



# WOMEN LEADERS of Culturally Responsive Education

## What is Culturally Responsive Education (CRE)?

The Women Leaders of Culturally Responsive Education program celebrates the women in our schools who are making positive impacts in their classrooms and workspaces. At its core, Culturally Responsive Education focuses on nurturing relationships and improving understanding among both student and adult populations.

In honor of Women's History Month this March, help us recognize the women who are enriching our schools, empowering others and building communities based on respect.



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*Need support or want to learn more?*

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Visit our website: [www.NorthwestEd.org/services/cre/](http://www.NorthwestEd.org/services/cre/)

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**Olivia (Liv) Akerly**  
Second-grade Teacher, Kingsley Elementary School  
Kingsley Area Schools

Olivia (Liv) Akerly, a second-grade teacher at Kingsley Elementary, cultivates a warm classroom environment where every student feels seen, heard and valued. She prioritizes getting to know each of her students as individuals, recognizing that their unique backgrounds and lived experiences are strengths to be celebrated and integrated into the learning process.”

Liv is a reflective practitioner who continuously seeks ways to refine her teaching methods and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all her students. Her dedication to professional growth, including active participation in local and regional cultural events, allows her to enrich her curriculum and broaden her students’ horizons.



**Rachel Anderson**  
Principal, Benzie Academy  
Benzie Central Schools

As principal of Benzie Academy, Rachel Anderson consistently demonstrates exceptional compassion and a deep commitment to serving all students. Her dedication to cultural responsiveness is evident in her ongoing professional development and her impactful work as a Homeless Liaison across multiple districts.

Notably, when a school incident occurred, she collaborated to implement restorative practices, facilitating crucial conversations with families and students. She transformed the situation into a valuable teachable moment, showcasing her ability to address complex issues with sensitivity and expertise.

Rachel’s unwavering support ensures all students feel valued and supported, making her a truly exemplary educator.



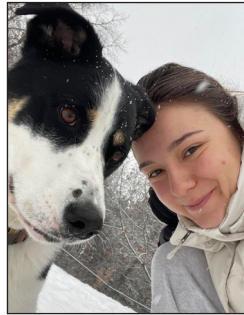
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**Megan Armstrong**  
Nutrition Facilitator  
Northwest Education Services

As the nutrition facilitator for North Ed, Megan Armstrong demonstrates a strong commitment to cultural understanding and student well-being through her work. Through SNAP-ED programming, she integrates world perspective into nutritional education.

She actively promotes welcoming environments, addressing weight-based discrimination and supporting classroom cultures that foster body positivity. Megan has established collaborative relationships with Indigenous community leaders, integrating traditional knowledge into school garden programs.

This partnership has not only enriched the educational experience for students but also facilitated a deeper understanding of Indigenous practices and perspectives. Megan's professional development, coupled with her dedication to community engagement, positions her well as a champion for holistic student growth.



**Cassie Fasel**  
Executive Administrative Assistant, Special Education  
Northwest Education Services

An invaluable contributor to North Ed's CREG and Celebrations subcommittee, Cassie Fasel also serves as North Ed's executive administrative assistant for Special Education. Her meticulous administrative support and planning are essential, while her active and engaged participation in CREG events fosters meaningful dialogue.

Her creative problem-solving and dedication to removing barriers ensure full participation across the organization. Cassie excels at identifying and sharing relevant resources to empower colleagues. She consistently takes initiative, coordinating meeting spaces, securing insightful speakers and crafting thoughtful agendas, all while fostering an atmosphere of open dialogue.

Beyond logistics, Cassie's genuine vulnerability and commitment to personal growth inspire others.



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**Kris Galoci**  
Science Teacher  
Greenspire School

Kris Galoci has an unwavering commitment to fostering cultural awareness, empathy and relationships as a science teacher for The Greenspire School. She is constantly helping students understand that every individual has unique needs and perspectives, encouraging them to embrace each other with respect and compassion.

Through her work in organizing Community Connections she partnered with the local Indigenous tribe to bring their culture into the classroom. She provides students with meaningful opportunities to learn about and appreciate different cultures.

