

# Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

**Amanda Petersen, Chair**

*Kansas State Department of Education*

**Nichelle Adams**

*Kansas Department for Children and Families*

**Jennifer Adhima**

*Project Eagle, Kansas Head Start Association*

**Marites Altuna**

*Kansas Deaf-Blind Project*

**Rachel Anno**

*Kansas Department for Children and Families*

**Mallory Arellano**

*Newman University*

**Emily Barnes**

*Barnes Child Care*

**Amanda Billings**

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**Paula Branizor**

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*Child Start*

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**Kelly Davydov**

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**Tabitha Ewing**

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**Jeremy Fite**

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**Crystal Henry**

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**Sheila Hermocillo**

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**Callie Hoffman**

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**Kim Kennedy**

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**Audra Kenneson**

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**Esther Kottwitz**

*USD 497 Lawrence*

**David Lindeman**

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**Amy Meek**

*Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund*

**Lucas Neece**

*City of Lindsborg*

**Patty Peschel**

*Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc.*

**Kate Roggenbaum**

Title V Delegate/Family Advisory Council

**Dannah Schatz**

*Russell Child Development Center*

**Lisa Schmidt**

*Women's Community Y Child Development Center*

**Cassandra Sines**

*Sines Virtual Assistant Service*

**Heather Staab**

*Kansas Department of Health and Environment*

**Cornelia Stevens**

*TOP Early Learning Centers*

**Jenny Welch Buller**

*KU Center for Public Partnerships and Research*

**Reva Wywadis**

*Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas*

## **Amanda Petersen, Chair**

*Kansas State Department of Education*



I am the Director of Early Childhood, Kansas State Department of Education, prior to coming to KSDE I worked in policy advocacy.

I am so excited that the Panel can help us build a state where every Kansan gets the chance to thrive – I have no doubt that together we can lead the world in the success of each student! Personal interests include enjoying a good cup of hot tea, spending time with my four-legged family members (dog Romeo, horse Polo), and projects around our new home in Lawrence with my husband Mat.

## **Nichelle Adams**

*Kansas Department for Children and Families*



I currently work as the Early Education and Child Care Services Manager for the Kansas Department of Children and Families (DCF). I have been with DCF for 15 years in various positions, including serving as a business analyst for our benefit eligibility system, staff development specialist for Economic and Environmental Services (EES) programs, and determined eligibility for EES human services programs. Prior to that I determined eligibility for most state medical programs that involved children. I was a home visitor for Early Head Start and Healthy Families in the past. I have also been a director at a child care center.

I will serve on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel as the representative of the state agency responsible for child care. DCF is the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) lead agency. The main focus of the CCDF funds is to increase the availability, affordability and quality of child care. The work we do with CCDF funds ultimately serves to help improve the lives of Kansas children and this is also the central role of the Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel. Helping children is my true passion.

I love oil painting, fishing, cooking and my family, including my husky

## **Jennifer Adhima**

*Project Eagle, Kansas Head Start Association*



I became the Executive Director of the Kansas Head Start Association (KHSa) in July 2021 after working for sixteen years in the early childhood field in Wyandotte County. KHSa's mission is to raise the advocacy voice of Head Start parents, programs, and partners through professional development, collaboration, and innovative leadership. Head Start programs across Kansas are committed to supporting quality early childhood services and interagency coordination within their communities, and KHSa works to support the early childhood system and enhance collaboration among early childhood partners in Kansas. As a macro-level social worker who believes wholeheartedly that the most effective way to make lasting change for children and families is through systems building, policy, and advocacy, I am honored to be part of the Recommendations Panel as the work we are doing will influence and shape policies and programs that will benefit all Kansas children. Outside of work, I enjoy spending time traveling and exploring new places with my spouse and daughter, being outdoors, listening to music, watching my daughter play tennis, and laughing with friends as often as possible.

## **Marites Altuna**

*Kansas Deaf-Blind Project*



I serve as the Director of the Kansas Deaf-Blind Project. Before my current position, I was an early interventionist and family service coordinator for children with special needs 0-3. I taught early childhood special education in an inclusive preschool setting and was a teacher of students with visual impairments providing direct services to children pre-K to 12th grade.

I have a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri - Kansas City in Speech and Hearing Science, and master's degrees in Early Childhood Special Education and Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Kansas and an endorsement in Teaching English as a Second Language. I obtained training in deaf-blindness from Utah State University and in visual impairments from Missouri State University. I am a member of organizations that support individuals with special needs. These include the National Family Association for the DeafBlind, Council for Exceptional Children, and Pediatric Cortical Visual Impairment Society.

