

Oregon Early Childhood Care and Learning System Roundtable Member Bios

Jaime Arondondo	1
Rod Belknap	1
Heidi Hagel Braid	2
Miriam Calderon	2
Elizabeth Farrar Campbell	2
Harriet Dichter	3
Robin Hill Dunbar	3
Lisa Harnisch	4
Elaine Harrison	4
Brittney Jackson	4
Sherri Killins Stewart	5
Kali Thorne Ladd	5
Amy Luhn	6
Carey McCann	6
John Merriman	6
Stephanie Schmit	7
John Tapogna	7
Albert Wat	8
Candice Williams	8

Jaime Arondondo

Bio forthcoming.

Rod Belknap

Rod Belknap is the Eastern Oregon Early Learning Hub Director, serving Baker, Malheur and Wallowa counties. He has been involved in early learning in Oregon since 2003. Rod has worked in several different capacities at a Migrant Seasonal program in Malheur county for 19 years, including the Director position when he transitioned into Hub work in 2022. In January of 2024, he was selected to be the new Hub Director. Since then, he has served on many state level early learning committees. Rod has seen up close the difference that Head Start and quality preschool makes for young children and believes every child deserves that opportunity.

Heidi Hagel Braid

Heidi Hagel Braid is a national child care nonprofit executive with a distinguished track record of leading and scaling innovative programs that support child care business development. Currently serving as President and CEO of First Children's Finance, Heidi has spent over a decade at the organization in senior leadership roles, driving strategic expansion, forging national partnerships, and delivering high-impact programs. She is the architect behind FCF's ECE Business Collaboratory and the Child Care Business Ecosystem Framework and has led pioneering initiatives in rural and Tribal child care supply building. Heidi regularly advises on public-private partnerships, financial models in non-traditional care settings, and sustainable child care business solutions.

With deep experience in organizational growth and systems change, she has led FCF's national expansion and founded multiple state offices and departments. A frequent speaker and trusted advisor, she is known for translating bold vision into sustainable results.

Beyond her professional achievements, she serves on several nonprofit boards and committees, contributing her expertise to shaping policy and improving systems that serve children and families.

Miriam Calderon

Bio forthcoming.

Elizabeth Farrar Campbell

Elizabeth Farrar Campbell is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Mighty Ripple Strategies, where she empowers businesses, governments and communities to solve problems that matter to moms. She has been a member of Oregon's Early Learning Council since October 2023 and was appointed by Governor Kotek to serve as the Council's Chair in June 2025. Previously, she was the elected Gilliam County Judge, where she led an initiative to improve early learning and care access in her rural community. As a result of these efforts, Gilliam County now leads the state in access to early learning and care. Ms. Farrar Campbell has held many titles, including in the Oregon State Capitol and on Capitol Hill, but her favorite is "Mama" to her young daughter.

Harriet Dichter

Harriet Dichter provides strategy and policy consultation to states, advocates, and foundations. She has a well-earned reputation as a thoughtful and effective leader who can move teams and organizations from concept to sustainable implementation, whether in her current role as a consultant and technical assistance leader or in her former leadership roles in the public, advocacy, foundation, and nonprofit sectors advancing early childhood systems and services, whether at the local, state or federal level. As Pennsylvania's founding Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, she gained national attention for the state's unique new solutions and partnerships. As Executive Director, Delaware Office of Early Learning, she accelerated the pace, quality, and accountability of the state's comprehensive work in early childhood. Other state and local government public leadership: Secretary, PA Department of Public Welfare; Policy Director, PA Department of Education; Deputy Managing Director for Child Policy, City of Philadelphia; Maternal and Child Health Director, City of Philadelphia; Special Assistant to the Mayor, City of Philadelphia. Complementing her public sector leadership work, Harriet has worked in the national and local non-profit and foundation worlds. Nationally, she served as a leader for the Ounce of Prevention Fund (now Start Early) and its policy advocacy affiliate, the First Five Years Fund and worked as staff at the Pew Charitable Trusts. At the community level, she developed her policy, planning, implementation and advocacy skills in organizations including United Way, a child policy and advocacy non-profit, and her service as a legal services lawyer. Harriet is a graduate of Yale University (B.A.) and the University of Pennsylvania Law School (J.D.).