Kris doesn't just teach about cultural responsiveness—she models it in every aspect of her work. Her dedication to creating a welcoming and respectful environment makes her a standout educator and a true role model for all.



**Kristin Goethals**  
Principal, Kingsley Elementary  
Kingsley Area Schools

Kingsley Elementary Principal Kristin Goethals champions a truly welcoming environment. She understands and celebrates the unique abilities of each student and staff member, providing tailored support to ensure everyone can thrive.

Kristin's leadership fosters a strong, supportive culture where everyone feels seen and respected for who they are. Her commitment to putting kids first is evident in her dedication to understanding each student's specific needs and supporting their individual growth.

She extends this same respect to her staff, creating a positive and supportive school community. Her approach fosters stronger relationships and empowers everyone to reach their full potential.



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**Carol Greilick**  
Assistant Superintendent, Special Education  
Northwest Education Services

Carol Greilick is an advocate for disability justice in her role as assistant superintendent of Special Education for North Ed. As an active member of the Culturally Responsive Education Group, Carol is constantly striving to develop a school culture that recognizes and responds to the unique needs and perspectives of all students and staff.

Carol is an advisor for the Parent Advisory Committee, and is always working to improve accessibility and to ensure the best level of support is provided to students.

Carol shows up to work every day with passion, ready to put people first, and as an example of what it looks like to lead with compassion for others. She is a dedicated champion for students and their families, and an invaluable resource for her fellow educators and colleagues.



**Brooke Juday**  
Farm to School Program Coordinator  
Northwest Education Services

In her capacity as the Farm to School coordinator at North Ed, Brooke Juday incorporates unique cultural perspectives into her gardening lessons and work with students. She honors where food comes from and curates opportunities for students to experience produce that may be different from what they are used to eating at home.

She works with local community farms to coordinate pop-up farmer's markets where students can buy produce and baked goods from local farmers and bakeries to support our local community. Brooke supports fairness for all students and provides them equal funding to buy something at the farmer's markets, ensuring all students have the ability to fully participate.

Brooke's passion for supporting students through hands-on learning and her ability to build connections with the local community make her an excellent resource for school districts regionally.



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**Lisa Klepper**  
Supervisor, Creekside School  
Northwest Education Services

Creekside School Supervisor Lisa Klepper is being recognized for the second year in a row for her continuous work in Culturally Responsive Education and her exceptional student-centered leadership. Her unwavering dedication to meeting each student's unique needs is truly inspiring.

Lisa's steadfast reliability and flexibility, coupled with her focus on continuous improvement, elevate the entire center-based program. She champions research-based best practices, empowering staff to create a supportive and welcoming environment.

Lisa cultivates a strong sense of community, fostering leadership and increasing staff competency. Her commitment to individualized student support and professional growth strengthens the program and ensures every student thrives. Lisa leads with heart and a positive, caring approach, always wanting what is best for her students and staff.



**Coreene Kreiser**  
High School Assistant Principal  
Greenspire School

Coreene Kreiser is the high school assistant principal at the Greenspire School. Coreene has dedicated herself to cultivating a deeply supportive environment through her work developing the school's foundational systems, processes and core values.

Her proactive leadership is evident in her swift and thoughtful response to community concerns, such as the strategic renaming of her school's Special Education department to Inclusive Education ("InEd"), demonstrating a genuine commitment to culturally responsive practices.

Coreene's dedication extends beyond administrative duties; she consistently demonstrates an unwavering commitment to each student's success. Even when faced with challenging situations, she approaches every student with empathy, striving to understand how she can best support their unique needs.



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**Laurie Lijewski**  
Fifth-grade Teacher, Blair Elementary  
Traverse City Area Public Schools

Laurie Lijewski is a 5th grade teacher at Blair Elementary School for Traverse City Area Public Schools. This year, she empowered her 5th graders to lead engaging Monday morning assemblies, setting a positive tone for the week.

Laurie skillfully fosters a dynamic learning environment and expands her students' understanding of the world by incorporating a wide array of experiences into the school curriculum. With speakers, food tastings and different cultural awareness events, Laurie brings learning to life.

