Swati Adarkar has a wealth of experience in research, communications, child advocacy and public policy development, and is a champion for high-quality early care and education for children pre-birth to age 8. She helped found the Children's Institute and has shaped its growth since its inception, first serving as vice president of research and communications. Swati was an instrumental leader in the 2007 expansion of Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten. She conceived the Institute’s Early Works initiative, and with David Douglas School District and Mt. Hood Community College Head Start, the Children’s Institute launched the first demonstration site at Earl Boyles Elementary School in east Portland in 2010. Swati served on Oregon's first Early Childhood Matters Advisory Council for former Governor Ted Kulongoski and on Governor John Kitzhaber’s Early Childhood and Family Investment Transition Team. She received the 2011 Women Leaders of Oregon Award from Portland State University’s Center for Women, Politics & Policy, and is a member of the Board of Trustees for Portland State University and the International Women’s Forum of Oregon. Prior to joining CI, she advised nonprofit organizations on public policy and communications, served as policy director for Children First for Oregon, and was director of community affairs for Children Now. She has a Master's in Public Administration from Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government and a Bachelor's in Communications Studies from UCLA.

Mimi Aledo-Sandoval is a Policy Director at the Alliance for Early Success. As Policy Director, Mimi leads work to advance home visiting as a strategy for high quality infant toddler programs and services, and directs a portfolio of state and national Alliance partnerships and investments. Mimi has a wealth of local, state, and federal experience and a passion for early childhood issues. Before joining the Alliance, Mimi was a Senior Associate on two Pew Charitable Trusts projects – Pew’s Home Visiting Campaign and the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative. Prior to her cross-country move to the metro-DC area, Mimi served as a senior fiscal analyst for the New Mexico’s Legislative Finance Committee where she prepared and presented annual budget recommendations to legislative committees for the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department, the Department of Workforce Solutions, and a number of other state commissions and agencies. Mimi is a former policy analyst for the Albuquerque City Council, an AmeriCorps volunteer, and a Congressional Hispanic Caucus Fellow. She earned a bachelor’s degree in economics from Salem College in North Carolina and a Master in public policy from Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government in 2006. In 2013, she was selected an NCSL Early Learning Fellow.

Rhian Evans Allvin, executive director since 2013, is responsible for guiding the strategic direction of the organization as well as overseeing the daily operations. With more than 70,000 members and 300 Affiliate components across the United States, NAEYC serves as the leading voice on behalf of young children and early childhood educators. Before joining NAEYC, Rhian was a guiding force in Arizona's early childhood movement for more than 15 years. In 2006 she co-wrote the citizen’s ballot initiative that created First Things First (FTF) which set aside Arizona’s tobacco tax monies for children birth to five and created a state agency whose purpose is to ensure all Arizona children start kindergarten prepared to be successful in school and in life. She was then appointed to FTF’s state board, where she served for four years before resigning to become the organization's chief executive officer (CEO).
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Leanne Barrett is Senior Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has provided leadership for several national initiatives, including Getting Ready: the 17-State National School Readiness Indicators Initiative. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is working with the Alliance on peer-to-peer work with other state advocates on issues related to state Pre-K using mixed delivery system.

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Helen Blank is Director of Child Care and Early Learning at the National Women’s Law Center. Her work focuses on child care and early education issues. Helen currently leads the federal Child Care and Early Learning Coalition and the Strong Start for America’s Children Campaign. She has authored numerous reports including an annual report on state child care policies and A Count for Quality: Child Care Directors on Quality Rating and Improvement Systems. Previously, Helen served 24 years as the director of the Child Care and Development Division at the Children’s Defense Fund, where she spearheaded advocacy on a variety of efforts to improve early learning policies.