I am affiliated with business organizations such as the Kansas City Diversity and Inclusion Consortium, Kansas City Kansas Women's Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association of Asian American Professionals. I serve as an ambassador for the KCK Chamber of Commerce, board member for the KC Blind All-Stars Foundation, and Diversity Inclusion Global Council member for the YMCA of Greater Kansas City.

It is an honor serving in the Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel representing the needs of all children and those who are blind, visually impaired, or with combined hearing and vision loss; as well as working in partnership with various organizations and agencies to best meet the needs of Kansas children and families.

## **Rachel Anno**

*Kansas Department for Children and Families*



Hello, I am the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) Program Manager with the Early Childhood Programs, Kansas Department for Children and Families. I started with the DCF in February 2018 as the QRIS Supports Manager and advanced to the position of QRIS Program Manager in October of 2019. In my position, I work closely within DCF, other State agencies, and partners within the field of early childhood and early childhood education. Last year I assisted in the update of Family Engagement Standards, and currently participate with the Workforce Development Advisory group. Along with this, I co-chair the Outreach and Recruitment committee within DCF as we work to support Families and Early Childhood Provider's needs within the State of Kansas.

I serve on the Recommendation Panel as a Representative for the Kansas Department for Children and Families as the QRIS Program Manager. The Kansas QRIS is known as Links to Quality and we work to support, recognize and improve quality within child care and early education. My goal with Links to Quality and the Recommendations Panel is to create increased access to quality early education for all Kansas children.

I have 2 adult sons (Cody and Ethan), a daughter-in-law (Julie), also a very active 5-year-old granddaughter (Chevelle) and a 2-year-old grandson (Rutledge). I am an avid sports fan who can be found rooting on the Royals and the Chiefs.

## **Mallory Arellano**

*Newman University*



I am in my 3rd year working for Newman University as an instructor and coordinator for our Early Childhood Unified program. I previously worked for USD 457 Garden City Public Schools in special education and early childhood. I was on our Autism team for the district and provided services for those wonderful kiddos.

I am a huge advocate for early interventions and early childhood/ preschool education. I would like to contribute to this movement for providing quality early childhood education for all children across Kansas. I am very excited to be a part of a group that sees the importance of early childhood in Kansas!

I enjoy playing with my 2 and 4-year old children, playing board games with friends and families, skiing, dancing, and volleyball.

## **Emily Barnes**

*Barnes Child Care*



Hello!! I am a family child care provider in Olathe, KS and have operated Barnes Childcare for 7 years. Initially this was an attempt to use my professional skills while taking care of my family, but it has turned into my passionate focus for my career. My background includes special education and applied behavior analysis. Throughout my career I have supported people from young infants up to adults. Previously, I have supported adults in residential and vocational settings to increase their independence. As a behavior consultant I supported individuals in their homes, schools, and work places in situations with difficult behavior or learning skills. I also taught at my eldest' Montessori school.

I understand and enjoy development, learning, and behavior and I love seeing the "ah-ha" moments when a person learns a new skill. Watching children learn amazes me, but the moment a parent begins to show confidence in themselves reminds me of why our field is so crucial. Being both a parent and a professional in early childhood, I understand the needs and successes families face. I look forward to seeing families supported through the work that the Recommendations Panel will do. Children deserve our best effort!

## **Amanda Billings**

*Stepping Stones Academy*



Hello, I am Amanda Billings. I grew up in rural Kansas, in the small community of Kirwin, but now reside in Portis. I am a graduate of Fort Hays State University and now, own and operate a Group Daycare Home in Osborne. I am also currently the Mayor of our small rural community, serve on the local school board as well as the preschool development committee in our district. I am involved in the Northern Kansas Regional Cohort through KCCTO, the Child Care Systems Improvement Team and serve as a board member of the North Central Kansas Special Education Cooperative.

I feel that living in rural Kansas, we sometimes get unintentionally over-looked when it comes to childcare. I feel that by serving on this Panel, I will be able to share my insight, as a provider and parent. As a member of the Panel, I would like to continue to focus on funding policies. As well as seeking support for a link between early childhood care and Kindergarten Readiness. I feel that there is still a gap between early childhood care and when a child is heading into the school system. Whether that be lack of resources, funding, or lack of willingness between school districts and childcare professionals. I feel that as a childcare provider, we are still looked at as 'babysitters' when in most cases that is not the case at all. I feel that now, more than ever, parents, regardless of age, race, etc. desperately need quality childcare that includes curriculum-based learning in line with the Kansas Early Learning Standards.

I am married to an amazing man, Jamie and we have two children, Gauge - 8 and Zoie – 6. We have a bulldog named Fletcher and a dachshund named, Ellie. We love our rural home!

It's a Great Day to be a BULLDOG!

