

# Blue Education Panel

Introduction to Experiential Educational Resources and Organizations  
9:20 a.m.



## Ben Moon: Moderator

Groton Public Schools

Director of STEM and Magnet Programs, K-5



## Biography

Ben has over 20 years of experience in public education serving as a classroom teacher, STEM Specialist, and now district administrator. In addition to working with students, Ben has provided professional development, built strong partnerships with community organizations, and created numerous programs that include experiential learning.

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## Andrew Ely

Project Oceanology

Executive Director



## Biography

Andrew developed his interest in the marine environment while studying Marine Affairs at the University of Rhode Island in the early 1990's. He spent a semester during this period at Sea Education Association, sailing and conducting research on oil pollution aboard the S.S.V. Westward in the Caribbean Sea. This experience led him to pursue a career in the United States Coast Guard. After 28 years of service focused on search and rescue, environmental protection, and interagency operations Andrew joined the Project Oceanology team in January of 2022. He brings leadership, program management, and education experience to the team. Andrew received his M.S. from the National Graduate School in Quality Systems Management, M.A. from the Naval War College in National Security and Strategic Studies, M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Connecticut, and B.A. in History and Social Science from Thomas Edison State University.

In his spare time, Andrew enjoys spending time with his family, sailing, camping, and volunteering in the community.

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## Amy Gollenberg

Director of School Programs

Mystic Aquarium



## Biography

Amy Gollenberg became the Director of School Programs for Mystic Aquarium in 2015. She works closely with teachers and education leaders in both CT and RI while expanding on Mystic Aquarium's school programming and their grant supports. Prior to that, she was the Science Manager for a high school STEM program of the CT RESC Alliance EdAdvance. Amy has enjoyed over 25 years of teaching and managing education in the ocean realm. She started out in the field as an informal educator at Dolphin Research Center in the Florida Keys, eventually became their Director of Education. She moved to Hawai'i Island to be the Education Manager for Dolphin Quest, helping to inspire and teach locals, tourists, and school children. Amy obtained a B.S. in Natural Resources and Marine Ecology from Cornell University and spent summer semesters at Shoals Marine Laboratory on Appledore Island, Maine. Throughout her career, Amy has participated in field research in the Everglades, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and cetacean studies in Florida, Hawai'i, and Japan.

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## Megan Strand

New England Science & Sailing

Managing Director of Program Administration



## Biography

Megan is the Managing Director of Program Administration with New England Science & Sailing. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Coastal Studies (now Marine Science) from the University of Connecticut and a master's in environmental education from Southern Connecticut State University. She also has her United States Coast Guard 100 Ton Captains License, is an ACA Coastal Kayak Level II Instructor, and is a Connecticut certified school teacher in Biology for 7-12th grade.

Megan has worked in informal education for 18 years with a primary focus on outdoor experiential

programs aimed on getting students out on the water.

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## Charles Mulligan

The Sound School  
Science Instructor



## Biography

Originally from Florida, I got my start in Science as a hard clam aquaculture scientist with the University of Florida. Before that, while working on my MS I spent two years as an NSF-GK12 fellow developing high school inquire-based science curriculum. Since jumping to education in 2009 I've worked in three different districts between Florida and Connecticut working hard to blend the best of research with educational outreach as I firmly believe for last knowledge to stick, kids have to see it in action and answer the age old question, when will this matter? I have a passion for connecting students to the environment around them and also to the folks in the community who study and care about that same environment. I've been at Sound for the past 6 years, teaching AquaScience, ECE Oceanography and spearheading an after school research and outreach Program (Environmental Justice Program). After all these years, one of the biggest things I will continue to take the most pride in is my students success post high school in whichever field they pursue!

# Workforce Development Panel

Industry Experts Discuss Workforce Needs and Desired Skills

10:00 a.m.

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## R.T. Brown: Moderator

Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition  
Chair



### Biography

R.T. Hamilton Brown is the Deputy Director of the Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (seCTer) and Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition Chair. In the field of entrepreneurship development he's been the primary author / architect of a US EDA Build to Scale Capital Challenge award to create an angel seed fund, won awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) for entrepreneur ecosystem creation, started micro-lending operations, served as an advisor for IEDC's new Entrepreneur Academy, and is a certified Ice House Entrepreneurship Facilitator. At seCTer, he designed the small business grant program seCTerRise and the Economic Impact Grants. He has a B.A. in English from Fordham University (go Rams) and M.S. in Economic Development from the University of Southern Mississippi. He's passionate about regional economic development, education, the blue economy, sailing, and pickleball.