Robin Hill Dunbar

Robin Hill Dunbar is a seasoned philanthropic and early childhood systems leader with more than 20 years of experience advancing equitable outcomes for children, youth, and families. Her career began in direct early childhood and family support roles, grounding her work in child care, early learning practice, and the day to day realities facing children, families, and providers.

In her current role as Director of Children, Youth and Families, Robin guides strategic initiatives that strengthen rural early learning and child care systems, family stabilization, and elevates community voice to build collaborative solutions across sectors.

Robin is recognized for her strategic systems work, partnership building, and deep commitment to data informed, community rooted change shaped by lived experience in early childhood settings. She holds a Masters in Early Childhood Inclusive Education.

Lisa Harnisch

Lisa Harnisch is the Executive Director of the Marion & Polk Early Learning Hub (MPELH), a nonprofit organization working alongside partners across Marion and Polk counties to ensure children are ready for kindergarten and positioned for long-term academic success. The Hub focuses on strengthening aligned systems and supporting family stability so that all children have the opportunity to thrive.

Lisa convenes partners and catalyzes action around strategies that support children and families with limited opportunities. She brings more than 20 years of experience in state-level leadership roles focused on early childhood, child welfare, and organizational development policy initiatives. Lisa played an instrumental role in the creation of Oregon's statewide Early Learning Hubs, helping shape both their policies and operational structures.

Working locally in the community where she lives, works, and plays brings Lisa deep satisfaction and energy. She serves the community as a school board member and is an active member of the Salem Art Association and Rotary.

Elaine Harrison

Elaine Harrison is the Early Head Start Director at Albina Head Start and a longtime advocate for children and families. With over 40 years in early childhood education, she brings expertise in program leadership, family engagement, and expanding equitable access to high-quality early learning.

Brittney Jackson

Brittney Jackson has 26 years of experience in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education and has five children of her own. She has provided exempt, registered, and certified family home care and for the last three years has served as the Director of Pendleton Children's Center. During the course of her career, Brittney has acquired a degree in Early Childhood Education, a second degree in Integrative Studies with minors in Sociology/Anthropology and Psychology and is almost finished with a degree

in Business Administration with a concentration in leadership, organization, and management, and a minor in Health Studies. She spent a few years volunteering in a kindergarten classroom and has worked closely with the Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub since 2014. Pendleton Children's Center has 36 Preschool Promise spots and works with the Department of Human Services, ERDC and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, CCDF. Brittney is excited about and looks forward to assisting with the development of Universal Preschool and Child Care in Oregon.

Sherri Killins Stewart

Sherri Killins Stewart, Ed.D is the President/CEO of Leaders Making it Possible, Inc. Dr. Stewart works directly with state, not-for-profit and philanthropic leaders to advance early childhood systems efforts in health, early learning, child safety and permanence, and family support, e.g., economic security, housing, and employment. She leads work to define and create intentional practices to tailor actions in early childhood systems, policies, programs, and leadership to prevent and reduce marginalization and increase opportunity. Her work includes co-leading the Equity Leaders Action Network (ELAN), a network of early childhood system leaders that aims to advance efforts to increase opportunity and remove barriers in policies, practices, and programs. Dr. Killins Stewart has worked at multiple levels in various states and communities to create tailored actions to benefit young children, their families, and communities.

Dr. Killins Stewart has worked as an advocate for children and families in various ways for more than 35 years, both as a direct care provider and in leadership roles on issues relating to children, families, and communities. Throughout her career, Dr. Killins Stewart has been committed to supporting families, both children and the adults who care for them as a nurse, through leadership and strategies in the workforce, housing, health, and education. Her efforts seek to increase access for families and communities to high-quality formal and informal opportunities and remove barriers in health, early care and education, employment, and other programs, strategies, and institutions, e.g., libraries and museums, to support family wellbeing. Dr. Killins Stewart has championed the development of a comprehensive early childhood workforce systems framework, guiding stakeholders to align infrastructure, policy, and investment strategies to pursue sustainable, high-quality opportunities for the workforce and outcomes for children, families, and educators. She is known for crossing organizational boundaries to create a child wellbeing and development lens in the work of informal organizations and within multiple state and local agencies, including education, public health, and housing. Dr. Killins Stewart has championed the development of a comprehensive early childhood workforce systems framework, guiding stakeholders to align infrastructure, policy, and

investment strategies to pursue sustainable, high-quality opportunities for the workforce and outcomes for children, families, and educators.