## **Paula Branizor**

*Kansas Department of Health and Environment*



Paula Branizor is the Director of Early Care and Youth Programs (Child Care Licensing) for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. She has a master's degree in public administration from Wichita State University, with an undergrad in psychology, and has a diverse work background including the for profit, nonprofit and/or public sector. She is a mother of two with a passion for protecting the vulnerable populations of Kansas.

## **Tanya Bulluck**

*Child Start*



I have been with Child Start since 2014, becoming the Child Care Resource and Referral Director in 2019. I am responsible for overseeing a variety of services that impact more than 60% of children under age 5 each year in South-Central Kansas, as well as teachers, child care providers, daycare center staff, parents, grandparents, foster parents, and the general community. I earned an associate's degree in Early Childhood Studies, a bachelor's degree in Organizational Leadership from Southwestern College and a Master of Leadership from Southwestern College.

Aside from my full-time position, I am currently an adjunct faculty member in the Early Childhood Education Department at Butler Community College and a CDA Specialist through the Council for Professional Recognition.

This panel is full of knowledgeable, passionate, dedicated and diverse leaders in the early childhood community. I am excited to join this team and support the efforts towards the overall improvement of early childhood experiences for the families and children we serve. Having leaders from all types of agencies and organizations working collectively to meet the needs of our families and children and improve their overall early childhood experiences, is essential to providing them with the foundation for lifelong success.

I am a proud Air Force spouse and an even prouder mother of three pretty neat children, ages 17, 15 and 10.

## **Gail Cozadd**

*Kansas Children's Service League*



I have been employed with Kansas Children's Service League (KCSL) for 14 years, but became the CEO on January 1, 2020. It has been an interesting first year in my new role! I graduated with my Bachelors of Social Work in 1996 from KU; and have been in the field of children and family services since that time. I worked for Social and Rehabilitation Services for nine years (known now as the Department for Children and Families), where I investigated child abuse and neglect, with an emphasis on cases of severe physical abuse and sexual abuse. In 2002 I completed my Master's Degree in Social Work Administration. This emphasized program development, continuous quality improvement, human resource management, social service budgeting, and social policy. I recently served on the Child Welfare Systems Task Force. I am also the past board president for the Children's Alliance of Kansas.

My hope for this panel is to improve collaboration among early childhood partners. But more importantly, my hope is to continue to elevate the importance of early childhood learning; and that early learning does not begin at age 3 or 4 but at birth! And finally, to create a sense of urgency for our state and business partners to invest in early childhood learning because of the long-term impact it has on our children as they become adults and ultimately our communities.

Personally, I love being outdoors and hiking. I also am an avid reader when I have time.

## **Shelly Crome**

*Communities in Schools Mid-America*



Shelly Crome has worked with students and families across Marshall County for over ten years. She holds bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Business Administration from Benedictine College. She began her work as an assistant teacher at Head Start before becoming a stay at home mom for six years. She returned to work as a Family Advocate in two school districts and is now a Student Support Coordinator with Communities in Schools of Mid-America. She has worked with students ranging from infants when she collaborated with Parents as Teachers, preschool, elementary and now currently at the junior/senior high school.

Shelly is passionate about her community, serving as a board member for Pony Express Partnership for Children, as well as a member of her local ICC group and is the Director of Service Projects for her Rotary club. She looks forward to helping the State of Kansas develop recommendations that will help children and families.

## **Kelly Davydov**

*Child Care Aware of Kansas*



As executive director for Child Care Aware of Kansas, Kelly Davydov leads Kansas' Child Care Resource and Referral network in addressing access to high-quality child care for young children and their families. Prior to joining Child Care Aware of Kansas, Ms. Davydov led Iowa's TANF 2-Generation anti-poverty initiative and served as project director for Early Childhood Iowa, the state's early childhood systems-building effort.

## **Tabitha Ewing**

*YWCA Northeast Kansas*



Hello, I am currently a Childcare Director in Topeka, KS. I have only been in this role for a few months. Before this job, I have been working in the child care field or school districts as a paraprofessional since I was 16 years old off and on. I have worked with ages 2 ½ to school age. The reason for joining this panel is I want to be able to share my experiences working in the field from both the teaching and director side. I always love to learn new things and ideas and I also think this panel will do that for me as well. In my free time I enjoy spending time with family and friends but also some evenings just cuddled up on the couch with the blanket on binge watching shows.

