

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

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[Cornelia Stevens, Chair](#) | TOP Early Learning Centers  
[Marie Treichel](#) | Kansas Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (KAIMH)  
[Stephanie Waterman](#) | Geary County Schools USD 475  
[Mandi Waugh](#) | Child Start, Inc.  
[Dr. Amber Wheeler](#) | USD 258 Humboldt Schools  
[Dr. Stephanie Wiggins](#) | Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO), Kansas Infant Toddler Specialist Network (KITS)  
[Christie Wyckoff](#) | Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Nichelle Adams

Kansas Department for Children and Families  
Social Services Program Collaboration Deputy Director



As the Social Services Program Collaboration Deputy Director, I help oversee the policy in the administration of the programs within Economic and Employment Services at the Kansas Department for Children and Families. These programs include Cash Assistance, Child Care Assistance, Food Assistance, Summer EBT, and LIEAP Energy Assistance. I serve as a Co-CCDF Administrator for Kansas.

I have been with DCF for 19 years in various positions, including serving as the Early Education and Child Care Services Manager, a business analyst for our benefit eligibility system, staff development specialist for Economic and Employment 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.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Marites Altuna**

Kansas State School for the Blind  
Family Infant-Toddler Services Director



As the Director of Family Infant-Toddler Services, I oversee and coordinate vision services for children with visual impairments aged birth to three. Before this role, I was the Director of the Kansas Deafblind Project. I provided technical assistance to families and educators working with individuals with combined hearing and vision loss aged birth to 21. I have extensive experience working with young children as an early intervention provider for infants and toddlers and as an early childhood special educator in the preschool setting. I also taught students with visual impairments from preschool to 12th grade.

I earned my Master's in Early Childhood Special Education and Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Kansas. I received specialized training in deafblindness from Utah State University and visual impairments from Missouri State University.

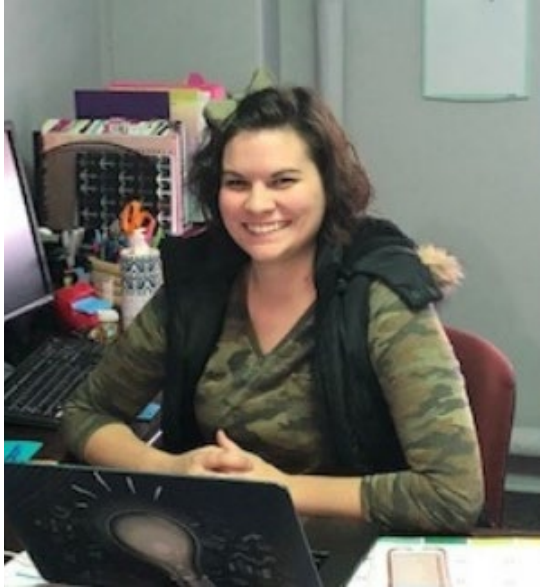
Outside of my professional roles, I enjoy volunteering in the community. I serve as a member of the Juniper Gardens Children's Project Community Advisory Board, the YMCA of Greater Kansas City Diversity, Inclusion, and Global Council, and the State Interagency Coordinating Council. I also serve as the Chair of the Women's Chamber Network and on the boards of the Kansas Division for Early Childhood, the KC Blind All-Stars Foundation, and the Kansas City Kansas Chamber of Commerce.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Mallory Arellano**

Newman University

Early Childhood Unified Program Coordinator/Assistant Professor



I am married and a mother to two children who will be five and seven this summer. My work experience is in education where I have taught preschool, special education, and general education in the early childhood grades. I am now in charge of the early childhood unified program at Newman University. I am a passionate advocate for children and have dedicated my career to providing quality education and care for young children, from birth through age 8. I have experience in early childhood education and development, curriculum planning, and classroom management. I have a strong knowledge of child development and behavior and am committed to creating a safe and nurturing learning environment for all children.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Brenda Bandy**

Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.

