



FY27 Arts Education Program Grant Panelist Biographies

Panel 1

Casey Hall

*Fine Arts Education Program Specialist
Georgia Department of Education
Fulton County*

Mr. Casey Hall serves as a Fine Arts Education Program Specialist for the Georgia Department of Education, where he actively supports Georgia's Fine Arts Educators (K-12) from across the state. In this role, he advocates for and supports Georgia's Fine Arts Educators through managing virtual, content-specific professional learning community groups, assisting in the development of high-quality Fine Arts instructional resources, creating Fine Arts-related, self-paced online courses, and presenting professional learning workshops to school districts and regional education service agencies (RESAs) throughout the state. He joined the GaDOE Fine Arts Department team from Fulton County Schools as a Fine Arts Support Teacher (FAST) and Music Specialist in Atlanta, Georgia, where he was awarded the title of 2019-2020 South Learning Community Teacher of the Year for Fulton County Schools. During his time as a FAST Team member in Fulton County, he coached and provided support for elementary music teachers across the district. He holds a bachelor's degree in music education from the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University and a master's degree in music education from Georgia State University's School of Music. Mr. Hall has presented at various conferences at international, national, state, and local school district professional development sessions.

Kelly Layton

GCA Council Member

Graphic Designer

Glynn County

Kelly Layton is a freelance graphic designer having received a BFA in Graphic Design from the University of Georgia - Franklin College of Arts & Sciences. Having begun her career in Atlanta, Georgia, as a graphic designer with Bellsouth and then AT&T, she later moved on to creating freelance design work for businesses, individuals and not-for-profit organizations. After moving to St. Louis, Missouri, she became the marketing chair for The Woman's Exchange, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to empowering others to lead financially productive, and stable lives through work in retail, restaurant and artisan work training programs. During this time, she also served on various school board committees while continuing her freelance design work. Currently, Mrs. Layton serves on the High Museum Board of directors, and on the Advisory Board of the University of Georgia Franklin College of Arts & Sciences. She recently endowed the "Layton Design Studio" within the UGA Lamar Dodd School of Art. This gift supports the graphic design area, a competitive and high demand major at UGA, with the goal of providing resources to help elevate the graphic design program and prepare students for future creative professions. A native of Georgia, she is married to Brent Layton, and has two adult children. She currently resides in Atlanta and Saint Simons Island, GA. Kelly has a strong passion for art, and loves traveling and visiting art museums.

Christen Napp

Arts in Education Director

Creative Arts Guild

Whitfield County

Christen is a dedicated arts professional with a strong foundation in both creative practice and arts education. She holds a BFA in Studio Art from Murray State University and an MA in Museum Studies from Johns Hopkins University, blending academic expertise with meaningful, hands-on experience in the field. Christen previously spent four years at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts in Montgomery, Alabama, where she contributed to curatorial projects and educational programming. She currently serves as Arts in Education Director at the Creative Arts Guild in Dalton, Georgia, where she champions access to high-quality arts experiences and nurtures artistic growth within the community. In addition to her organizational leadership, Christen has served as a panelist for the Alabama State Council on the Arts and as a panelist for the Georgia Council for the Arts, offering professional insight into the funding and advancement of arts initiatives at the state level.

With a deep commitment to the intersection of arts, education, and community development, Christen is passionate about supporting and elevating the next generation of creative thinkers and makers in Georgia.

Kristin Siembieda*Springdale Park ES**STEM Program Specialist | Specialist in Educational Technology**DeKalb County*

Kristin Siembieda is the STEAM Program Specialist at Springdale Park Elementary in Atlanta Public Schools, where she leads a schoolwide vision for interdisciplinary learning grounded in strong arts integration. She helps teachers weave visual arts, music, drama, design, and collaborative murals into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to create meaningful, student-centered experiences. Kristin supports arts and classroom teachers in partnering with artists such as Yoyo Ferro, Chastain Clark of Studio Chastain, and Black Cat Tips to bring authentic creative practice into classrooms and transform school spaces through public art. Through project-based initiatives focused on sustainability and food insecurity, including partnerships with Intown Cares, students apply creativity to real community challenges. She led her team through both Cognia STEM Certification and Georgia Department of Education STEAM Certification and serves on the Live Thrive grant board, collaborating with CHaRM to strengthen environmental education and advance STEAM implementation.