## **Jeremy Fite**

*Hilltop Child Development Center*



My name is Jeremy Fite, and I have been the Executive Director of Hilltop Child Development Center in Lawrence since 2014. Hilltop is the only NAEYC Accredited facility in Douglas County. Prior to my time at Hilltop, I spent time with Boys and Girls Clubs from Buffalo, NY to Knoxville, TN. Developing high yield positive programming in some of the most at-risk neighborhoods within each community. My diverse experiences have allowed me to better prepare our programs to appropriately nurture and educate all youth, no matter the circumstances. I am excited to be part of the conversations of this panel to help ensure that we are moving Early Childhood Education in a positive and productive way. Helping show the immense value that this service provides to all. My personal interests include biking, swimming, and running. I also enjoy traveling with my wife and son.

## **Jennifer Forker**

*Hutchinson Community College*



My name is Jennifer Forker and I have been working in the early childhood education field for 20 years. I was a kindergarten teacher for 15 years in the Amish community of Yoder. I then transitioned to program coordinator of the early childhood education program at Hutchinson Community College. I continue to teach the early childhood education courses at Hutchinson Community College, as well as supervise the child care center on campus.

I am an advocate for early childhood education because I believe it is the most important profession! So much is riding on the development of young children and it is vital they have the necessary support to become the best that they can be!

In my free time I enjoy spending time at the lake with my family and pets.

## **Jennifer Francois**

*Kansas Institute for Early Childhood Education and Research*



Dr. Jennifer Francois is the Director for the Kansas Institute of Early Childhood Education and Research (KIECER) at Kansas State University which includes supporting the Kansas Childcare Training Opportunities (KCCTO) research initiatives and program evaluation. She is also a Professor of Practice in the department of Applied Human Sciences where she teaches courses in the Early Childhood Education program. Prior to joining the K-State faculty, Dr. Francois spent 9 ½ years working for Rainbows United in Wichita, KS. During her time at Rainbows United, she was their Early Childhood Coordinator and supervised the Community-based Education and Training Services (CBETS). She is currently the state of Kansas Recommended Practices Ambassador for the Division of Early Childhood and she is actively involved in local and state level organizations, including the Riley County Inter-Agency Coordinating Council and the Kansas Division for Early Childhood. Her research focuses on pre-service preparation and professional development in early intervention and early childhood special education, social-emotional development, and language acquisition in children.

## **Amy Gottschamer**

*Googols of Learning*



In 2008, I opened Googols of Learning Child Development Center in Lawrence. I have an M.A. in History and an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education with an emphasis in Administration, a Program Director's license for over 100 children, and a Director's Credential from KS Association for the Education of Young Children (KSAEYC). I sit on the state board of KSAEYC and serve as the President of the Lawrence Chapter. For the past year, I've worked on the Workforce Development Committee, and locally I've worked with the Lawrence School District, as an advisor for the creation of their Teacher Cadet program and received some of their student interns until COVID set in.

Currently, I am actively involved in Douglas County's COVID recovery team and am the Unit Leader for Childcare. My pet projects are kindergarten transitions and the Unifying Framework initiative by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

I want to serve on the Recommendations Panel because this is such an interesting time for Early Childhood in Kansas. You can see the potential for the changes that can be made. I feel my education and direct provider experience will give a needed perspective. I've been an early childhood advocate for years, and this seems like an ideal way to serve. I think a benefit for each of us will be that we can actually see the changes being made and how our contributions will make an impact. How satisfying for us all!

My personal interests are: History, Genealogy, Quilting, Reading, Political Podcasts, and Audiobooks.

## **Crystal Henry**

*The Family Conservancy*



I am the Start Young Manager with The Family Conservancy and have been with TFC since the beginning of the project in 2018. I have 17 years of combined experience in child care, teaching, project management, and communications in various nonprofit organizations. Through my early childhood education major and Master's in Public Administration with an emphasis in nonprofit management, my education and experience places me in a unique position to bring solutions to the child care deficit in Kansas.

I meet monthly with the Wyandotte Economic Development Council's Workforce Solutions committee and Child Care sub-committee to address identified areas of improvement from the Wyandotte County Public Health Department's Community Health Improvement Plan.

As a Kansas resident for nearly all of my life, and current recipient of child care services in Kansas City, Kansas, I have a firsthand look at child care needs and how they can be met. I am excited to bring both personal experience and the experience of working with child care providers and families in Wyandotte, Kansas for the past three years to the panel.

At home, I am "mommy" to an enthusiastic and curious 4-year-old, as well as an energetic and expressive 10-month old. My husband and I have designed, constructed, and planted a garden that will harvest pumpkins, cucumbers, corn, and watermelons this year, to name a few! We have a dog and a cat, but someday I would like to add some chickens to the crew. I practice yoga, enjoy being active outdoors, and try to make people laugh when at all possible.