Executive Director



I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition (KBC) and oversee the KBC's programs which includes work with child care providers and the early childhood system in Kansas. I am excited to bring our 10+ years of experience working with child care programs to my work on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel. We have educated over 5,500 child care providers about their unique & powerful role in supporting breastfeeding families. I also look forward to bringing our cross-sector, systems-level approach to this work. I am an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant and a retired La Leche League Leader with a passion for bringing people together to build a culture of breastfeeding support in Kansas. When not talking about breastfeeding, I can be found working on a puzzle or reading a book, waiting for one of my four young adult children to text me back.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Turi Berger**

T.L.A.D. Learning Academy

Owner/Director

I am married with a beautifully blended family of 9 children and 10 grandchildren with one on the way. I have been caring for children for over 30 years. I opened my childcare business in 2008 as a fulltime career and have never looked back. I have the best job. I have cared for children with disabilities and cared for just about every ethnicity you can name. Currently, I am pursuing NAFCC Accreditation. Something else about me is that I absolutely love nature in all aspects of it. I find my serenity in planting flowers or sitting in my home filled with various plants. I also love writing poetry, songs and music.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Sheila Bertelsen

Dodge City Public School-Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Center  
Education Specialist



I am beginning my ninth year as Education Disability Specialist for Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Center-Dodge City Public Schools. I oversee the education and disability components of our federal Head Start grant and Kansas At-Risk grant. I work to align with Dodge City Public School initiatives to promote a Birth to Grade 12 alignment of high-quality education for all of the students in our community. Other duties include CLASS observer of 0-5 classrooms, primary LEA, oversight of curriculum, and assessment database systems, Kindergarten Transition Data Manager, and management team member of program oversight.

I initially worked in the family plumbing/HVAC business for ten years and felt called to the vocation of teaching. I worked to obtain my degree as a mother of four, at the age of 30, while working full-time. I graduated Magna Cum Laude from Newman University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education. I worked two years as a preschool teacher, four years as a Kindergarten teacher, and another four years as a second-grade teacher. I received my Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Kansas State University.

I am remarried and am a mother of six children in a blended household. We currently have three children in college (KU, K-State, NWOSU), one daughter in cosmetology school, one son in the workforce, and the eldest daughter is an educator/Head VB Coach at Maize South. We are officially empty-nesters. I love to take pictures and have documented all of our children's sports activities and life events. This will continue, as I have one son playing college football.



# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Dana Book

Kansas Children's Service League

Training Specialist



As a father of four, I've had an interest in early childhood outcomes for over 30 years. However, as my children have gotten older, my perspective has shifted to helping other parents & caregivers provide supports to their children and families. After more than 25 years in retail and food service management, I joined KCSL in 2018 as a Parent Engagement & Leadership Coordinator, and since April 2021, I have worked as a training specialist focused on ACEs, resilience and Family-Friendly Workplaces.

I currently live in my hometown of Topeka with my wife and 2 daughters, cat, hamster and hedgehog. My free time is consumed wondering how to use all the cool crafty things I've accumulated, watching the Royals lose and the occasional trip to Colorado or Seattle.



# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Amy Dean-Campfire**

Kansas Department of Health and Environment  
Children and Families Section Director



I am the Section Director for Children & Families for the Department of Health and Environment. I have been in my role since March 2023. Prior to coming to KDHE, I was employed for 11 years with the Kansas Department of Correction as the Mental Health & Housing Program Manager. I obtained my bachelor's degree in psychology, with a minor in criminal justice from the University of Maryland Global Campus. I am married with 3 children, all adults (19,22,24), learning to navigate our world. I am excited to be a part of this group supporting the amazing work already being done in early childhood throughout the State of Kansas.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Jarvis Doleman**

Kansas Department for Health and Environment (KDHE)  
Child Care Licensing Director



I am the Section Director for Early Care & Youth Programs/Child Care Licensing for the Department of Health and Environment. I have been in my role since September of 2022. Prior to coming to KDHE, I was employed for 12 years at Prairie Band Casino and Resort serving as a Surveillance Shift Manager. I obtained my bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice, with a minor in Social Work from the University of Tennessee at Martin.