Prior to the school year, she helped facilitate a parent survey to ensure the school's programs reflected the diverse backgrounds of its student body. Her efforts have created a lively and engaging atmosphere at Blair Elementary.



**Laura Miller**  
School Social Worker, North Ed Career Tech  
Northwest Education Services

Laura Miller's dedication to supporting all students as the social worker at North Ed's Career Tech building makes her highly deserving of this recognition. Laura has launched several initiatives to foster awareness of students with diverse backgrounds and unique needs, and she remains a strong advocate who fights to ensure student voices are heard.

Laura also creates displays that celebrate a variety of perspectives to broaden student understanding and enrich their learning experiences. Her partnership with Harvard's "Making Caring Common" study provides valuable data on student connectedness, further enabling targeted support strategies where they are needed most.

Laura's tireless efforts create a welcoming environment where all students can be seen and supported to ensure they reach their full potential.



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**Bea Moreno**  
Bilingual Liaison  
Suttons Bay Public Schools

Bea Moreno has made a significant impact as a leader in Culturally Responsive Education. As Suttons Bay Public Schools' bilingual liaison, she is instrumental in supporting Hispanic heritage students and families. Bea provides crucial translation services, ensuring clear communication and academic access.

She advocates tirelessly for students, empowering them to succeed. Beyond academics, Bea fosters cultural awareness by celebrating Hispanic heritage through events like folk dances and quinceañeras, creating a positive environment where students feel valued.

She also prioritizes the social and emotional well-being of students, connecting them and their families to vital support networks and resources. Bea's dedication strengthens the school-home partnership, making her an exemplary leader and an invaluable advocate.



**Ashley Nuño**  
Teacher, Migrant Education Program  
Northwest Education Services

As a teacher in North Ed's Migrant Education program, Ashley Nuno is dedicated to forging deep, meaningful connections with her students. She demonstrates a remarkable ability to understand and appreciate the unique cultural backgrounds each student brings to the classroom, actively integrating these diverse perspectives into her teaching.

Ashley prioritizes building strong relationships and taking the time to truly know her students as individuals. During the Migrant Summer School program, her genuine care is evident, as she demonstrates a deep understanding of each student's culture, family dynamics and academic aspirations.

Ashley's commitment extends beyond the classroom; she is a steadfast advocate for her students, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met.



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**Heidi Schmidt**  
Teacher, Bridgeway Program  
Northwest Education Services

As a teacher of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder at Bridgeway, Heidi Schmidt makes a profound difference in the lives of those around her. She is deeply committed to ensuring equitable access to a quality education and the chance for every student to reach their full potential.

Even amidst staffing shortages, she prioritizes individual learning needs with remarkable patience and understanding. Recognizing the importance of understanding her students' unique backgrounds and circumstances, Heidi provides tailored support. By adapting her approach based on individual student behaviors, she ensures all students receive the encouragement and resources they need to thrive.

She excels at building strong, supportive relationships that foster a sense of community and empower student growth.



**Lauren Scanlon**  
School Social Worker  
Northwest Education Services

Lauren Scanlon serves multiple schools as a social worker for North Ed. She is a skilled ally, and is not afraid to stand up to teachers and administrators to advocate for students who are not being treated with respect. She is a champion for the individual and unique learning needs of all students.

Lauren embodies a core value of inclusion and is passionate that all students be treated with the same understanding and awareness. She is one of the brave colleagues who will speak up when she knows students are not being treated fairly, instead of letting it go and following a path of lesser resistance.

Her dedication to ensuring every student feels valued and supported makes her a vital advocate within the school community.



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**Staci Short**  
Principal, Kalkaska High School  
Kalkaska Public Schools

Staci Short is the high school principal for Kalkaska Public Schools. Staci cultivates a welcoming, high-expectation environment where every student's voice is heard, especially those often unheard. Her genuine care for student well-being is evident in everything she does.

Staci supported the formation of a student group, providing a platform for those who might otherwise lack a voice. This group's recognition at a board of education meeting was a testament to her dedication.

Staci fosters cultural awareness throughout the school, from hallway visuals to classroom activities. She builds strong connections with both students and parents, advocating for their needs and helping them navigate academic and personal challenges. Her advocacy for students and families ensures understanding, acceptance and success for all, and her efforts have contributed to a positive and welcoming atmosphere at Kalkaska High School.



