

Health & Early Learning Forum Speakers

Keynote:

Sondra Samuels, M.B.A.

President & Chief Executive Officer
Northside Achievement Zone



As the President and CEO of the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), Sondra Samuels provides top-level leadership, vision, and oversight for the overall NAZ effort. She is leading a revolutionary culture shift in North Minneapolis focused on ending multigenerational poverty through education. In collaboration with more than 40 partner nonprofits and schools, NAZ is working toward a single goal—to prepare 2,500 low-income North Minneapolis children to graduate from high school ready for college. NAZ is scaling up to support 1,000 parents as they turn the social service model on its head and lead the creation of a college-bound culture in their homes and community. Under Ms. Samuels' leadership, NAZ was named a federal Promise Neighborhood and has become a nationally recognized model for comprehensive community development and systems change.

Prior to leading NAZ, Ms. Samuels was the President of the PEACE Foundation—NAZ's predecessor organization—a respected diversity consultant, and a National Service Leader for AmeriCorps. As a Peace Corps volunteer in Botswana, she facilitated the start-up of over 50 new businesses through the government's Financial Assistance Program, and increased the success rate of start-up businesses in the first few years by 25 percent. Ms. Samuels began her career as a successful Marketing Representation Specialist with the Ford Motor Company, where she consistently exceeded sales goals and drove the annual sale of millions of dollars' worth of vehicles and commodities.

Ms. Samuels earned a Masters of Business Administration from the Atlanta University Graduate School of Business in Atlanta, Georgia and a Bachelor of Science in Marketing from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. She serves on the boards of the Children's Defense Fund, the Harvest Network of Charter Schools, and sits on the Judicial Selection Commission for the State of Minnesota, the Leadership team of Generation Next, and the African American Leadership Forum's Education Committee.

Opening Plenary:

Dana Hargunani, M.D., M.P.H.

Child Health Consultant

Dana Hargunani, M.D., M.P.H., is a pediatrician and consultant to the Oregon Health Authority regarding children's health and the alignment between health and early learning system transformation. Dr. Hargunani served as the Child Health Director for the Oregon Health Authority from 2011-2015. In this role she was responsible for directing child health activities, developing strategies to improve quality and access to health care for children and adolescents, and promoting the coordination between primary care and community health. She practices general pediatrics part-time at the Children's Community Clinic.

Diana Bianco, J.D.

Principal, Artemis Consulting

Diana Bianco has more than twenty years of experience in health policy development, advocacy, organizational growth, project management and facilitation of diverse groups seeking to address complex problems. She launched Artemis Consulting in 2005 and helps organizations in the health arena – government, nonprofits, foundations, providers and others – determine responsive and responsible health policy and work for change.

Megan Irwin

Early Learning System Director, Oregon Department of Education

Megan Irwin is the Early Learning System Director in Oregon where she oversees the state's early learning division which has regulatory, administrative and quality improvement responsibility for the state's child care and pre-school system, home visiting services and respite care for families. Megan holds bachelor's degrees in journalism and mass communications and political science from Arizona State University. She is the two time recipient of the Payne Award for Ethics in Journalism and of multiple Arizona Press Club awards for her reporting on and coverage vulnerable populations. She is also one of Exchange Magazine's emerging leaders in early childhood education.

Lynne Saxton

Director, Oregon Health Authority

Lynne Saxton is the Director of the Oregon Health Authority. She previously held the role of Executive Director at Youth Villages Oregon, a nonprofit providing results-driven services to youth and families. She is active in community and civic leadership positions, including service on the Early Learning Council, the International Women's Forum and the Willamette University Board of Trustees. She also served on the Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commission and as chair of the Metropolitan Family Services Board. She recently received the Gordon and Sharon Smith New Freedom Award from the Oregon Chapter of NAMI. Lynne graduated from Willamette University and attended the University of Michigan Business School Executive Program.

Dinner Plenary:**Pam Curtis, M.S.**

Chair, Early Learning Council

Pam Curtis is the Director of the Center for Evidence-based Policy (CEbP). CEbP is a national leader in evidence-based decision making and policy design that works with 26 U.S. states, federal and state agencies and nonprofit organizations. Ms. Curtis works on policy application, consensus building, strategic planning and organizational and policy development.

Zeke Smith

Chair, Oregon Health Policy Board

Zeke Smith is the Chief Impact Officer of the United Way of the Columbia Willamette, where he leads the community impact strategy through grant-making, volunteerism, community convening and policy work. Previously, Zeke served as the Chief of Staff to Portland Public Schools Superintendent Carole Smith from 2007-2012.