Outside of work I serve as the Program Director for a youth mentoring group called Young Minds Determined to Be Great (YMDG) which is a part of Topeka's own non-profit organization Omni Circle Group. I am married with 4 children, a three-year-old as well as three teenagers who are all currently in middle school. The non-profit work and the children's activities all keep me on the go! I am excited to be a part of this group which plays a large role in solving the issues and furthering the great work already being done in early childhood throughout the State of Kansas.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Kerri Falletti**

KDC-Office of Rural Prosperity  
Grassroots Strategy Developer



Kerri Falletti has worked as the Grassroots Strategy Developer in the Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) with Kansas Department of Commerce since December 2021. The ORP was created to target and address issues facing rural communities across the state in the primary focus areas of housing, childcare, broadband and infrastructure, healthcare, workforce, and community development. A goal of the ORP is to equip communities with the tools and training to work on making progress in the areas. Previously, she worked for Cowley First – Cowley County Economic Development Partnership for 18 years, serving as director for 12 years. As a countywide partnership, she led the organization’s dedication to providing services and program creation to support local entrepreneurs and small businesses, in retention, expansion and recruitment of businesses, workforce development services, and supporting community development initiatives.

She earned her bachelor’s degree from Friends University in Business Administration and has served as a business consultant. She is a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD), is a member of National Rural Economic Developers Association (NREDA) and has served on several local, regional and state boards including Kansas Economic Development Alliance (KEDA) and Team Kansas. Throughout her career and experiences, Kerri has been passionate about supporting businesses and in making connections for communities to thrive and grow. She is married with three children and grandmother of three.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Bronwyn Fees**

Kansas State University & KCCTO  
Professor and Associate Dean



I am a professor in early childhood education and associate dean for academic affairs in the College of Health and Human Sciences at Kansas State University. Since 1998, I have taught in pre-service teacher education and graduate studies and engaged in research, publishing, and presenting on children's physical activity in the early childhood classrooms. As associate dean, I am responsible for the coordination of academic processes, courses and curriculum within the college including distance programs and coordination/integration with larger academic systems across the university. As part of my role, I also provide leadership for several national organizations.

Prior to K-State I taught in as well as administered programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in university settings as well as provided direct services to neurodiverse youth and their parents (also neurodiverse) in a home visiting program designed to support basic living skills. I am a board member for and PI of Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc. (KCCTO) and currently lead the implementation planning process for the Career Pathway for Kansas Early Care and Education.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Janine Foth**

Cougar Cubs Daycare USD 397 Centre  
Director



My husband Travis & I live in Peabody with our 4 dogs and 1 cat. We are proud of our 7 children who are all grown and living across the state. They have blessed us with 9 grandkids so far. I have been in the childcare field for 20 years and have an associate degree in early childhood education. I am currently the Director of the Daycare in the Centre school district. I have had my own home daycares, worked in daycare centers, and was a program assistant for Infant Child Development. I'm also involved in several county and state programs in the early childhood field. I look forward to serving on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Kelly Frantz-Langford

TARC

Director of Children’s Services and Assistive Technology



I have worked in the field of early childhood for over 18 years in Kansas. After graduating with a master’s degree in early childhood special education from the University of Kansas, I began my career with TARC’s tiny-k program as an early childhood special education teacher. After 8 years, I took a leadership position with TARC where I established connections with many early childhood programs in the community and across the state. I obtained my building leadership license and became the director of TARC’s Children’s Services. This work requires the oversight of four programs, including tiny-k, that are designed to support individuals of many abilities in accessing and fully participating in their early childhood communities.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Lisa Gehring**

USD 270 Plainville

Superintendent



Lisa Gehring has been an educator for over 30 years. She started her career as an English Language Arts teacher for USD 269 in Palco, Kansas where served as a teacher, coach, building principal and superintendent for the district. After 21 years of service for the district, Lisa accepted a position for USD 270 Plainville where she currently serves as superintendent. Lisa received her B.S. in Elementary Education, M.S. in Building Administration, and Ed.S. in Educational Leadership in from Fort Hays State University. Currently, she is a Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership at Kansas State University.

In addition to her PreK-12 position, Lisa works as an adjunct instructor for Fort Hays State University in the Educational Leadership Department. She also mentors new superintendents throughout Kansas through the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI).

She has always made it a priority to remain actively involved in her profession. Lisa serves as Kansas Education Commissioner, Dr. Randy Watson's Advisory Council and Dr. Watson's Leadership Council. In addition, she serves on FHSU's Educational Leadership Advisory Council. She is a member of USA, KAESP serving as Governor Elect from 2010-2012 and Governor from 2012-2013, KASSP serving as the Chair Elect for Area V, and KSSA.