## **Sheila Hermocillo**

*USD 443 – Dodge City Public Schools*



Sheila Hermocillo has worked as an Education Specialist for Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Center/ U.S.D. #443 Dodge City Public Schools since 2015.

Sheila holds a Bachelor's Degree from Newman University in Elementary Education, and served as an early childhood teacher in the classroom for ten years. She also maintains a Master's of Science Degree in Educational Leadership obtained through Kansas State University.

She maintains certification for CLASS Observations and coaching, PD Specialist for the Child Development Associate Credentialing process, and is also a EC LETRs Trainer.

Her current role and responsibilities include overseeing the early childhood education programming to meet state and federal grants, as well as district, state, and federal guidelines and initiatives through data aggregation, data analysis, instruction, observation, assessment, for the development of the whole child, teacher, and program.

## Callie Hoffman

*Kansas Parents as Teachers Association*



I am the Executive Director for the Kansas Parents as Teachers Association (KPATA). KPATA supports early childhood home visiting programs with a parent education component in Kansas. We strive to build quality programs throughout Kansas so that all Kansas children will develop to their fullest potential.

- Funded by a Families First Prevention Services Grant, we partner with the Kansas Department for Children and Families to deliver intensive PAT services to families at imminent risk of entering foster care through the [Bright Futures Program](#).
- We provide [professional development](#) opportunities to home visitors and early childhood professionals.
- We [advocate](#) for policies that support parents with young children at the national, state, and local levels.

I lived in Olathe, KS with my husband Matt, our five children (Emily, Rudy, Clare, Colter & Jude) and our very well loved dog Bullet. We love traveling, spending time outdoors and watching sports.

## **Eva Horn**

*University of Kansas Department of Special Education*



I came to Kansas and the University of Kansas over 20 years ago by way of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. Vanderbilt is where I got my Ph.D. and Nashville is where I worked as an early educator (early intervention and early childhood special education) before moving to teach and conduct research in higher education/universities.

Supporting early childhood educators to provide equitable access and opportunities to learn and grow for each and every young child and their family is very important to me and provides me the inspiration and reinforcement to keep working hard and learning. KU and the state of Kansas have provided me with rich opportunities to continue to grow and develop as an early childhood educator.

## **Kim Kennedy**

*Kansas Department for Children and Families*



I work for the Department for Children and Families (DCF) as the Head Start Collaboration Director (HSCO). My career at DCF began in 2004 in the Economic Employment Services division with determining eligibility for DCF human services programs. Prior to that I worked as an early childhood special education teacher.

I will serve on the panel to assist the efforts of Head Start agencies to engage in effective coordination and collaboration. The role of the HSCO is to collaborate with entities involved in state and local planning processes to better meet the needs of low-income children from birth to school entry, and their families. The Early Childhood Recommendations Panel will provide Kansas with the opportunity to improve this coordination and delivery of early childhood education and development services. Early intervention is key to making a difference in the lives of children and families. As a member of the Panel, I look forward to being part of this work.

My personal interest includes: baking, reading, gardening and spending time outdoors. Most of all I enjoy spending time with my family.

## **Audra Kenneson**

*Rainbows United*



I coordinate the Early Childhood Mental Health Services and the Specialized Foster Care Services at Rainbows United, where I've worked since 2007. I also serve as the HIPAA Compliance Officer for Rainbows. My first role at Rainbows was to coordinate Start Start of Butler County, which focused on raising the level of quality of child care and increasing community awareness about early childhood development. Prior to working in early intervention, I was a reintegration specialist and worked with juvenile offenders who were released from the state's juvenile correctional facilities. I began my career as a teacher and spent most of my time teaching in an alternative high school setting.

The work I did in public schools and in juvenile corrections caused me to realize the importance of the first years of a child's life and gave me real examples of what happens if a child isn't provided with a secure, loving environment in their formative years. When I landed at Rainbows and focused my efforts on early intervention, everything felt right. Helping parents and early childhood professionals meet the mental health needs of young children is a way that I can use my skills to help focus on prevention. As a social worker, I enjoy macro-level work that helps me support systems change that will positively impact our community.

## **Esther Kottwitz**

*USD 497 Lawrence*



I am currently Coordinator of Early Childhood for Lawrence Public Schools.

My career in early childhood education began with teaching in an early childhood special education classroom and working on research and training grants as part of my graduate work at the University of Kansas. I then worked 20 years as the Executive Director of a non-profit serving children ages birth to 5 in an inclusive, full day intervention program. During that time, I served as President of the Kansas Division for Early Childhood, Council for Exceptional Children and as a board member for the Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children.

I then completed a graduate degree in School Administration at Emporia State University and worked 12 years in the Kansas City Kansas Public Schools as a District K-12 Behavior Specialist and Teacher Leader.