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Charlotte Brantley joined Clayton Early Learning in Denver, CO as president and CEO in 2006, after holding a variety of early childhood leadership appointments at local, state and national levels. Previously she taught preschoolers in model early childhood education programs; instructed teachers working toward AA and BA degrees; managed educational initiatives at PBS Kids television; and administered state and federal early childhood policies, programs and funding streams for the state of Texas and in the Clinton Administration. At Clayton Early Learning Charlotte oversees the implementation of the Educare model at Educare of Denver and a second innovative preschool program in Far Northeast Denver. In addition, she oversees the work of the Clayton Institute, working toward improved early education opportunities for all Colorado children by providing and facilitating effective teacher preparation, offering evaluation services to identify and promote promising practices, and designing and advocating for effective public programs and policies. She is a member of the Governor appointed Early Childhood Leadership Commission and co-chairs the Legislation Implementation and the Data and Outcomes Committees.

Ms. Bronfin is the Executive Director of the Policy Institute for Children. She has worked extensively in policy and advocacy around children's issues in Louisiana at the state and local level for the past 15 years. Most recently she has focused on the implementation of the Early Childhood Education Act, Act 3 of the 2012 Legislative Session. This latest work has resulted in the state’s adoption of two nationally recognized, developmentally-appropriate tools as the assessments for the new accountability structure, the implementation of these assessments gradually through pilots, the statutory requirement for an Advisory Council on Early Childhood Care and Education to the state board of education, the preservation of the high quality standards of Louisiana’s pre-k program in statute and the preservation of the School Readiness Tax Credits that support low income working parents to access high quality child care, as well as many other policies. Melanie received her BA from Yale University and her J.D. from Tulane University School of Law.

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Michael (Mike) Burke is Vice President of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, which invests in public education on the first five years of life and learning. Mike has more than 30 years of experience in politics, public relations and philanthropy. He helps the foundation execute its pan-philanthropic strategy to invest in early childhood practice, policy and science, in Nebraska and throughout the United States. Mike spends most of his professional time working with local partners to create new Educare schools and serving on the advisory boards guiding Educare Milwaukee, Educare Tulsa, Educare Oklahoma City, Educare Central Maine, Educare Miami-Dade, and Educare West DuPage. Before joining the Buffett Early Childhood Fund in 2007, Mike oversaw public affairs and communications for several children’s organizations, including: the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Voices for Illinois Children, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

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Tim joined the staff in October 1998 to coordinate the Illinois operations, bringing with him eighteen years of experience in issue advocacy, public education, and public relations strategies at the state and national levels. For eleven years, he was the executive director of the Metropolitan Tenants Organization in Chicago, a nonprofit citywide coalition devoted to promoting tenants’ rights and the availability, affordability, and quality of rental housing in Chicago. Tim received a bachelor’s degree in natural resources from the environmental advocacy program at the University of Michigan.

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Cindy Cisneros is the Vice President of Education Programs responsible for leading CED’s comprehensive portfolio that covers the continuum from early education to postsecondary issues. She manages the day-to-day project work for CED’s state-based efforts in early education and related research. Prior to working at CED, Ms. Cisneros served as the Director of Stakeholder Engagement at Public Education Network and as a Principal Research Analyst at the American Institutes for Research.
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As president and CEO, Shannon directs the overall work of KAC. Shannon has been a voice for Kansas children for nearly two decades, joining KAC in 1997. She became president and CEO in 2010. Shannon is from Leavenworth, Kan., and she earned a master’s in public administration from the University of Kansas, a master’s in child development from Sarah Lawrence College in New York and a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Sweet Briar College in Virginia. Her work on behalf of Kansas children has been recognized through the Presidential Volunteer Service Award initiative, the YWCA Women’s Leadership Luncheon and the Dental Champions Leadership Program. Shannon is a member of the Kansas Children’s Cabinet, Leadership Kansas, the Governor’s Children’s Health Advisory Committee and the Blue Ribbon Panel on Infant Mortality.
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Claire Dudley Chavez serves as Executive VP for Policy and Stakeholder Engagement for United Way of Santa Fe County and the New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership. Previously, Claire served as the Governance Excellence Manager at Presbyterian Healthcare Services where she managed the system’s governance system and assisted in the coordination of community health activities. From 2003 to 2011, Claire served as the Child and Youth Policy Advisory to Lieutenant Governor Denish, developing and directing the New Mexico Children’s Cabinet. Claire also developed and co-authored the annual Children’s Cabinet report card and budget report, which provides a comprehensive overview of state and federal funding.

