outside the box" to promote critical problem solving skills and increase creativity has always been a passion of hers.

Kellie Taylor, Theatre Director, St. Mary's High School, Phoenix

Kellie grew up in the summer academy classes at Childsplay. She studied theatre at Arizona State University where she was an Artsbridge Scholar. This scholarship allowed her to use theatre to teach second grade language arts in a local underprivileged school. Later, she earned an MA in Theology from Franciscan University. Kellie spent two years in China where she was able to teach theatre and bring theatre into many poor villages throughout the country. She currently serves as the Theatre Director, Fine Arts Department Chair and Student Activities Director at Saint Mary's Catholic High School in Phoenix.

Kerri Tornow, Kindergarten Teacher, Awakening Seed School, Phoenix

Kerri Tornow has been part of the Seed staff since 1984. She grew up in Michigan and is married to Roger. They have two sons, Andrew and Aaron. Kerri graduated from ASU with a degree in art education and has an elementary certification and an early childhood endorsement. Kerri has many years of experience working with preschoolers through 2nd graders at the Seed. She also teaches art with the older Seed students in the summer program. Kerri enjoys art and children's literature. She also loves to draw and create crafts, as well as camp, canoe, hike, and travel with her sons and their beagles, Dunkin' and Daisy. Her focus is on providing a safe, happy classroom environment in which young children can explore their world and influence their own learning with rich oral expression, creative opportunities, purposeful experiences and strong social connections to their peers and teachers.

Leah Froum, Special Education Teacher, Laveen Elementary School, Laveen School District

Originally hailing from New York, Leah travelled nationally and internationally performing in musicals. After moving to Arizona, Leah discovered a love of combining theatre with teaching, and obtained her master's degree in education and certification in Special Education. She enjoys every day in the classroom and utilizes performance with her students from 4th -8th grade. She is currently represented by Leighton Agency and is the voice for many local businesses.

Lisa Wyatt, Senior Elementary Teacher, Montessori Day School, Chandler

Lisa Wyatt is a Phoenix native. She attended the University of San Diego for her B.A. in English and then earned her Masters of Education degree at UCLA. Lisa worked as a teacher trainer in the Philippines as a Peace Corps volunteer for two years. After returning to the U.S., Lisa taught reading and English classes at the high school and community college levels for fourteen years. Lisa became Montessori certified in 2012 and now teaches grades 4-6 in a multi-aged classroom at Montessori Day School in Chandler. She loves to help students find joy in learning. Lisa is a passionate reader, gardener and mother of two. Lisa and her husband John raise two daughters who love to write, read, and eat broccoli right out of the garden.

Mary Spangenberg, 2nd Grade Teacher, Davidson School, Cartwright School District

Mary is from East Islip, NY but has lived in Arizona since 1981. She graduated ASU with a Liberal Arts degree in Family Studies. She earned a Master's degree in Health Administration from the University of St. Francis, and a Post Bachelor teaching certificate from Ottawa University. She currently teaches third grade at G Frank Davidson School in the Cartwright School District. Previously, she taught ELL and Gifted, Second Grade at Justine Spitalny Elementary for 16 years. She has been involved in many programs during her Cartwright tenure. These include: Reading Is Fundamental, Read Across America, Grant writing, NEA Executive Board, Advocacy, script writing, and drama classes.

Sheila Borentstein, K-2 Master Teacher, Solano Elementary School, Osborn School District

Sheila is an Arizona native who loves the heat. She found her passion for teaching only five years ago and feels it is truly her niche. She practices yoga to stay sane, and she brings that practice into her classrooms, always teaching her students to stand in their own truth and to maintain a sense of mindfulness daily.

Teresa Minarsich, Theatre Specialist, North Valley Arts Academies, Paradise Valley School District

Dr. Teresa Minarsich is a graduate of Arizona State University's Theatre for Youth doctoral program. The American Alliance for Theatre & Education awarded her the 2015 Distinguished Dissertation Award. An educator, scholar, director, theatre artist, and puppeteer she is passionate about creating socially relevant theatre WITH young people. With over two decades of experience creating theatre in a variety of settings with youth from Pre-K to college, Teresa believes firmly in the power of theatre to inspire and transform youth as they explore what it means to be human through character and story.