These wonderful experiences gave me a tremendous appreciation for the importance of high-quality early education opportunities for all children and families! It is my honor to serve on the Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel. I look forward to working with and learning from dedicated leaders who represent communities across Kansas.

My other passions include reading, word and number games, road trips, and adventures with my family, especially with my two young grandchildren who are growing up on a farm in Grant County, Kansas.

## **David Lindeman**

*University of Kansas Life Span Institute at Parsons*



I am the Director of the University of Kansas-Life Span Institute at Parsons, a center for research, training and exemplary services. I have over 30 years of experience in early childhood, special education, and university-based project development, implementation and management. I have been the director or co-director of over 50 funded federal and state grants. As the director of both preschool and early intervention service programs for children with disabilities, I have developed a number of grants based in these experiences including model demonstration projects, outreach training programs, in-service training programs for early intervention and preschool programs for children with disabilities, training and referral programs for child care providers and families, and inclusion of children with disabilities into community programs.

I currently serve as the Chair of the Kansas Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Childhood Developmental Services. I have experience as a presenter at state and national conferences, publications, provision of training and technical assistance, and have served on a number of national, state, and local committees, boards of directors, and advisory boards. I hold a PhD in Special Education from Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

My interest in serving on the Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel include insuring that professional development, training, and technical assistance for early childhood providers and the interests of children with disabilities and their families are address through the All in For Kansas Kids Early Childhood Strategic Plan.

## **Kelli Mark**

*Kansas Department of Health and Environment*



I am the Director of the Children & Families Section within the Bureau of Family Health at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). I previously worked at KDHE in the Bureau of Community Health Systems, Primary Care and Rural Health. I have also spent many years in the inpatient hospital setting serving in clinical and administrative roles. The section I oversee within KDHE is home to several programs that focus on early childhood, such as Early Interventions, Children with Special Health Care Needs, Home Visiting, and Maternal and Child Health local programming.

I am passionate about serving on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel to help ensure coordination and collaboration of services across the state, helping Kansas families have equitable access to services and ensure a seamless referral system is in place.

In my free time, I enjoy practicing Yoga, reading and spending time with family (including two fur babies!)

## **Malissa Martin**

*Community in Schools Mid-America*



I'm the President and CEO of Communities In Schools of Mid-America, which is headquartered in Lawrence. I've been in this position since 2007 and have been thrilled to be a Kansan since 2005. I've been with the Communities In Schools network in different places since 1999, beginning in Houston and working at the local, state and national levels. Briefly, Communities In Schools places staff on school campuses to provide prevention and intervention services to at-risk students and their families and prevention services to the whole campus.

In my career and life, I've had the opportunity to work and live in urban, suburban, rural, and frontier communities, which gives me a broad perspective. I am deeply interested in children and family issues, and most of my career has focused on that, although I began in the corporate and small business arena.

Being a part of the panel is very exciting for me. I am looking forward to learning a lot, and I hope that my experience and perspective are a benefit to the group.

I'm also a creative person, and I spend a lot of time making art, gardening, and designing things in my head. I have two grown sons, a daughter-in-law, and two grandsons in the KC Metro and spend as much time with them as possible. I have a close-knit family still living in Texas and visit there or have them here frequently.

## **Natalie McClane**

*Kansas State Department of Education*



I am Natalie McClane, an Education Program Consultant on the Early Childhood Team at KSDE. I've been in my current position for 2 ½ years and before working at KSDE, I worked in the early childhood field for about 14 years as an Education Coordinator with Head Start. Before that, I was an elementary teacher for a short time.

I wanted to be on this panel so I could have a chance to help guide progress in the early childhood field across the state of Kansas alongside other early childhood leaders who know and value the importance of quality early childhood education.

My personal interests include spending time with my husband (also a teacher) and two boys 10 and 15, music, painting, sewing, and just crafting in general!

I am so excited to be on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel with so many other early childhood experts from across our state and look forward to working and learning from you all.

## **Amy Meek**

*Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund*



I joined the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund in May 2015. Before joining the Cabinet, I spent six years at Community Action, Inc. in Topeka, first as the Early Childhood Education Coordinator and finally as the Director of Head Start and Early Head Start. I fostered collaborative partnerships with school districts and community entities in order to provide high-quality integrated services to at-risk children and families in Shawnee County. Prior to joining Community Action, Inc., I worked as an administrator for a hospital child care center and also worked in the pediatric and orthodontic dental field.

I have experience in program management, grant writing, policy development, and compliance with local, state and federal regulation. I have also participated in local and state early childhood leadership groups promoting comprehensive services for children 0-5.

I hold a BA in Human Development and Family Life with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education from the University of Kansas and a Master of Business Administration from Baker University.