Dr. Killins Stewart is the former Director of System Alignment and Integration and Co Director of State Services for the BUILD Initiative, Commissioner of Early Education and Care for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Vice President of Human Development and Operations at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and CEO of Empower New Haven. She was a mayoral candidate in New Haven, Connecticut.

Dr. Killins Stewart has served on various boards, including the New Haven Housing Authority, New Haven Regional Workforce Board, and Connecticut Trails Girl Scouts. She was appointed and formerly served on the Regional Advisory Committee under the U.S. Department of Education and the M.A. Commission on Postpartum Depression. She formerly served as a member and co-chair of the New Haven Early Childhood Council. She currently serves on the Boston Children's Museum Board of Advisors. She is presently the Vice Chair of NHCHild. Several organizations have recognized Dr. Killins Stewart; examples include the Massachusetts Reading Association Legislative Award for her leadership in promoting early childhood literacy and the Horizons for Homeless Children Public Leadership Award. She recently received the West Haven Black Coalition Community Service Award.

Dr. Killins Stewart holds a nursing degree from the University of Pittsburgh, a Master of Administrative Science from Johns Hopkins University, and a Doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Sarasota.

Dr. Killins Stewart resides with her husband in New Haven, Connecticut, and Guyton, Georgia. She is the mother of three adult daughters.

Kali Thorne Ladd

Kali Thorne Ladd is the Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Institute, a leading Oregon-based organization dedicated to advancing early childhood education and well-being. A passionate advocate for equity and innovation in education, she previously co- founded and served as Executive Director of KairosPDX, a culturally specific nonprofit focused on eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps for historically underserved children.

Throughout her career, Thorne Ladd has been a visionary leader and entrepreneur committed to transforming education systems and supporting the healthy development of children and families across Oregon. Her leadership extends across multiple

platforms, including service as Chair of the Board for Portland Community College, a member of the Oregon Governor's Early Learning Council, and as a current board member of the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation. She has also played key roles in shaping education policy at the Oregon Department of Education and in the Portland Mayor's Office.

Thorne Ladd holds a master's degree in Education Policy from Harvard University and a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and Psychology from Boston College. She has been recognized as a Women of Influence by Portland Business Journal and is a TEDxPortland speaker, known for her compelling talk on the power of love in early childhood, and the author of *A Kids Book About Hope*, which inspires young and old readers alike to embrace optimism and resilience.

Amy Luhn

Amy Luhn serves as Director of the Family Resource Center at Oregon State University. The Family Resource Center provides comprehensive services and supports to students with children as well as employees with dependent care needs. The Center offers several models of campus-based early care and education and administers the network of campus lactation rooms and family friendly spaces/suites, several child care assistance funds, individualized support for parenting students, and education and outreach programs. Amy is president-elect of the ORAEYC Board and serves as co-chair of ORAEYC's Public Policy Committee. Prior to joining Oregon State University, Amy held the Education Coordinator position at Old Mill Center for Children and Families, a Corvallis, Oregon social service and education non-profit providing early education and therapeutic services to children and their families. She holds a B.S. in Human Development from University of California, Davis and an M.S. in Education, Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education from Western Oregon University.

Carey McCann

Bio forthcoming.

John Merriman

John Merriman is a seasoned executive with 10 years of experience in the ski, tourism, and hospitality industry, and has a 20 plus year track record of leading successful teams. John currently serves as the President and General Manager of Mt. Bachelor,

the premier ski resort in the Pacific Northwest. John moved to Bend in 2023 for the role and is currently in his 3rd season. Previously, he was Vice President of Finance and Sales at Copper Mountain Resort, one of the largest ski resorts in North America. In his current role as President and General Manager, John oversees all aspects of the resort's operations, including mountain and base operations and planning, skier services, food & beverage, and administrative functions.

