Speaker Bios

Josh Cunningham
Josh Cunningham is a senior education policy specialist for the National Conference of State Legislatures. He oversees NCSL's work on school choice and charter school policy.

Josh previously worked as a legislative aide for Colorado State Rep. Jack Pommer providing assistance on the annual long budget bill and school finance act. He was also the President and co-founder of Colorado Taxpayers for Effective Fiscal Policy, a Colorado-based issue committee dedicated to strengthening the role of the state legislature in setting state fiscal policy.

Josh holds a B.S. in Marketing from Metropolitan State University of Denver and a Master in Public Administration from the University of Colorado Denver.

Joel Hand
Joel is a 1995 graduate of Indiana University School of Law and a 1992 graduate of DePauw University with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a minor in Secondary Education. Joel is a private, solo practitioner with offices in Indianapolis and Fishers, Indiana. Currently, Joel also serves as General Counsel and legislative lobbyist for the Indiana Coalition for Public Education where he has helped lead the efforts to oppose legislation which would siphon public tax dollars away from public schools and redirect them to private schools and for-profit charter operators. Joel also authored an Amicus Brief in the Indiana school voucher lawsuit, Meredith v. Daniels in 2011.

Previously, Joel worked as the Director of Legislative and Governmental Affairs for the Indiana Department of Public Instruction from 2007 to 2009 and on the Department’s legal staff from 1995 through 1996. Joel also worked for more than a decade as a deputy prosecuting attorney in Marion, Hamilton and Carroll Counties during which time he tried in excess of 80 jury trials including a Capital Murder case.

For his efforts, Joel has received numerous awards and recognitions including the Indiana Department of Education “Bellringer Award”, the 2007 M.A.D.D. National Prosecutor of the Year Award, and the 2005 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Public Service Award. Joel has also served as a faculty member for numerous continuing legal education programs in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Tennessee and at the National Advocacy Center in South Carolina.

Leslie Hiner
Leslie Hiner is Vice President of Programs at EdChoice. She directs the organization’s educational programs and collaboration with policymakers, community leaders, and partner organizations. A thirty year advocate of educational freedom, her goal is to advance school choice for all children, improving educational outcomes and preserving individual liberty.

Leslie is an appointee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Indiana State Advisory Committee and the Indianapolis City-County Ethics Commission. She also serves on the Schools That Can National Advisory Board.

Hiner is an attorney with extensive state legislative and executive branch experience. She was the first woman chief of staff to the Speaker of the House, counsel to the Senate President Pro Tempore, and
General Counsel/Elections Deputy to the Secretary of State in Indiana. She is also a former small business owner, and former litigator in private practice.

Leslie earned her J.D. from the University of Akron School of Law, her B.A. from the College of Wooster, and attended Rostad Teachers College in Sweden where she was a student teacher in grades 2 and 3.

Julie Pelegrin
Julie Pelegrin is a deputy director with the Office of Legislative Legal Services for the Colorado state General Assembly. She has worked with the Office for 25 years drafting legislation pertaining to education law. In addition to drafting and advising legislators, Julie now focuses on improving legislator education programs and materials.

Julie graduated from the University of Denver in 1986 with a bachelor's degree in mass communications and public affairs. She went on to graduate from the University of Denver College of Law in 1989.

Julie is currently a member of the NCSL International Education Comparison study group.