In her community she serves as a board member on the Plainville Wellness Coalition and the Plainville Community Foundation. She has been a member of the Northwest KS Leadership Challenge, and the Rooks County Vision Leadership Team. During her time in Palco, Lisa served on an advisory board that managed the construction of a multi-million-dollar youth center. During her time as superintendent for USD 270, Lisa has brought in over \$2.3 million dollars in grant funds. She has completed numerous projects in the district to improve the education and well-being for the students and families of the Plainville community. Currently, she is working on a project to provide safe routes to school for students with a project estimate of almost \$1 million. One of her most recent projects includes a preschool expansion and the start-up of a new child care facility. By the start of the 2024-2025 school year, she plans to open three additional child care facilities that will address the need for daycare services in her community.

Lisa lives in Plainville, KS, with her husband Monte. They have four children, all of whom are educators. Monte and Lisa have 12 grandchildren. Lisa enjoys spending time with her family and working with her colleagues.



# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Amy Gottschamer**

Googols of Learning Child Development Center  
Owner/Executive Director



I opened Googols of Learning Child Development Center in Lawrence in 2008. I have an M.A. in History and an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education with an emphasis in Administration. I hold a KDHE Program Director's license for over 100 children, and a National Director's Credential. I have served on state board of KSAEYC since 2016 and served as the Past President of the Lawrence Chapter for 4 years. I've worked on the Workforce Development Advisory Group, including various subcommittees, and served 2 years on the Recommendations Panel. Locally, I've worked with the Lawrence School District, as an advisor for their Teacher Cadet program and received some of their student interns until COVID set in.

My pet projects are the Unifying Framework and Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education initiatives, by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For the last three years I have facilitated a PDG/All in for Kansas Kids grant opportunity in Douglas County for providers interested in learning about teaching Anti-Bias Education (ABE) in early childhood education settings. Each year, I enabled a new cohort of participants to receive free ABE training, and classroom materials and I hosted monthly Community of Practice meetings to enhance their learning. My personal interests are: History, Genealogy, Quilting, Reading, Political Podcasts, and Audiobooks.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Cathy Grey**

Butler Community College  
Department Chair, Early Childhood Education



I am the Department Chair for the Early Childhood Education program at Butler Community College where I teach Early Childhood Education classes in person, online, and supervise all practicum/field experience courses. I have a Master's degree in Early Childhood Studies. My 25+ years of experience in the field includes running an accredited family childcare program, teaching preschool and Kindergarten, and serving as a curriculum coach. Additionally, I have worked as a project manager for Child Care Aware of Kansas, overseeing grant activities to improve physical activity and nutrition practices in childcare programs. I enjoy supporting emerging professionals and advocating for changes to make Kansas the best state to raise young children. I live in Wichita with my husband Addison. We have two adult children, a daughter named Paige and a son named Parker.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Teresa Houston**

Envision, Inc.  
Director, ECDC



Teresa Houston, Director, Cathy G. Hudson Envision Child Development Center, has an undeniable passion for advocating for employment of people who are blind or visually impaired and access to early education for all children. Teresa, now blind, after being diagnosed with Bilateral Optic Atrophy, has been with Envision since the opening of the center in July of 2010. Envisions Child Development Center is a state-of-the-art facility brings children ages 0-5 years together in classrooms in which all students, irrespective of their abilities or skills, are welcomed holistically. The ECDC is the only vision-integrated early education center in the region providing comprehensive learning experiences and support to children and their families. Teresa received a Bachelor of Science degree in counseling with an emphasis in substance abuse and childhood development from Newman University, and her master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Friends University.

Houston is active with the National Industries for the Blind and consistently travels to Capitol Hill to advocate for people for employment of people who are blind or visually impaired, and has spoken many times in front of city, state and federal government. Teresa is married and has twins.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Talia Juiliano-Myers

Child Care Aware of Eastern KS  
Provider Services Manager



I am a Provider Services Manager for Child Care Aware of Eastern KS. I have worked in numerous aspects and initiatives within the Child Care Resource & Referral system for the past 15 years. I oversee new provider recruitment and start-up (CCHC), Child Care Quality Initiative Support System (CCQIS), Baby Steps, Shared Services, and Community Outreach for our region. Currently, I serve on the ECE Advisory Council for Allen Community College, the KCSL Healthy Families Advisory Group for Southeast KS, and numerous Child Care Coalitions.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Kim Kennedy**

Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF)  
Head Start Collaboration Office Director



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.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Tanya Koehn**

Child Care Aware of Kansas

Director of Families and Community Services



I currently work as the Director of Families and Communities Services for Child Care Aware of Kansas (CCAKS). I have been with CCAKS for 18 years in various positions, currently I oversee on with their Referral Center to assist families looking for child care, their early childhood data collection to partner with other early childhood state partners to look at the early childhood landscape, and with their community engagement work. I have always had love for the early childhood world, I worked in a preschool in high school, worked for Head Start and ran my own family child care program. I am excited to serve on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel and partner with other early childhood experts to enhance early childhood services to families, child care providers and communities.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Hilary Koehn

Kansas Parents as Teachers Association (KPATA)

Interim Executive Director/Quality Implementation and Affiliate Director



Hilary is an early childhood professional who believes strongly in providing high-quality, intentional support to early childhood staff, students, and families in Kansas. She is currently working for Kansas Parents as Teachers Association as the Interim Executive Director as well as the Quality Implementation and Affiliate Director. In her former role as Early Childhood Lead for Wichita Public Schools, she provided leadership in program development and implementation of early childhood programs, especially Parents as Teachers and At-Risk PreK. She has been working with PAT for over 15 years. She also works as an early childhood consultant.

Hilary has had the incredible opportunity over the last 22 years to work in various roles within the early childhood spectrum including classroom teacher, parent educator, curriculum coach and early childhood leadership/management. These different roles and experiences in early childhood programs have enabled her to work with multiple ages of children and parents from a variety of different demographic backgrounds. The vast majority of her experience has been in working with preschoolers and toddlers. She previously served as a member of the Kansas Parents as Teachers Association Board, the Sedgwick County Early Childhood Coordinating Council and the Kansas Preschool Program Leadership Team.

Hilary believes that by providing parents, educators and program leaders with research based professional development, support and early childhood resources, we can accomplish the mission of strengthening early childhood services across the state of Kansas to better prepare our young students for lifelong success. She is a strong advocate for community partnerships that help early childhood programs to thrive in their communities.



# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Larry Lewis

Growing Futures Early Education Center  
Executive Director



Over the past 25 years, Larry Lewis has been active in his roles working with children and youth in his community. He has been successful strengthening programs for urban youth, developing financial goals for growth and implementing whole-child educational services. His commitment to serving families has been a part of Larry's professional journey since the very beginning. Larry is a local product of Blue Valley Northwest and graduate from Kansas State University where he completed his bachelor's degree in Family Studies and Human Services while also competing as a collegiate athlete. (Wildcat Football!). His opportunity to volunteer at a local after school program piloted him into a field that would ultimately become his career. Working after school with children allowed Larry to discover his talent for connecting with youth. Years later, he has served in various roles all with the vision of helping young people reach their full potential.

During his endeavor as a child and youth development professional, Larry has gained the experience of leading large nonprofit organizations through fundraising projects, partnering with local companies, and establishing positive connections in the community to bring awareness to the need of quality care and education for all children from all backgrounds. When he is not busy advocating for children, Larry enjoys sports recreation activities with his family and traveling to new places.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Karen MacCrory**

Mitchell County Partnership for Children  
School Readiness Specialist



A passion for early childhood has been the driving force behind my transition from childcare worker, to center director, to licensed educator with a degree in Early Childhood Unified. I currently serve early childhood as a school readiness specialist for Mitchell County Partnership for Children, an ECBG funded organization. As a school readiness specialist I serve both childcare and preschool classrooms in four rural counties in north central Kansas, completing IGDIs, P-3 and myIGDI's assessments. I work directly with children to support their development helping ensure they enter kindergarten meeting developmental benchmarks. I also provide mentoring and training to early childhood educators, including conducting CLASS observations and engaging in learning focused coaching conversations with them. I meet with district leadership to discuss the importance of quality early childhood experiences and how they fit into the framework of Kindergarten readiness in our state. I assist in writing and managing early childhood grants for the organization as well. I recently completed the National P-3 leadership course, and that experience highlighted for me the importance of collaboration.

I am interested in being a part of the ongoing discussions regarding early childhood in our nation. Our state is focused on Early Childhood and this panel is a wonderful opportunity to be a part of discussions that will help shape the future.

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## Malissa Martin

SparkWheel, Inc.