**Amy Strom**  
Coordinator, Early On Program  
Northwest Education Services

Amy Strom is an Early On coordinator for Northwest Education Services. Her kindness, compassion and inclusive spirit creates a welcoming environment for everyone. Amy champions understanding and embracing the diverse cultures within the Early On program's families.

She skillfully guides staff to broaden their perspectives through engaging trainings and thoughtful one-on-one conversations. Amy's dedication to cultural awareness strengthens the program's ability to serve the families within our region effectively and respectfully, fostering a true sense of community.

Her efforts empower staff to connect authentically with families from all backgrounds, enriching the Early On experience for everyone.



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**Ashley Troy**  
Director of Teaching and Learning  
Northwest Education Services

Ashley Troy is the director of teaching and learning at Northwest Education Services and serves on the North Ed Culturally Responsive Education Group. As a regional leader dedicated to the practice of Culturally Responsive Education, this is the second year Ashley is being recognized for her continued efforts.

Ashley passionately educates districts on the importance of recognizing new perspectives and ensuring all voices are heard. She consistently guides school leaders and educators toward fostering welcoming environments for all students, staff and community members.

Committed to her own professional growth, she also champions learning for her team and colleagues at North Ed. When challenging conversations arise, Ashley's deep understanding of CRE and her ability to build positive connections make her an invaluable resource.



**Samantha TwoCrow**  
Director of Indigenous Education  
Suttons Bay Public Schools

As the Indigenous Education Director at Suttons Bay Public Schools, Samantha TwoCrow serves a very diverse student population, including Native American and Native Alaskan students. Samantha ensures that Indigenous students receive the support they need to succeed in all areas.

She works tirelessly to expand the reach of the Indigenous Education Program, directs the Indigenous Education Program Parent Committee, spearheads various events that honor Indigenous heritage and provides professional development for staff. Samantha is always looking for opportunities for Indigenous students to share their cultural heritage and to increase cultural identity and awareness.

Her gift of art, her warm and caring nature, and her constant smile have had immeasurable positive impacts on the school community.



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**Michele VanKleek**  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consultant  
Northwest Education Services

Michele VanKleek is a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consultant with Northwest Education Services as well as a dedicated member of the CREG Celebrations Subcommittee. Michelle's creative thinking and activism are instrumental in breaking down barriers for people with disabilities, and she never turns down the opportunity to grow and learn through a culturally responsive lens.

From facilitating engaging discussions to contributing insightful content and participating in learning opportunities, Michele consistently elevates efforts that strengthen the district's culture and interpersonal relationships.

Her leadership on a statewide committee supporting students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing further demonstrates her exceptional commitment to creating opportunities for all.



**Jessica Vitale**  
Special Education and Student Support Specialist  
Leelanau Montessori

Leelanau Montessori's Jessica Vitale, a Special Education and Student Support Specialist, cultivates a joyful and welcoming learning environment, honoring each student's unique gifts and perspectives. Reflecting Dr. Montessori's vision of a peaceful world through education, Jessica thoughtfully connects learning to students' cultures and interests.

Her commitment to intercultural understanding is evident in her participation and pursuit of training related to the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Jessica artfully integrates student interests and needs into meaningful projects, building skills and fostering excitement, connection and enthusiasm.

She creates unique opportunities for students to connect their education to the world around them and each other, building a strong sense of community based on mutual understanding and relationships.



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**Jessica Ziecina**  
Early Childhood Services  
Northwest Education Services

Jessica is part of the Early Childhood Services team at North Ed and a fierce advocate for young children and their families. Jessica is considered extremely supportive and is a huge problem solver who has been an asset since she joined the team.

Always ready to think through creative solutions to challenging situations, Jessica keeps her focus on fairness, equity and doing what is best for the children and families she serves.

Jessica is not afraid to dig in and let her voice be heard in support of lifting up the rights of families and doing so in a way that protects the inherent dignity of each person she works with. Her energy, enthusiasm and upbeat attitude make Jessica an ideal ally for families navigating the early childhood system.



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