Ms. Olethia Thomas*Director of Gifted Education, Coordinator of Fine Arts & Advanced Placement**Houston County School District**Houston County*

Olethia Calhoun serves as the Director of Gifted Education and Fine Arts Coordinator for Houston County, Georgia. With more than 25 years of experience in education, she has positively impacted over 30,000 students through her leadership in gifted programming, fine arts, and specialized academic initiatives. She holds degrees from Clark Atlanta University, Georgia State University, and Columbus State University, culminating in a Doctor of Philosophy from Liberty University. Her academic background reflects a strong foundation in leadership, instructional excellence, and student advocacy. A passionate advocate for lifelong learning, Olethia encourages educators and students to pursue continuous growth. She is committed to a holistic approach to education—integrating academic rigor with the arts, athletics, mentorship, and community engagement to support the development of the whole child. Outside of her professional work, Olethia values time with family, shared laughter, and creating meaningful memories, which continue to ground her work in purpose and connection.

Emily McKenna

*Artist, Board Member
Thomasville Center for the Arts
Thomas County*

Emily is a conceptual artist working primarily in fiber and sculpture. A product of two curious, capable makers, Emily always had her hands in making something but never felt like an artist. She graduated from Smith College with degrees in economics and mathematics and tried to be practical after graduation. In 2014, after years of corporate jobs and starting a family, Emily decided to be less practical and opened You're Maker Studios, where she taught makers of all ages to sew while also working as a product designer for superhero outfitter Everfan. By the time she sold You're Maker in 2021, it had become a hub for art, sewing, birthday parties, and camps. Since 2021, Emily has been working as a full-time artist. She currently serves on the board of the Thomasville Center for the Arts and previously served on the board of the art organization Pines & Palms. She has created and led independent community art projects, published a zine featuring local artists, continued to teach, and has a growing jewelry design business that is as much art as it is jewelry.

Jerry G. White

*Teaching Artist
DeKalb County*

Jerry G. White is a Georgia-based Teaching Artist. An author, percussionist, songwriter, producer, and storyteller, he integrates these disciplines through his work as both a performer and arts educator. He has served as a Board Member of the Decatur Arts Alliance (2006–2016; 2022–present), supporting the organization's mission to celebrate and sustain the arts in the community. His debut bilingual children's book, *Anansi and the Colorful Kente Cloth*, illustrated by Courtney Strickland and published by 1010 Publishing, reflects his commitment to cultural storytelling and literacy. Jerry coordinates cultural programs in the Office of Belonging at The Lovett School. He also serves as a Teaching Artist with the Teaching Museum of the Fulton County School System and works through the Cobb County School District Fine Arts Program. He is listed on the Teaching Artist Registry of the Georgia Council for the Arts. In addition to his educational work, Jerry collaborates musically with Edrinna Marie. Their EPs *Out the Box* and *Rising*, along with the singles "Kwanzaa – Habari Gani" and "When Is Enough Enough," are available on major streaming platforms. He also performs through his performance entity, A Performance Method. "Drums—it's how I tell the stories."

Panel 2

Paul McClain

*Fine Arts Education Program Specialist
Georgia Department of Education
Fulton County*

Paul McClain currently serves as a Fine Arts Program Specialist with the Georgia Department of Education where he has worked for the last 6 years managing fine arts grants, developing fine arts specific professional learning opportunities, and project managing the development of Fine Arts resources for Georgia Teachers. For 15 years prior, he served as a High School Theatre Program Director in Fulton County and worked professionally in Georgia's creative industries including work in theatre, film, and as a voiceover artist. He holds an MFA in theatrical performance from the University of Florida.

Mitch Green

*Principal
Trickum Middle School
Gwinnett County*

Mitch Green currently serves as the Principal of Trickum Middle School in Gwinnett County Public Schools. Mitch began his career in education more than 30 years ago teaching special education at an alternative high school in New Jersey and has since served both general and special education students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Mitch has had a full circle moment recently in his career as the majority of Mitch's career was spent at Trickum Middle School where he first served as a special education teacher, a general education teacher, and finally as an assistant principal before routing back to Trickum 13 years later where he now serves as the principal. After leaving Trickum in 2012, Mitch served briefly as an assistant principal at Hopkins Elementary before being named principal of Henderson Mill Elementary School in the DeKalb County School District. During his tenure, Henderson Mill was recognized as the first STEAM-certified school in the State of Georgia, a Beating the Odds School by the State DOE, and Mitch, himself, was recognized by the Atlanta Families Award for Excellence in Education in the area of School Leadership. Following a four-and-a-half year tenure there, Mitch moved with his family to Quito, Ecuador where he served as the Director of Language and Learning Services, leading a team to support PK-12th grade special needs students as well as those working to acquire the English language. In June of 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, Mitch and his family moved back to the Atlanta area where he served as the principal of Baggett Elementary School. For 5 school years, Mitch championed the values of engaged learning through STEAM, formed a school culture that was second-to-none, and led the effort to provide experiences to students well beyond those of a typical elementary school. Mitch has presented at various conferences across the State of Georgia often about the benefits of purposeful, integrated learning through STEM/STEAM and on engaging at-risk youth through powerful programs and activities. Mitch transitioned back to what he calls his first home

as an educator, Trickum Middle School, in the summer of 2025 where he is working to cultivate community and ensure authentic engagement for all.