President/CEO



I'm the President and CEO of SparkWheel, Inc., which was previously Communities In Schools of Mid-America, which is headquartered in Lawrence and serves multiple states. I've been in this position since 2007 and have been thrilled to be a Kansan since 2005. I was with the Communities In Schools network in different places since 1999, beginning in Houston and working at the local, state and national levels. On July 1, 2023, Communities In Schools of Mid-America became SparkWheel. Our name changed, but our commitment remains the same for our work in the early childhood through post-secondary spaces. We will continue to place staff on school campuses to provide prevention and intervention services.

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 hope that my experience and perspective are a benefit to the group, and as a lifelong learner, I am looking forward to learning a lot.

I'm also a creative person, and I spend a lot of time quilting, 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.

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## **Natalie McClane**

Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE)  
Education Program Consultant, Early Childhood Team



I am Natalie McClane, an Education Program Consultant on the Early Childhood Team at KSDE. I work closely with the Preschool-Aged At-Risk and Kansas Preschool Pilot Grant programs across the state. Most recently I've had the pleasure of working with an exceptional team of Early Childhood experts across the early childhood landscape in Kansas to update the Kansas Early Learning Standards. I've worked in the Early Childhood field for over 20 years and love the collaboration the Recommendation Panel allows me to have with Early Childhood Programs across the state.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Cheisa Myles

Blessed Assurance Daycare  
Owner/Lead Teacher



I am a licensed child care professional with over 20 years of childcare experience. I own/operate my in home daycare, Blessed Assurance Daycare, and live in Manhattan KS with my two sons, Braxton 17 and Desmond 11, and my husband, Randy. I am a recent graduate from the University of Kansas with a degree in Leadership Studies and Diversity Equity and Inclusion. My passion is teaching and advocating for all children and helping parents along the way.

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## **Dr. Leigh Anne Neal**

USD 512 Shawnee Mission School District  
Chief of Early Education/Sustainability



Dr. Leigh Anne Neal is currently serving as the Chief of Early Childhood Education and Sustainability for the Shawnee Mission School District. Currently in her 29th year in education, she has spent the past seven years overseeing early childhood programming and previously served as Associate Superintendent for Communications. She began her career as a special educator and elementary (third grade and kindergarten) classroom teacher before being promoted to a district-level administrative role. Neal has held other positions during her career including director of public information and building principal at the early childhood education center.

Neal earned a doctorate in educational leadership from Baker University; a master's degree in educational leadership from Pittsburg State University; a bachelor of science degree in elementary and special education from Avila University; and a bachelor of arts degree in broadcast journalism from Southern Methodist University.

## 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

### **Charlotte Neuschafer**

Russell Child Development Center  
CACFP Director



I am in my 17th year as a Director for the Child and Adult Care Program, in SW Kansas. I assist licensed Childcare Providers in 22 counties to attain the highest reimbursement possible for their services. I work with several counties to set up classes on "How to Become a Childcare Provider. As a former childcare provider, I am passionate about the field.



## 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

### **Patty Peschel**

Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc. (KCCTO)

Director



As the Director of Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO), I have experience working with multiple early childhood quality improvement projects at both the state and national level for 20 years. I oversee two grant funded projects which include the Workforce Professional Development System and the KCCTO-KITS Infant Toddler Specialist Network. Both projects focus on supporting the early childhood workforce, programs, and system.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Tabatha Rosproy

Kansas Parent Information Resource Center  
Early Childhood Project Coordinator



Tabatha Rosproy is a 13-year early childhood educator, and the first pre-school teacher to ever be named National Teacher of the Year. She was awarded this honor in 2020 and has spent the last several years speaking for organizations around the country, elevating the work of early childhood educators and the students and families they serve. Tabatha is passionate about social-emotional learning, working with families, and empowering educators to be advocates for their field.

