Ramona Richards

Pam Reising Rechner

Cris Stanek

Katherine L. Stanton has received her Bachelor’s in Consumer Economics and Family Management from SIU-Carbondale and a Master’s in Human Resource Development from Illinois State University. Ms. Stanton is currently working with the Illinois State Board of Education to address the development of early childhood and role of play-based learning in the classroom. Ms. Stanton is also working with the Illinois State Board of Education to develop professional development opportunities for Early Childhood educators. She is a presenter for the Illinois Early Learning Laboratory, a facilitator for Healthy Moms, Happy Babies, a speaker for the Illinois Early Learning Lab, and a presenter at various conferences and professional development sessions.

Keynote

Carla Bryant

Carla Bryant is the Director of Education Strategy and Ventures at The Kenneth Baim Foundation where she focuses on early childhood education. Bryant led the founding of the education investment arm of the Foundation in September 2017. Her work focuses on increasing the number of opportunities for young children, particularly those who are ready for kindergarten and retaining at grade level by third grade. She directs funding initiatives to help improve children’s positive early childhood experiences, support families with young children in the early years of development, and promote learning leadership and systems in Oakland.

Jaclyn Vasquez

Angela Searcy

Jill TOMPINS has spent over 20 years in the early childhood field. She received her Bachelor’s in Child Development from Illinois University and a Master’s in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Illinois. She spent 3 years as a Development Specialist and Service Coordinator in an Early Intervention Program in Illinois before becoming an Infant/Toddler Specialist for the Lakas Quality Improvement Center for Disabilities. She worked for several years as an independent consultant, assisting new Early Head Start programs with start-up activities, observing children and teachers for scholarships, and facilitating team meetings.

Jill Topkins is the Associate Director of the Early Development Instrument at Erikson Institute. She is a former educator of 15 years and a faculty member of Parent Centers of Chicago Public Schools. Jill earned a Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education with an emphasis in special education. Her role at Erikson Institute includes addressing access issues in Chicago, being the highest performing Rt3 district, assisting new Early Head Start programs, and working with home-visitors, government officials, service agencies, child care providers, and teachers for various projects, and addressing access issues in Chicago.
Currently the Parent Engagement and Training Manager for Illinois Action for Children, Erin is a Professional Learning Coordinator. She helps to develop and implement Family and Community Engagement initiatives, technical assistance and program support for staff and parent groups in child care centers and public school districts and licensed exempt homes, for targeted groups of parents, providers as well as deepening and expanding neighborhood partnerships.

With working in Illinois Action for Children (IAC), in the North Lawndale community, Sarah has worked with a seasoned staff focused on regulating student attendance. As a Community Connections Case Manager, she provides an intense case management approach to address and eliminate barriers. Prior to her work with IAC, Sarah graduated from Millikin University with a Bachelor of Science in Sociology. Shortly after, she went on to work with the Illinois Department of Human Services as a Case Manager.

Linda has a background in Speech, Language Pathology and Audiology. She has worked at all educational levels and served as Special Education Consultant, Director of Services for Instruction and professional development at deLacey Family Education Center. Linda presently serves as Director of Early Childhood for District 100.

Dr. Coba-Rodriguez uses a family-resilience framework to explore how ethnic-racial families promote children’s successful transition to kindergarten. To enhance child competencies upon kindergarten entry, she strives to enrich the home-school partnership. Dr. Coba-Rodriguez’s qualitative and mixed-method research explores participant voices, recognizes cultural variation, and documents heterogeneity.

Donna “retired” from Washabawan Area Development Inc. and moved to work at the Illinois State Board of Education in the Early Childhood division with Preschool for All and Prevention Initiative grants for 4 years. Currently, she is back working with her first love—Head Start as the Illinois Associate Head Start State Collaboration Director through the Illinois Head Start Association. Donna believes firmly in Head Start’s core values of working alongside families providing a solid foundation for our nation’s youngest and most vulnerable children.

Michelle Escapa

Michelle began with the KIDS project as a coach four years ago and is now the Illinois Early Learning Coordinator. She has 15 years of experience as a Childhood Childhood teacher. She graduated from Illinois State University with a degree in Early Childhood. Michelle furthered her education with a graduate degree in one in Early Childhood/Special Education and the other in Educational Leadership from Western Illinois University.

Thirty-three ago when Sandy’s daughter was born with Down syndrome, she became activated to the challenges related to disability, inclusive practices, children, and education. She has been employed with the state’s Project CHOICES, directed an Early Childhood Education Program, served as an Early Intervention Statewide Trainer, been an Early Childhood and Parent Educator. Currently, she is the Early Childhood Specialist for the Dramatic, Physical, and Visual Arts programs for the Illinois Early Learning Network.