Carmen Moses

*Afterschool Site Director
Jessye Norman School of the Arts
Richmond County*

Carmen Moses is a multimedia artist and arts administrator based in Augusta, GA, currently serving as the Afterschool Site Director at the Jessye Norman School of the Arts (JNSA). With eight years of experience at JNSA, Carmen bridges the gap between creative practice and program leadership, ensuring high-quality arts access for local youth. Since earning a BFA in 2018, Carmen has maintained a diverse studio practice specializing in printmaking, drawing, and woodworking, while also exploring digital art, painting, and mixed media collage. This broad technical expertise has been showcased through various exhibitions, artist talks, and presentations throughout the region. As a panelist, Carmen brings a unique "boots-on-the-ground" perspective, combining years of non-profit operational expertise with a deep, multifaceted understanding of the creative process.

Gwendolyn Jackson Napier

*Storyteller and Teaching Artist
Fulton County*

Gwendolyn J. Napier – aka “Miss LuvDrop”. Native of Atlanta, Georgia. Retired Educator from Fulton County Schools. Founder of LuvDrop Productions - The “Heart of Storytelling” sharing One Story at a Time. Fun Educational Entertainer, Storyteller, Singer, Poet, Drummer, Workshop Facilitator and more. She has been performing as a Storytelling Artist for over 16 years. Performing and Teaching Artist for the Georgia Council Of the Arts Registry. Performing Year-Round Storytelling Artist for the Wrens Nest House Museum in Atlanta, and an Atlanta Ambassador for the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Children. She has participated in many Venues celebrating Juneteenth as the Historic Portrayal of Harriet Ross Tubman in “The Annual Atlanta Parade” for the last 8 years, Clarkston Georgia Juneteenth Events including Schools, Churches, Libraries, Performing Arts Theatre, Conferences and Festivals. Miss Napier has portrayed many historic Women in History as Harriet Tubman, Bessie Coleman, Mahalia Jackson, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Shirley Chisholm and others. Member of Kuumba Storytellers of Georgia, National Associations of BlackStorytellers, Inc. including the Adopt-A- Tellers Program, Georgia Storytelling Network, and a Board Member of the National Storytelling Network.

Morgan Whitely

*Dance Student at Howard University
Chatham County*

Morgan Whitely is a sophomore at Howard University, where she is pursuing a degree in Criminology with a minor in Dance on the pre-law track. Originally from Savannah, Georgia, she began her academic journey at Savannah Technical College, earning a Technical Certificate of Credit before continuing her studies at Howard. Morgan brings a strong foundation in the arts, with over a decade of dance training in jazz/commercial, tap, ballet, pointe, and hip-hop. Her artistic experience also includes theater, and her time at Savannah Arts Academy further deepened her appreciation for arts education and its impact on young people. With meaningful ties to the Savannah community and a lifelong engagement in the arts, Morgan is committed to supporting access to creative opportunities. She is particularly interested in contributing to initiatives that expand arts education and strengthen communities through the arts.

Elizabeth Pond

*Performing Arts Guild Facilitator/Book Festival Facilitator
Okefenokee Heritage Center
Ware County*

Elizabeth is a recent transplant to Ware County, having spent the majority of her adult life in metro Atlanta. Following her Graduation from James Madison University, Elizabeth moved to Atlanta and quickly became a director and actor with Neighborhood Playhouse, working closely with Executive Artistic Director Sondra Nelson. In addition to NP, she has performed and directed throughout the Atlanta area, including Actor's Express, Curtain Call Youth Players, Roswell Village Playhouse, Agnes Scott College, and with her own non-profit theater company, Different Drum Theatrics. Elizabeth has over thirty years of experience as a theatre arts instructor, having taught in public high school, homeschool consortia, and adult continuing education. She currently works as a freelance journalist and columnist while pursuing opportunities to increase exposure to the arts in southeast Georgia.