Tabatha is well-known for helping to create a full-day public pre-school classroom inside of a nursing home in Winfield, Kansas called “Cumbernauld Little Vikes” and loves to work with schools to create intergenerational partnerships. Tabatha has transitioned into a new role with Kansas Parent Information Resource Center where she travels the state training schools on best practices in Early Childhood Education and Family Engagement. She resides in Olathe, KS with her husband, Tim.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Bethany Samuel**

Department for Children and Families (DCF)

QRIS Supports Manager



I am part of the DCF Links to Quality team as well as manage the CCDF consumer education website. This connects me to several other consumer education and provider support efforts around the state. Before joining the Links to Quality team, I worked at DCF as an EES Human Service Supervisor, managing the application teams for SNAP, TANF, and Child Care Assistance for my county. I have my master's degree in Intercultural Studies, and I love learning about different people groups. My education, together with my previous and current job experience, brings together my passions of learning about people and figuring out how best to serve them.

I live in Johnson County with my husband, our two children, and our family dog. We enjoy hiking, board games, and spending family time together.

## 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

### **Brett Schmidt**

Learning Cross Inc.  
Executive Director



I am the Executive Director and Founder of Learning Cross Inc., a multi-site intergenerational Child Care. I have been focused on early childhood from teaching as a Kindergarten and 1st grade teacher, child care provider coach, preschool teacher and child care director. I graduated with a B.A. in Early Childhood Education from Marietta College and received my M.S. in Brain-Based Teaching and Learning from Nova Southeastern University.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Lisa Schmidt**

Women's Community Y Child Development Center  
Executive Director



My journey to early learning has had some extended detours. My bachelor's is in Family and Consumer Science and after college I spent over 20 years in sales both wholesale and retail. These career deviations have prepared me for my current position as the Executive Director of the Women's Community Y in Leavenworth, Kansas. I became familiar with the Y when our twins (that are now juniors in college) attended preschool here. I then was asked to serve on the board of directors and when the previous Executive Director retired, I received a call from a board member.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Heather Schrotberger

Kansas Head Start Association  
Executive Director



Heather Schrotberger, a life-long Kansan, has worked for nearly 25 years in the early education field. Most recently, as an early childhood consultant, she has provided strategic planning, project management, facilitation, and grant writing services to local, state, and national early education organizations. Prior to that, she served as the Director of Project Eagle/Educare Kansas City at the University of Kansas Medical Center, an early education program serving children ages birth to five, and their families, in Wyandotte County, KS.

She has participated in numerous collaborations and efforts to promote excellence and innovation in the field of early education and enjoys working with diverse groups of individuals committed to making a difference for young children and their families. Heather resides in the Overland Park area with her family.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Natalie Sollo**

KU School of Medicine-Wichita  
Associate Professor, MD



I am a pediatrician (about to retire) who has worked in both private practice and academic practice in Wichita for over 30 years. I spent a majority of my career as the medical director of the Wesley Clinic practice, training pediatric residents and caring for children, many from lower income families. I also worked in and directed the cystic fibrosis clinic in Wichita from 2001-2024. In my roles I have been able to see the effects of governmental policies on children and families, and I have been convinced that we could do better, especially in early childhood.

I am on the board of Center City Academy, a nonprofit working to build an early childhood education and daycare center in downtown Wichita.

I am the mother of two and the grandmother of four. My grandchildren have reminded me how much goes on in early childhood, and why it is such a critical age for learning. And also, why it is such a fun age!



# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Cornelia Stevens, Chair**

TOP Early Learning Centers

Executive Director



Cornelia Stevens is the Executive Director of TOP Early Learning Centers. Cornelia has more than 20 years of experience developing collaborative partnerships, creating opportunities for new business development, assessing and identifying needed services, program development, and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of programs and services. Cornelia received her education at Ohio University with a degree in Music Therapy, and at Baker University with a Master's in Business Administration.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Marie Treichel

Kansas Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (KAIMH)  
Program Manager



I am the project manager for KAIMH, currently working on a DCF grant to expand Infant Mental Health Endorsement® opportunities to early educators. I have worked in integrated early learning classrooms, family child care programs, and as a provider services manager at Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas where I oversaw grant work and provided direct services (coaching and education) to early learning educators. I am currently involved in project work for CCAEKS that includes community engagement, professional development and coaching.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## Stephanie Waterman

Geary County Schools USD 475

Early Childhood Program Coordinator



I am excited to begin my 26th year as an educator this August. After receiving my bachelor's degree from Fort Hays State University, my teaching career began in Fort Worth, Texas where I taught 3rd, 2nd, and 1st grades. My family moved to Junction City in 2002, where I was honored to introduce military children and their families to the world of Kindergarten at Fort Riley for 8 years before shifting into an Instructional Coach role. In 2014 after receiving my master's degree from Kansas State University, I found my love for Early Childhood Education when I was selected as the Principal of the Early Childhood Center. The ongoing expansion of our program eventually created the need for the Early Childhood Program Coordinator to be added to the district administration team in 2021 and I shifted into this role. I oversee all aspects of IDEA compliance for the program, manage the application, screening, and placement process for the Early Childhood students, facilitate curriculum implementation and professional development for all staff members.