As a representative of the Cabinet, I'm excited to serve on the panel to support the implementation of a coordinated, comprehensive early childhood delivery system that provides a solid foundation for families in Kansas so children can thrive.

In my free time I enjoy playing golf, game nights with my family, and fine art painting with watercolor.

## Lucas Neece

*City of Lindsborg*



Lucas Neece has served as the Assistant City Administrator in Lindsborg, Kansas since December 2018. In that role he is responsible for economic development. Lindsborg, Little Sweden USA, is a short commute to both Salina and McPherson, two communities with many great job opportunities. We believe that inviting people to come share our prosperity is the best way to ensure our future prosperity.

Community leaders identified improving childcare as a key component to making that invitation. Thus began Project Future, a five-pronged effort to partner with a local non-profit childcare center, Sprout House, to construct a new, purpose-built facility which broke ground June 19, 2021; raise salaries; improve programming; achieve NAEYC certification; and set the center onto the path to financial sustainability. Lucas serves as the project manager with responsibility for the building project. You can learn more at [www.childcareforlindsborg.org](http://www.childcareforlindsborg.org)

His passion for making high-quality childcare attainable for families across Kansas comes from his own experience as a parent. He has two children with his wife Larissa. Nelle, 5, spent two fantastic years at Hilltop Child Development Center in Lawrence, and Arvo is 10 months old. Having childcare they are confident in allows both Larissa and Lucas more freedom to serve their neighbors—Lucas does that in government administration; Larissa as a speech-language pathologist.

## **Patty Peschel**

*Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc.*



I am the Director of Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO). I have experience as a director and coordinator working on various quality improvement projects at both the state and national level for 19 years. I oversee the Workforce Development project and the Infant Toddler Specialist Network project, funded through the Department for Children and Families.

I have been a part of numerous state level committees and workgroups (e.g., Child Care Systems Improvement Team (CC-SIT), Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) State Advisory Team, Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) Advisory Board, Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP), Child Care Providers Coalition (CCPC).

I look forward to serving on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel, as I am committed to partnering with key agencies and programs to increase the quality of our early care and education workforce in the state of Kansas.

My husband and I live in Manhappiness (Manhattan) with our four children.

## **Dannah Schatz**

*Russell Child Development Center*



For the past 7 years, I have been employed with Russell Child Development Center in southwest Kansas as an ABC (Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up) Infant and Toddler Coach and Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) Coach. I love working with families and strengthening their skills in order to create a better future for Kansas and our world.

I earned a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Newman University in 2001 and a Master of Science in PreK-12 Adaptive Special Education from Fort Hays State University in 2011. I taught first grade for 3 years and Early Childhood Special Education for 10 years. In 2014, I joined Russell Child Development Center as a Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) Coach. I received certification in Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 Triple P programs and before COVID, taught a weekly seminar to inmates in the Ford County Detention Center. In June 2018, I earned full certification in the ABC-Infant (Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up) program. In March 2021, I also earned full certification in ABC-Toddler as well.

I look forward to learning more about the early childhood systems by participating in the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel. I am a huge advocate for early interventions for both children and parents and would shout the benefits from the rooftops if I could! As a teacher, I am also a big advocate for early childhood education.

I am married with four grown sons, two sets of boy twins. For 25 years, my home was an on-going experiment in Nature vs. Nurture! I enjoy learning all that I can about ACEs, brain development and developmental trauma. I now have an empty nest, but I enjoy crafting, creative arts therapy and camping with my husband and English bulldog named Sky.

## **Lisa Schmidt**

*Women's Community Y Child Development Center*



I am the Executive Director of the Women's Community Y Child Development Center in Leavenworth. The Y is an unaffiliated nonprofit organization that is a licensed childcare center.

My bachelor's is in Family and Consumer Science. I served on the board of directors of the Women's Community Y after my children had attended preschool here. My career journey into early learning has had some detours along the way that have equipped me for the nonprofit world.

I am an ardent believer that early learning education is where the foundation is built for the next generation of students. I am passionate about providing high quality learning environments to prepare the youngest learners and their families for their education. Creating a sustainable network for years to come is necessary for early learning's success. I am very interested in how this model will benefit the children, families and providers to create the best possible early learning situation for the future.

Young families need supports in order to work and go to school. These supports many times are focused on children and families that are impoverished. There is a working-class population that does not qualify for any supports and those children fall through the cracks. Attracting professionals to early learning and the ability to pay them with benefits for long term retention.

The Early Childhood Recommendations Panel has the opportunity to help affect change and access for families, their children and early learning professionals to build a strong educational foundation for the future.

My other interests include: spending time with family, sewing, quilting and cooking.