Stacie is a Quality Specialist and Trainer for Baby TALK. She has over 20 years of experience working with families and children in multiple capacities including serving as a birth to 3 Program Coordinator for a PI program in the Westlin School District. In addition to 10 years of experience in the early childhood field, Stacie’s experience also includes teaching elementary school in multiple grades, working as a school administrator, teaching college at McKendree University, parent education, and home visiting. Cumulatively, these experiences have given her insights and knowledge to help build and work collaboratively on common goals for children.

Erin Jackle has been an early childhood educator for 14 years. She has worked at Head Start, a Head Start Parent Educator, and a special education teacher, as a coach, and most recently as a Director of Transitional Services for District U-46. In her role as Kindergarten Transition Facilitator, Erin supports students, families, and teachers around transitioning into kindergarten programs as students move from early childhood programs to Kindergarten.

Jenny Metcalf

Jenny works as an Early Childhood Consultant at the Illinois State Board of Education. She has extensive experience in early childhood and intervention strategies, teaming and collaboration, early childhood special education leadership, collaboration with families, and special education program administration.

Kim Nelson

Kimberly Nelson is the Executive Director of Early Childhood for Rockford Public Schools. She oversees a largest K-12 Northern Illinois University and St. Xavier University, she has extensive experience addressing the needs of Spanish-speaking families. Other areas of interest include quality improvement, social-emotional development and reflective practice.

Peggy Ondera

Peggy Ondera, the Director of Early Childhood Development. Her responsibilities include working with the Preschool for All program and serving as the agency contact for the Preschool Development Grant and ExceleRate Illinois. Prior to joining the Illinois State Board of Education, she served as a director of a child care center serving children 6 weeks to 12 years old. In this role, Jenny has experience working in higher education in the area of student affairs.

Kris Pennington

Kris Pennington holds bachelor’s in early childhood education with special education endorsement and master’s in educational administration. She was an early childhood teacher for 16 years in both private and public schools. The past 8 years Kris has served as an early childhood coordinator and Principal in McLean County Christian School. Kris includes IL Early Learning MSeries Steering Committee, Child Parent Center, Birth-3rd Grade Alignment/Preschool Expansion Model, Community Schools Model, Danahon Framework for Success in Early Childhood development, and IL P-20 Council and Illinois Early Learning Transition Coalition. Kindergarten Transition Advisory Committee.

Marianne Pokorny, Senior Manager of Strategic Engagement, is a Professional Early Childhood Education Counselor, and Social Change Agent. She has passion and experience working in areas of social justice, education, and gender and race equity; she strives to give voice to the marginalized and underserved populations. Her work at the YPA includes supporting Chicago public schools relationship cultivation, capacity building and community systems development. She has the ability to foster conversations that lead to change in communities.

Bernadette Laumann, Ph.D., Project Coordinator, the Illinois Early Learning Project at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Dr. Laumann in Psychology, Ed.D. in Early Childhood Special Education from Michigan State University. She received her B.A. in Psychology, Ed.D. in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in early childhood education methods, assessment of the young child, early childhood curriculum and intervention strategies, teaming and collaboration, early childhood special education leadership, collaboration with families, and special education program administration.

Debra Pacchiano

Debra Pacchiano is Vice President, Strategic Engagement at the Ounce of Prevention Fund. She is an applied researcher, trainer, consultant, and advocate. Dr. Pacchiano has extensive experience working in community systems development and in child welfare.

Kit Patterson

Kit Patterson, B.A., is a Training Manager in the Ounce Institute. She has over 13 years of experience in early childhood professional development as a coach, group facilitator and program supervisor. She is a certified Healthy Families America Trainer and is a member of the HFA Accreditation Panel. Kit is fluent in Spanish and has extensive experience addressing the needs of Spanish-speaking families. Other areas of interest include quality improvement, social-emotional development and reflective practice.

Kit Patterson

Kris Pennington

Marianne Pokorny, Senior Manager of Strategic Engagement, is a Professional Early Childhood Education Counselor, and Social Change Agent. She has passion and experience working in areas of social justice, education, and gender and race equity; she strives to give voice to the marginalized and underserved populations. Her work at the YPA includes supporting Chicago public schools relationship cultivation, capacity building and community systems development. She has the ability to foster conversations that lead to change in communities.

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who made this conference possible!