We currently have 32 classrooms across 11 sites and serve approximately 800 students throughout the school year. My passion for Early Childhood Education includes increased access to a high-quality preschool experience for children in my community and the state, empowering families through meaningful engagement in their child's education, and advocating for developmentally appropriate practices that honor the power of play for young learners. In my personal life, I am the proud mom of 3 sons, the youngest of which I'll be moving to Bethany College next month to begin his freshman year and first season of college football.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Mandi Waugh**

Child Start, Inc.  
Program Director



Mandi Waugh is a dedicated professional and passionate advocate for early childhood education. With over 10 years of experience in the field, she has made a profound impact on the lives of countless children and families. Mandi currently serves as the Early Childhood Connections Director at Child Start, a renowned organization committed to providing high-quality early childhood education and support services.

Throughout her career, Mandi has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and a deep understanding of the unique needs of young children. She possesses a remarkable ability to create nurturing environments that foster optimal growth and development. Mandi's commitment to ensuring that every child receives the best possible start in life is evident in her unwavering dedication and tireless efforts.

As the Early Childhood Connections Director, Mandi plays a crucial role in designing and implementing comprehensive programs that promote early learning, social-emotional development, and school readiness. She works closely with teachers, parents, and community partners to create innovative strategies and initiatives that address the diverse needs of children from various backgrounds.

With an expertise that extends beyond the classroom, Mandi has actively engaged in professional development and stays abreast of the latest research and best practices in early childhood education. Her vast knowledge and experience allow her to provide guidance and support to educators and parents, empowering them to create enriching experiences for young learners. Her genuine love for children and her unwavering commitment to their well-being and growth have earned her the respect and admiration of her colleagues and the community at large. Her positive impact on early childhood education is felt by all who have the privilege of working with her.

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Dr. Amber Wheeler**

USD 258 Humboldt Schools  
Superintendent



I am currently the Superintendent of Humboldt Schools USD 258. I have 21 years experience as an educator, and I spent the majority of my teaching and administrative career in the elementary setting. Our district is currently building a Community Care Center that will include childcare opportunities for our staff and community. I also am living the Early Childhood world as a parent of a 4-year-old. We have had amazing experiences with Birth to 3 and childcare in our first four years. My experiences as both an educator and parent have reinforced the vital need for quality early childhood experiences for all kids!

# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Dr. Stephanie Wiggins**

Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO), Kansas Infant Toddler Specialist Network (KITS)  
Technical Assistance Specialist



Dr. Stephanie Wiggins is currently a Technical Assistance Specialist with the Infant-Toddler Specialist Network, part of the Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities program. She has worked extensively in the field of early childhood, with more than 15 years of professional experience as an infant teacher, toddler teacher, center director, college instructor, and her current role as a coach for early childhood providers throughout the state of Kansas.

Her areas of interest include leadership, behavior and guidance, and anti-bias. She holds a Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D in Human Development and Family Sciences, and has experience with the Environmental Rating Scales, CLASS observations, and Conscious Discipline. Her career focus includes increasing the capacity and empowerment of childcare providers.



# 2024-2025 Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Members

## **Christie Wyckoff**

Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund  
Early Childhood Coordinator



Christie Wyckoff joined the Children's Cabinet in May 2023. She graduated from Kansas State in 2008 with a BS in Management and Marketing. Before working in School Finance at KSDE for almost 5 years, she worked in the custom apparel industry through college and 10 years after.

Christie likes to volunteer and was a big sister through Big Brother Big Sisters for 6 years until she aged out of the program (but nothing has changed since then as they still talk all the time!) Her family, friends (and their families) are Christie's motivation for her professional and community work. She has been a K-State Football & Basketball season ticket holder for 20+ years and will travel almost anywhere to watch them. Christie also loves to garden and work on projects for her historic home. Summers on the lake, travelling, and live music are also big passions.