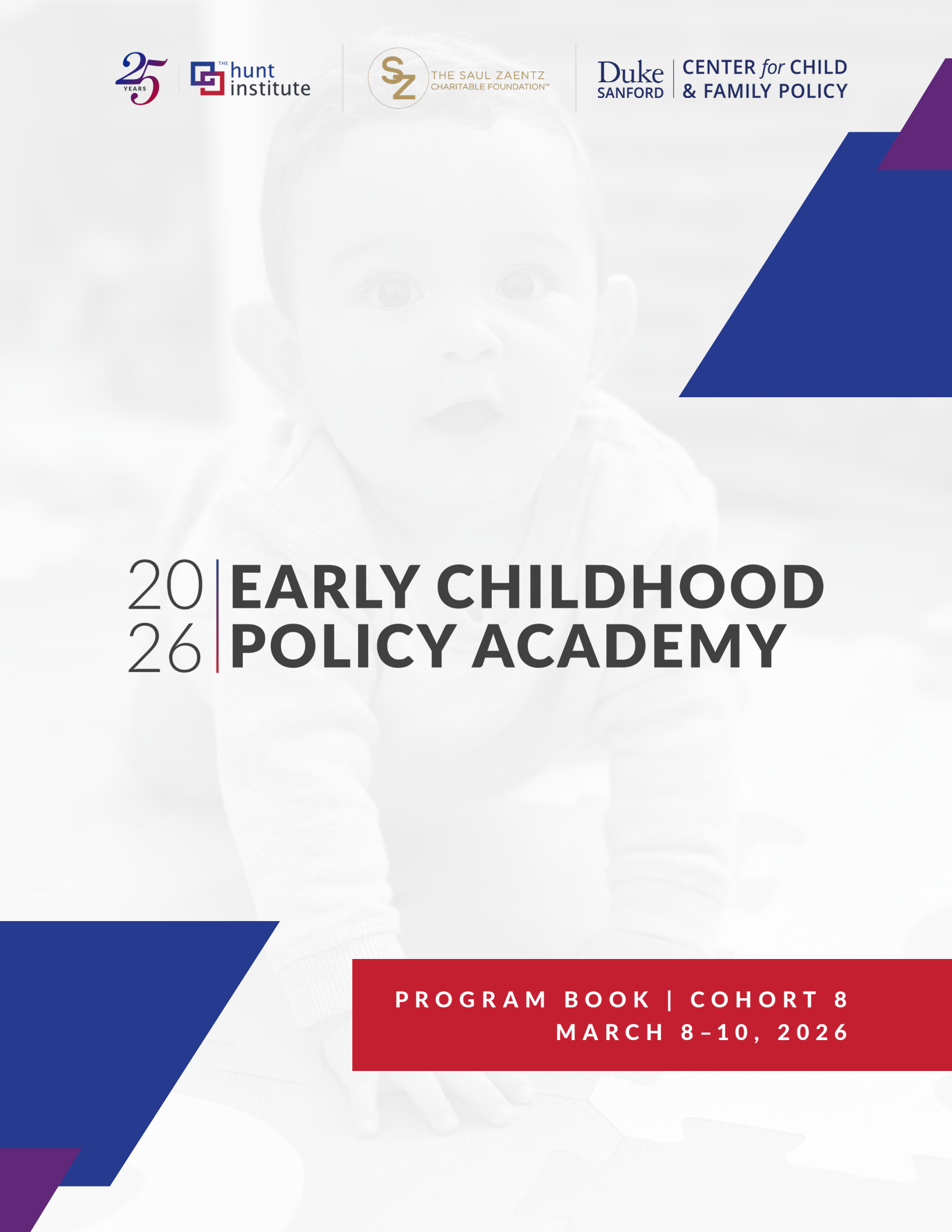
25 YEARS | THE hunt institute | THE SAUL ZAENTZ CHARITABLE FOUNDATION™ | Duke SANFORD | CENTER *for* CHILD & FAMILY POLICY



2026 EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY ACADEMY

PROGRAM BOOK | COHORT 8
MARCH 8–10, 2026

WELCOME LETTER

Welcome to the 2026 Early Childhood Policy Academy March 2026 convening. I would like to be the first to congratulate you on your participation in and completion of this rich, cohort-based learning experience. Thank you for investing your time and leadership in the critical conversations and actions that will most meaningfully advance outcomes for the children and families you serve.

As you know, the Early Childhood Policy Academy is a collaboration between The Hunt Institute and Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation to provide an in-depth learning experience designed exclusively for state policymakers. We are grateful to host this convening in collaboration with the Center for Child and Family Policy, a program of the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.

