



## What Can States Do to Ensure Young Children Thrive?

### Speaker Bios

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**Elizabeth Gaines** is the founder and chief executive officer of Children’s Funding Project. Her career began with leading after-school and community-based youth programs at the Atwood Community Center in Madison, Wis. She later served as youth policy analyst for Citizens for Missouri’s Children, followed by 13 years at the Forum for Youth Investment, where she helped policy leaders develop tools and techniques to improve their use of data, increase their policy alignment and more efficiently apply resources for greater impact. Gaines is also the executive director of Children’s Funding Accelerator, the advocacy arm of Children’s Funding Project. Since 2018, Gaines has guided Children’s Funding Project through over 40 projects with national networks, state and local governments, advocates, and youth leaders. A native of St. Louis, she attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison and currently resides in Washington, D.C. E-mail: [elizabeth@childrensfundingproject.org](mailto:elizabeth@childrensfundingproject.org).

**Alethea Gomez** is the director of programs and initiatives at Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC). EPIC is a group of prestigious business executives partnering to invest in children. Gomez has worked in both early education and business for more than 15 years. Her undergraduate studies focused on Business Administration, Early Cognition and Development, and she completed her Masters in Life and Developmental Sciences at CU Denver’s Department of Human Development. She also holds several licensures in Colorado and continues to pursue opportunities to deepen her experience and knowledge of the field. E-mail: [alethea@coloradoepic.org](mailto:alethea@coloradoepic.org).

**Marisa A. Gullicksrud**, LCSW, is an experienced community leader and social worker, trained at Columbia University’s School of Social Work. She has special expertise working with infants, children adolescents and families who have mental health issues, involvement with child welfare or the juvenile justice system. She is the state clinical director of the Child First Program for Invest in Kids. Prior to her employment with Invest in Kids, she was program director of community based service and day treatment at Denver Children’s Home from 2016-2021. Gullicksrud recently completed the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce’s Leadership Denver Program in October 2020 where she used her social work background to contribute to city wide solutions that address the stigma around mental health and suicide prevention efforts. E-mail: [mgullicksrud@iik.org](mailto:mgullicksrud@iik.org).

**Carlise King** is the executive director of the Early Childhood Data Collaborative at Child Trends, which promotes policies and practices that support the development and use of coordinated early childhood data across departments of education, social services, and public health to guide policy. King regularly convenes experts from states and national and technical assistance groups to communicate effective strategies for data integration and use of data to support policy. She brings years of experience analyzing early childhood services to improve policies and coordinate services for vulnerable young children. King has over 16 years of experience



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conducting state and national level research on early childhood issues and examining the impact of state and federal policies on parents' access to child care services, licensed child care supply, child care costs and the child care workforce. E-mail: [cking@childtrends.org](mailto:cking@childtrends.org).

**Tom Massey** is a co-chair of the executive subcommittee of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission in Colorado. Massey is also deputy executive director and policy communications and administration office director at the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing. Prior to coming to the Department, Massey served as a state legislator representing Colorado House District 60 for eight years. He was a member of the Health and Environment Committee and chaired the House Education Committee. E-mail: [tom.massey@state.co.us](mailto:tom.massey@state.co.us).

**Melissa Merrick**, Ph.D., is president and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America, the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit organization dedicated to the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect. She has more than 20 years of clinical, research and leadership experience related to the etiology, course and prevention of child abuse and neglect. Previously, Merrick was a senior epidemiologist at the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Merrick successfully leverages her significant clinical and research experiences to communicate and disseminate the critical public health importance of preventing early adversity to key stakeholders with diverse priorities, backgrounds, and knowledge, including legislators, business and civic leaders, and members of the academic and medical communities. Merrick received her BA in psychology, magna cum laude, from the University of Pennsylvania, and her master's and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology from the San Diego State University/University of California, San Diego, joint doctoral program in clinical psychology, where she served as a program coordinator for the San Diego site of the Longitudinal Studies on Child Abuse and Neglect consortium. E-mail: [mmerrick@preventchildabuse.org](mailto:mmerrick@preventchildabuse.org).

**Allison Mosqueda**, MS, RN, has dedicated her nursing career to improving maternal and child population health. Allison worked in the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program from 2008 to 2015 providing community health nursing services in metro Denver. She has worked with Invest in Kids since 2015 as a nurse consultant and is currently the NFP program director. She has observed the systemic inequities that exist for parents and children within Colorado and is committed to NFP being a partner within communities to build strong foundations for families. Mosqueda values time with her family and looks for any opportunity to spend time outdoors; snowboarding, hiking, or working in the garden. E-mail: [AMosqueda@iik.org](mailto:AMosqueda@iik.org).

**Dawn Odean** is the director of the Colorado Universal Preschool Program housed within the new Colorado Department of Early Childhood. Odean has worked for Jeffco Public Schools since 2001, most recently serving as the district's executive director of early learning. Over the course of her 20-year career in public education, Odean has also served as a director of early learning, an elementary principal, an instructional coach, and a classroom teacher. E-mail: [dawn.odean@state.co.us](mailto:dawn.odean@state.co.us).