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Dave Edie has served as the Early Education Policy Analyst for the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) since 2006. Dave worked in Wisconsin state government for over 20 years, serving as director of the state’s Office of Child Care for 10 years, and also as the Director of the Office of Regulation and Licensing. He was the lead child care administrator and planner in state government for most of his tenure in state government. After leaving state government in 2002, Dave worked as an analyst for the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership and as a consultant for the National Child Care Information Center, before he was hired by WCCF. Dave worked in public elementary schools and as a teacher and director of child care programs in Massachusetts and Indiana early in his career. He is currently a member of the Governor’s Early Childhood Advisory Council, and is co-chair of its steering committee. Dave holds a Bachelor’s degree from Amherst College in Massachusetts and a Master’s degree in education from Springfield College.

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Pete Festersen was elected to the Omaha City Council in 2009 and re-elected in 2013. He served as President of the City Council from 2013 to 2015 and is President of his own small business, Strategic Business Development, LLC. Prior to serving on the City Council and starting his company, Pete helped shape Omaha’s future in senior management positions with the Peter Kiewit Foundation, the Mayor’s Office, the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and Alegent Health, one of Omaha’s largest private employers.
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Jon Gould joined the staff of the Children’s Alliance in Washington in 1997. As Deputy Director, he coordinates the organization’s public policy, mobilization, lobbying, communications, and outreach activities. Prior to becoming Deputy Director, Jon served as the organization’s Community Action Director. Jon has an extensive history of contribution and leadership in housing, human service, and children’s issues at the local, state and national levels. His strategic leadership has contributed to major state policy victories for children, including Washington’s Apple Health for Kids universal health coverage program, major expansions in early learning including the Early Start Act, and expansions of child nutrition programs.

Lisa Guernsey is deputy director of the Education Policy Program and director of the Learning Technologies Project at New America. She leads teams of writers and analysts to examine policies, tell stories, and generate ideas on new approaches to help disadvantaged students succeed. Prior to her work at New America, Lisa worked as a staff writer at The New York Times and The Chronicle of Higher Education. She has also contributed to several national publications, including The Atlantic, The Washington Post, Newsweek, Time, Slate, and USA TODAY, and she is the author of College. Edu (Octameron Associates, 1997-2010) and Screen Time: How Electronic Media – From Baby Videos to Educational Software – Affects Your Young Child (Basic Books, 2012). Her latest book, with Michael H. Levine, is Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens (Jossey-Bass, 2015). Lisa has served on several national advisory committees on early education, including the Institute of Medicine’s Committee on the Science of Children Birth To Age 8 which produced the 2015 volume, Transforming the Workforce Birth to Age 8: A Unifying Foundation.
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Jason Sabo is the Founder of Frontera Strategy. Experience matters. After more than a decade working at the Texas Capitol and other state legislatures, Jason has developed a straightforward system for helping nonprofit organizations and philanthropists reach their public policy goals. Jason knows the issues and politics important to nonprofits and philanthropy, and he knows how to win. Jason is a frequent public speaker and is trained in public policy dispute resolution. Jason received his M.A. in History from Indiana University.
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Natalie Smith is a consultant with Frontera Strategy. Natalie draws from her background in communications, law, and government. Natalie began her career working as a legislative aide for U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. During and after law school, she focused on health law and policy and public interest law. Natalie is an active volunteer in the Austin community and a member of the 2015 Leadership Austin Emerge class. Natalie received her B.S. in Communication Studies from The University of Texas at Austin and her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.
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Sheila Smith, Ph.D. directs the early childhood team at NCCP, and has extensive knowledge about policies that can benefit low-income children. She has experience in program/policy development and research in the areas of: quality early childhood education, Quality Rating Improvement Systems, parent involvement, and early childhood mental health.