## **Cassandra Sines**

*Sines Virtual Assistant Service*



Hi! I own Sines Virtual Assistant Services, an administrative business that helps entrepreneurs with their administrative needs. With my administrative skills in several different fields, I have 12 years of experience, specifically in the legal field. For the last several years, being my own boss has afforded me the opportunity to do a lot of advocacy work. I am currently the Maternal Child Health (MCH) Family Delegate for Kansas. I also serve on the Executive Committee of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) Special Health Care Needs Family Advisory Council.

I want to serve on this panel to help make the Early Childhood System a better system for families in Kansas, but more specifically to make sure the voice of special health care need families is heard as well.

I enjoy spending time with my husband and our two boys, who both have multiple special health care needs. I also enjoy traveling and reading books. My current project though is that I am in the process of writing our adoption journey in hopes that I can help other families know that they are not alone when things are tough and feel that no one understands what they're going through.

**Heather Staab**

*Kansas Department of Health and Environment*

## **Cornelia Stevens**

*TOP Early Learning Centers*



I am the Executive Director of TOP Early Learning Centers. We have three high quality preschools in Wichita serving approximately 600 children each year. Data from our longitudinal study indicates that our students do well when they enter the k-12 system and our student outcomes have been published in the Journal for Research in Childhood Education.

I received my BA from Ohio University with a degree in Music Therapy, and later obtained my MBA from Baker University. I have worked for a diverse range of organizations, including the Kansas Children's Service League as the South-Central Region Director, Mental Health Association of South-Central Kansas as the Director of Compeer/Volunteer Services, ResCare Kansas Life Choices as a Day Program Coordinator and the Ohio Department of Corrections as the Director of Activity Therapy. In these roles, I coordinated volunteers, designed and implemented programs supporting adults, children and families, helped establish the first prison based mental health unit for the department of corrections, had oversight of numerous programs that support children and families including the Sedgwick County Pre-K Collaborative, the Child Abuse Prevention Coalition, and Wichita's first Crisis Nursery program all resulting in more than 25 years of experience developing collaborative partnerships, creating opportunities for new business development, assessing and identifying needed services, and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of those program.

My interest in serving on the Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel stems from my years of experience serving children and families but most importantly because I know firsthand of the services and supports needed to support at risk children and families as I was once a single mother living in poverty.

I live with my husband in Wichita and our blended family includes five children ranging in age from 17 to 30 and 2 grandchildren ages 1 and 3. I enjoy singing and the performing arts, an interest that began as a young child when my mother opened a children's theater in Miami, Florida. I also enjoy reading, spending time with family, and spending time outdoors.

## Jenny Welch Buller

*KU Center for Public Partnerships and Research*



I am a research project manager at the Center for Public Partnerships and Research (CPPR) at the University of Kansas (KU). My passion for early childhood care and education is rooted in some of my earliest personal experiences – from tagging alongside my mother at her child care center to running a small child care business as a young parent. My other professional experiences include case management and workforce re-entry training; community education and outreach; facilitating victim-offender conflict resolution through a community-based restorative justice program; and farming. Most recently, I have had the opportunity to assist our Kansas Department for Children and Families colleagues with testing and developing innovative approaches to SNAP employment and training and the Kansas Quality Recognition and Improvement System. In my spare time, I can most often be found weeding my kitchen garden, running, and trying desperately to learn the rules to Dungeons and Dragons at the request of my two children. Making policies, processes, and big ideas work for families is what drives me, and I look forward to contributing to this important work.

## **Reva Wywadis**

*Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas*



I am the executive director of Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas. After spending twelve years operating a licensed and nationally accredited family child care facility, I had the opportunity to transition to a position with the child care resource and referral agency (then ERC Resource & Referral, Inc., and now doing business as Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas). I love working directly with child care providers, center-based teachers and center directors, offering technical assistance and teaching professional development sessions. I moved into the role of Executive Director in 2006, and celebrated 20 years with the agency last October.

I am committed to supporting policies and practices that offer every child a healthy, safe and appropriate early learning experience regardless of the type of setting. I believe that parents and families deserve support and the ability to make choices that are right for their child and family. I value collaborative work and see the power of collective impact, understanding the benefits of working in tandem and partnership with others. I am a parent and grandparent, and strongly believe that the decisions we make today will have a lasting impact on the strength and well-being of our communities, the state of Kansas and our nation in the years to come.

I saw the opportunity to serve on the Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel as a chance to add my voice and perspective to the important work taking place in our state supporting the early childhood field, and am honored to have this opportunity.

My personal interests include spending time with my husband and family in our beautiful back yard, reading, and taking in the beautiful Kansas scenery from the back of a Harley!