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**Heather Rouse**, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of Human Development and Family Studies with Iowa State University and director of I2D2, Iowa's Integrated Data System for Decision-Making. Rouse specializes in research impacting child and family policy, including early childhood education, child welfare and homelessness, and access to health care, with nearly two decades of experience studying and developing integrated data systems for policy and research. She is a representative on the National ECIDS Leadership Workgroup on Stakeholder Engagement her work has been nationally recognized in the Health Research Services Administration Community of Practice Data Sharing and Use in Home Visiting Programs and Policy. Email: [hlrouse@iastate.edu](mailto:hlrouse@iastate.edu).

**Lisa Roy**, Ed.D., is the newly appointed executive director for the Colorado Department of Early Childhood. The Department will manage Colorado's new universal preschool program, serving 4-year-olds statewide starting in the summer of 2023. The department will also manage comprehensive programs and services for young children, families and early childhood professionals, utilizing a "one-stop shop" application process. Roy previously served as the director of program development for the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and as the executive director of early childhood education for Denver Public Schools. She has volunteered and worked in non-profit and government sectors supporting families with young children for over 30 years. E-mail: [lisa.roy@state.co.us](mailto:lisa.roy@state.co.us).

**Anna K. Shapiro**, Ph.D., is a research scientist at the University of Virginia, School of Education and Human Development. Her research focuses on the effects of early childhood programs and policies on young children's cognitive and socioemotional outcomes. She is particularly focused on the effects of early childhood programs on children with or at-risk for developing disabilities, and the role that early intervention can play in mitigating the effects of persistent academic and developmental delays for young children. She has also conducted work studying barriers to access to early education for marginalized families. Previously, she worked at the District of Columbia Public Schools. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Policy, Leadership and Innovation at the University of Michigan, her AM in Urban Education Policy from Brown University, and her BA in French and educational studies from Emory University. E-mail: [aks6q@virginia.edu](mailto:aks6q@virginia.edu).

**Representative Emily Sirota** represents House District 9 in the Colorado Legislature as a social worker and proud progressive Democrat with years of experience working in government and in her southeast Denver community. Before her election to the Colorado House of Representatives, Sirota helped run an early learning center in Denver. She received her B.A. in Political Science at Indiana University and received her Master of Social Work from the University of Denver. As a Representative for House District 9, Sirota has championed worker's rights, campaign finance reform, a healthy and vibrant public education system, environmental justice, progressive tax policy and fundamental reforms to our pillars of democracy. She is married to reporter David Sirota, and they are the proud parents of two young children and their dog, Monty. E-mail: [emily.sirota.house@state.co.us](mailto:emily.sirota.house@state.co.us).



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**Jennifer Stedron**, Ph.D., is executive director of Early Milestones Colorado, which she helped design and launch. Previously, she was senior program manager for Ascend at the Aspen Institute. She has also served as the executive director of Colorado's Early Childhood Leadership Commission and the policy director for Early Childhood in the Office of Lieutenant Governor Joe Garcia. In this capacity, she spearheaded the ECLC's work to establish Colorado's new Office of Early Childhood and led the grant application effort that resulted in Colorado's \$45 million Early Learning Challenge Fund award. Stedron has also managed bipartisan policy efforts in K-12 education and early childhood and for the National Conference of State Legislatures. She received her B.A. in history from Michigan State University and her Ph.D. in child clinical psychology with a specialty in developmental cognitive neuroscience from the University of Denver. Email: [jstedron@earlymilestones.org](mailto:jstedron@earlymilestones.org).

**Tim Storey** is the chief executive officer of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) with offices in Denver and Washington, D.C. Storey has spent the past 30 years working for and studying legislatures--specializing in the areas of elections, redistricting, legislative organization and leadership. During his tenure at NCSL, he has participated in, and led, more than two dozen, in-depth studies of legislative operations. And, he has consulted with, and conducted training for parliaments around the world. Storey staffed NCSL's Redistricting and Elections Committee for 20 years authoring numerous articles and papers on the topics of redistricting and elections. For two decades, he led NCSL's StateVote effort to collect and analyze state election results. He led NCSL's State Services Division prior to being hired as NCSL's third executive director in June 2019. Born and raised in western North Carolina, Tim attended Mars Hill College and received his MA from the University of Colorado. E-mail: [tim.storey@ncsl.org](mailto:tim.storey@ncsl.org).

**Albert Wat**, senior policy director at the Alliance for Early Success. There he leads a portfolio of state and national Alliance partnerships and investments focused on early learning, including prekindergarten, child care, and the education continuum from birth through third grade. He brings to the Alliance experience in state policies on literacy and social-emotional development, prekindergarten access and quality, learning standards, assessments, data systems, and alignment between early learning policies and practices and education reform initiatives, especially in the early elementary years. Previously he worked as a senior policy analyst in the education division of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and the research manager at Pre-K Now, an advocacy campaign at the Pew Center on the States, where he authored a number of policy reports, managed research activities for the initiative, and provided staff and states analysis and information about the latest prekindergarten and early education research and policy developments. Wat has a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in education from Stanford University, and a master's degree in education policy from George Washington University. E-mail: [awat@earllysuccess.org](mailto:awat@earllysuccess.org).

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