Please connect with R.T. if you would like to learn more or be part of CT's first Ocean Innovation Week in September, 2026.



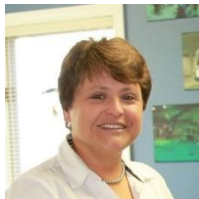
**Stefanie Montejano**  
General Dynamics Electric Boat  
Workforce Development Specialist  
**GENERAL DYNAMICS**  
Electric Boat

## Biography

Stefanie Montejano is a defense industry workforce development professional with a strong commitment to education and community engagement. Currently serving as a Workforce Development Specialist at General Dynamics Electric Boat (GDEB), Stefanie leads initiatives to enhance employment opportunities by addressing barriers such as language, transportation, and childcare. She also collaborates on educational outreach projects to attract youth and under-employed adults to careers in the Maritime Industry and works closely with the Navy Talent Pipeline Program, sharing best practices for recruitment, onboarding and retention.

Stefanie's extensive background in education, coupled with her experience in program development, makes her a valuable asset in fostering workforce skills and opportunities within her community.

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**Maria Hanna**  
Survival Systems  
President/CEO



## Biography

Prior to her appointment as President and CEO in 2007, Ms. Hanna served as the Executive Director for Survival Systems USA since 1999. Responsible for ensuring operational readiness across 7 locations, she has presented extensively at various venues in over 40 states for various aviation and renewables clients. She has conducted instructor and student training around the world and has consulted as a Subject Matter Expert in various liability suits related to training preparedness as well as R&D programs with the Department of Defense and various civilian spaceflight agencies. Most recent efforts include underwater egress, surface water survival and offshore wind training and equipment as well as workforce development for the offshore wind industry. Ms. Hanna holds a BS in Nuclear Engineering and an MBA from the Pennsylvania State University. She is certified as a private pilot and holds Instructor Trainer qualifications across multiple disciplines.

Maria has served on the board for the Boys & Girls Club of Southeastern Connecticut. She currently sits on the board for the Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (seCTer) – the region's designated private, non-profit Economic Development Organization that supports economic development and diversification within

Southeaster Connecticut. She also sits on the board for the Connecticut Wind Collaborative – a pivotal component of Connecticut’s Offshore Wind Strategic Roadmap poised to catalyze growth, attract investment and foster innovation across Connecticut. Maria is a past recipient of the Ballast Award presented by the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, acknowledging her long standing support of the region.

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## **Rebekah Coffey**

Marine Trades Association  
Executive Director



### **Biography**

Rebekah Coffey serves as Executive Director of the Connecticut Marine Trades Association, a role she began in August. Since stepping into the position, she successfully organized and led the Hartford Boat Show at Mohegan Sun.

Prior to CMTA, Rebekah spent five years with MarineMax in Westbrook, CT and Rhode Island, where she served as Sales & Marketing Coordinator and Operations & Service Coordinator. She is also an active member of the Newport Maritime Alliance, supporting initiatives that strengthen the regional boating community. Earlier in her career, she was the School Age Program Director at the Valley Shore YMCA, focusing on youth development and community engagement.

In her free time, Rebekah enjoys coastal living with her husband Eric, their daughters Camryn and Kylie, and their two dogs. As a family, they love exploring the Long Island Sound and creating lasting memories on the water.

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## **Michael O'Connor**

Connecticut Port Authority  
Executive Director



### **Biography**

Michael J. O'Connor, Executive Director of the Connecticut Port Authority, is a longtime Connecticut resident and Navy veteran, committed to growing the maritime economy on Connecticut’s coastline.

Prior to joining the Connecticut Port Authority, O'Connor completed a 32-year career in commercial nuclear power, most recently as the vice president at Dominion Energy's Millstone Nuclear Power Station in Waterford, Connecticut. He has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of New Haven and a master's degree in business management from the University of Connecticut. O'Connor's work in nuclear started in the United States Navy where he completed a 10-year enlistment and attained the rank of chief petty officer.

O'Connor is an elected member of the town of Bozrah's Board of Finance and has been the chairman for 26 years. He is vice chair of the Mitchell College Board of Trustees and is a past member of the Southeastern Connecticut Water Authority.

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## Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition

[www.ctblueeconomy.org](http://www.ctblueeconomy.org)

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