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Helene Stebbins is Senior Policy Director for the Alliance for Early Success. She provides strategic oversight for the knowledge development grants, with a focus on making the research more accessible to policymakers. In 2003 she launched her own consulting firm, specializing in the coordination of the health, education, and care of children from birth through age five. Her clients include dozens of state and national organizations working to improve state policies for vulnerable young children. From 1996–2002 Helene worked in the Center for Best Practices at the National Governors Association. As the program director for children and youth policy, she served as a resource to governors and their senior advisors on child and family policy issues. By tracking state initiatives and best practices, Helene worked to promote the exchange of good ideas among policymakers to improve state policies. In 1994, Helene was a Presidential Management Intern for the Food Stamp Program in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She earned a Masters of Public Policy from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and graduated cum laude from Carleton College in Minnesota.
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Deborah (Debbie) Stein has more than 30 years of experience in policy analysis and advocacy on behalf of vulnerable children. In April 2015 Debbie became the first Network Director for the Partnership for America’s Children, a network of 54 state and local independent, multi-issue, child advocacy organizations. The Partnership strengthens, connects and inspires its members so that they can better improve the lives of children in their communities and across the country. Previously, Debbie spent nine years at the Hatcher Group, where she was Vice-President for Policy. She developed much of the content for the Casey Foundation’s Advocacy Learning Lab (ALL) including: writing and editing policy reports, providing strategic communications services, helping launch Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity, and advocating for better state level data for children.

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Louise Stoney is an independent consultant specializing in early care and education finance and policy. She is a co-founder of both Opportunities Exchange and the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance. Louise has worked with state and local governments, foundations, national policy organizations, early care and education (ECE) providers, industry intermediaries and child advocacy groups in more than 40 states and cities. In addition to leading the national Shared Services movement, Louise is currently focused on effective Quality Rating and Improvement System implementation, innovative ECE policy, and using cost-modeling techniques to inform ECE finance. She has authored several articles for Exchange magazine.

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Cynthia Stringfellow, senior vice president, oversees the Educare Learning Network’s approach to implementation assistance, professional development and learning. Cynthia leads the team in design and effective delivery of implementation assistance and professional development for Educare Schools and oversees a comprehensive learning and development system for the Network. Prior to joining the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Cynthia was the director of the Midwest Learning Center for Family Support at Family Focus Inc. and the national director of training and technical assistance for Healthy Families America at Prevent Child Abuse America. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in community and school health education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and her Master of Science degree in counseling and health education from the University of North Texas.
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Angel Taveras served as the Mayor of Providence, Rhode Island from 2011 to 2015. He is credited with rescuing the city from the brink of bankruptcy and eliminating a $110 million structural deficit. Under his leadership, Providence was recognized with the All-America City Award from the National Civic League for its plan to boost third-grade reading proficiency, was the recipient of a $3 million award from the Carnegie Foundation to create innovative high schools, and received the City Livability Award at the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 2014. In addition, Angel won Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Mayors Challenge $5 million grand prize for his innovative proposal to improve the vocabularies of preschool age children. Angel joined Greenberg Traurig, LLP as a shareholder in February 2015 and focuses his practice on municipal restructuring, public finance, commercial litigation, pension litigation and public infrastructure.

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Kathryn Tout co-directs Early Childhood Research at Child Trends. She is the project director for evaluations of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) in Minnesota and New Mexico. Through a contract with the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Kathryn co-directs the Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium (INQUIRE) – a community of researchers that produces reports and materials to support the design, implementation and evaluation of quality improvement efforts in early care and education.