Under John's leadership, Mt. Bachelor has been able to foster deeper relationships with the community through our Play Forever giving program, passholder appreciation events and parties, and is an executive member of the Board of Directors for Visit Central Oregon and the Bend Chamber of Commerce, and has close relationships with Visit Bend, MBSEF, OAS, and PNSAA. Additionally, in the 1st season, Mt. Bachelor was also able to forge partnerships with a local hotel for employee housing, and recently launched year-round daycare for employees and guests.

John grew up in Gorham, Maine and learned to ski at Sunday River and Shawnee Peak. His passion for skiing and the mountains led him to attend college in Colorado where he received a bachelor's degree in finance from Metropolitan State College of Denver and an MBA from the University of Denver. Prior to joining Copper Mountain Resort, John held various executive positions at leading telecommunications companies including Level 3 Communications and twtelecom.

John is an avid skier, snowboarder, golfer and outdoorsman who enjoys exploring all we have to offer here in Central Oregon. John and his wife, Amanda have three children and a Labradoodle named Molly. They enjoy spending time together at various sporting events, traveling to new places, and exploring the outdoors.

Stephanie Schmit

Stephanie Schmit is CLASP's Director of Child Care and Early Education. Her work focuses on the intersectional needs of children and families and the foundational role that child care plays in helping meet them through federal and state policy analysis, data analysis, and support for states in navigating equitable implementation of federal programs.

Stephanie has expertise in state and federal child care and early education policy, data analysis, implementation, and maternal mental health. She has worked at CLASP for 15 years and has supported states at all stages of policy creation from concept development, policy writing, advocacy, and implementation.

Stephanie has a background in social work, receiving her BSW from the University of Cincinnati and her MSW from Washington University in Saint Louis, and early career roots in home visiting.

John Tapogna

John Tapogna is President of the Oregon Business Council, a CEO-led organization representing many of Oregon's largest employers and working to strengthen the state's long-term economic competitiveness and prosperity. He previously served as President of ECONorthwest and has spent nearly three decades advising governments, foundations, and business leaders on economic strategy and public policy. John currently focuses on several structural pressures shaping Oregon's future—housing supply, education performance, wildfire management, tax competitiveness, and regulatory and land-use constraints. He also serves as Board Chair of Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Albert Wat

As Deputy Director of Advocacy and Impact, Albert Wat leads the development and implementation of the Alliance's grantmaking strategy, policies, and practices. He also brings to the Alliance experience in state policies on literacy and social-emotional development, pre-k access and quality, learning standards, assessments, data systems, and alignment between early learning policies and practices and education reform initiatives. Before joining the Alliance, Albert 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, from early childhood through third grade. 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. Albert has served on three National Academies committees: Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation; Vibrant and Healthy Kids: Aligning Science, Practice, and Policy to Advance Health Equity; and Exploring the Opportunity Gap for Young Children from Birth to Age Eight. He also serves on the board of the Council for Professional Recognition.

Candice Williams

As Executive Director at For All Families Oregon (formerly Family Forward Oregon), Candice brings her extensive experience in education and leadership to support transformational organizing and advocacy work centered on the needs of mothers and caregivers. She is a seasoned education leader with over two decades of experience in various roles, including high school Language Arts teacher, Special Education Teacher, assistant principal, school principal, district level climate coach, student services supervisor, and executive director of student and family services. Further, Candice is a fourth-generation member of Portland's historic Albina community and has strong familial connections in that area. As the mother of two children, she has experienced early childhood education and care as a student, a parent, and as an organizer and advocate. Her diverse background has equipped her with a deep understanding of the challenges families face in balancing care work with economic stability.

As a passionate advocate for equity and social justice, Candice has fought tirelessly for fair treatment of students of color, students with disabilities, and students learning English. With deep knowledge, skill, and experience in an array of student and family experiences, including inclusion, culture and climate, multi-tiered systems of supports and interventions, data literacy, and equitable practices, she brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her work, driving systemic change through prioritizing equity, intersectionality, collective power, integrity, and transformation.