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Erick Vaughn is Executive Director of the Kansas Head Start Association (KHSA) where he is responsible for guiding the Association to implement its mission to support and strengthen Kansas early learning programs through advocacy, professional development and leadership. Erick is a Kansas LMSW with a concentration in administrative and advocacy practice. He served as KHSA’s Fiscal and Program Manager for two years before taking over his current role as Executive Director in August 2013. During his tenure at KHSA, Erick has managed the fiscal operations, including grant reporting and management, and managed and directed the associations’ various projects and initiatives that support Head Start programs, children, and families. These projects include various professional development for Head Start staff and parents, home visiting training and coaching, parent health literacy, financial literacy, oral health training and resources, community collaboration support to implement high-quality integrated preschool classrooms, and advocacy for early childhood social emotional services. Prior to joining KHSA, Erick worked for seven years at the state of Kansas mental health department. During his tenure at the state he managed the procurement and monitoring process for grants and contracts for mental health services funded by the state, and later in a different position in the same department was responsible for coordinating inpatient services for children and adults.
Becky is the Director of First Five Nebraska, an organization that works with the Nebraska Legislature, state agency partners, private partners and early childhood professionals on shaping effective early childhood policies based on best practices. Becky brings over 25 years of experience working as an aide in the Nebraska Legislature and the U.S. Senate, lobbying for the long-term care industry, and developing and administering a statewide program for the Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services. She worked in a multi-agency effort during restructuring and redesign of Nebraska’s Health and Human Services System, and has also spent time fundraising and working in the area of strategic planning.

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Frank Walter is vice president of strategic communications. He oversees the research and communications team in support of the Alliance for Early Success, including co-leading the communications working group on early childhood communications. Mr. Walter also directs Child Trends communications program including message development, media relations, social media, partner outreach, and graphic and digital communications. He recently led the successful launch of the Child Trends Hispanic Institute, and directed communications for reports on the risks facing young children in military families, state child welfare policies for young children, infants and toddlers, and adverse childhood experiences. He has provided communications consulting to such organizations as Raising A Reader, America’s Promise Alliance, Reading Is Fundamental, and Share Our Strength. He is on the communications advisory council for the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network and leads Child Trends’ communications work for the Office of Adolescent Health.

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Albert Wat is a Senior Policy Director at the Alliance for Early Success, where he supports the organization’s strategy and goals for early education, including increasing access to high-quality pre-k. Most recently, he was a Senior Policy Analyst in the Education Division of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, where he helped governors’ staff and advisors improve their early care and education policies and increase alignment between their states’ early learning and K-12 reform initiatives. Before NGA, Albert was the Research Manager at Pre-K Now, an advocacy campaign at the Pew Center on the States, where he authored a number of policy reports, managed research activities for the initiative, and provided analysis and information about the latest pre-k and early education research and policy developments to Pre-K Now staff and its network of state partners. In 2014, Albert served on the committee of the Institute of Medicine’s study on The Science of Children Birth to Age 8: Deepening and Broadening the Foundation for Success, which released the report, Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation in April 2015. Albert has worked with schools, school reform nonprofits, and community-based organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, southeastern Michigan, and Washington, DC. Albert holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in education from Stanford University and a master’s in education policy from George Washington University.
Laura Wells has been the director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Washington, where she established the Washington state office in 2006. Prior to this, Laura was a member of the management team of Child Care Resources (CCR), the non-profit child care resource and referral agency for King County, where her focus was on improving the quality of care for children in both licensed and family, friend and neighbor care. Laura is a recipient of the Seattle Human Services Coalition 2003 Excellence in Advocacy Award and the Children’s Alliance 2009 Voices for Children Award. She was appointed by Governor Gregoire in June, 2012, to serve on the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission.

Cecilia (Ceil) Zalkind, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), has advocated for children in New Jersey for more than 30 years, working to secure better outcomes for children in the child welfare, early care and education, health care and juvenile justice systems. Ceil has been instrumental in the development of critical legislation, including the Out-of-Home Placement Bill of Rights for children in foster care and a landmark educational equity case: Abbott v. Burke. She leads ACNJ’s early education advocacy agenda and provides leadership to the Early Care and Education Coalition and the NJ Build Initiative. Ceil is committed to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up safe, healthy and educated. In 2009, Ceil received the national Florette Angel Memorial Child Advocacy Award from Voices for America’s Children and in 2014, she was included on Inside Jersey’s list of the 100 most influential people in New Jersey.