Throughout your time in the Academy you have engaged in online modules designed to build your understanding of the science and policy of early learning and development. The architecture of the brain is built in the earliest years, shaped by stable relationships, responsive caregiving, and the environments in which young children grow. Accessible, affordable, high-quality child care that is delivered by a well-trained and appropriately compensated early care and learning workforce is not a peripheral support; it is a core driver of lifelong outcomes.

Together, these foundational elements form the evidence base upon which strong, effective early childhood policy must be built.

As policymakers, your roles are critical in shaping the early childhood investments, policies, and systems within your states. During this in-person convening, you will have the opportunity to hear directly from researchers and experts in the field of early care and learning. They were selected for their expertise spanning the depth and breadth of practice and policy, and we are delighted to bring you into conversation with them as you consider how you will use your learnings in your roles as state policymakers.

We thank you for your continued commitment to the children and families you serve and hope you find this time edifying. We are excited to engage in these conversations with you.

Best,



Javaid E. Siddiqi, Ph.D.

President & CEO
The Hunt Institute

25 YEARS | THE hunt institute | THE SAUL ZAENTZ CHARITABLE FOUNDATION™ | Duke SANFORD | CENTER *for* CHILD & FAMILY POLICY

DAY ONE: SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2026

6:00–8:00 PM
WELCOME RECEPTION AND DINNER
JB Duke Hotel | 230 Science Dr, Durham, NC 27708

6:30 PM
WELCOME REMARKS
Dr. Javaid Siddiqi, *President and CEO, The Hunt Institute*

7:00 PM
PROGRAM REMARKS
Linda Chappel, Ed.D., *Senior Vice President, Triangle Child Care Resource & Referral Services | Project Lead, Durham PreK*

DAY TWO: MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2026

8:00 – 9:00 AM
BREAKFAST
JB Duke Hotel | 230 Science Dr, Durham, NC 27708

9:30–11:00 AM
DURHAM PREK SITE VISIT

11:30 – 11:45 AM
OPENING REMARKS
Duke Sanford School of Public Policy | 201 Science Dr, Durham, NC 27708
The Honorable Leo Williams, *Mayor of Durham, North Carolina*

11:45 – 11:55 AM
WELCOME REMARKS
Dr. Manoj Mohanan, *Interim Dean of the Duke Sanford School of Public Policy*

12:00 – 1:00 PM
LUNCH AND COHORT INTRODUCTIONS

1:00 – 2:00 PM

EARLY YEARS ESSENTIALS

This session will examine the role of family and child health and well-being during a child's earliest years on children's health and educational outcomes. Experts will discuss how physical and mental health, early care and education, food security, housing, and other basic elements of well-being work together to support children's start in life.

OPENING REMARKS

- **The Honorable Missy Irvin,** *State Senator, Arkansas*

MODERATOR

- **Gerry Cobb,** *Director, Pritzker Children's Initiative*

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- **Dr. Rushina Cholera,** *Executive Director, NC Integrated Care for Kids | Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Duke University*
- **Dr. Sarahn Wheeler,** *Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Duke University School of Medicine*

2:00 – 2:45 PM

PRESENTATION | ECONOMIC CASE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENTS

- **Dr. Lisa Gennetian,** *Pritzker Professor of Early Learning Policy Studies, Duke Sanford School of Public Policy*

2:45 – 3:00 PM

BREAK

3:00 – 4:00 PM

THE ONCE AND FUTURE WORKFORCE

This session explores the ways in which child care supports the workforce of today and the workforce of tomorrow. Discussion will draw clear connections between child care and local and state economies and highlight the ways in which businesses and commerce have a stake in supporting high quality child care.

OPENING REMARKS

- **The Honorable Eric C. Berthel,** *State Senator, Connecticut*

MODERATOR

- **Samantha Cole,** *Child Care Business Liaison, North Carolina Department of Commerce*

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- **Debra Derr,** *Senior Director of Government Affairs, NC Chamber | Member, U.S. Chamber Foundation Early Childhood & Business Advisory Council*
- **Armeer Kenchen,** *Executive Vice President of Small Business Capital, NC Rural Center | Executive Director of the Small Business Credit Initiative & CornerSpace Community Capital*

4:00 – 5:00 PM

SUPPORTING THE CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

This session will provide information on early care and learning workforce conditions and explore state approaches to improving compensation, professional development, and other workforce supports.

OPENING REMARKS

- **The Honorable Albert Y. Muratsuchi,** *State Assemblymember, California*

MODERATOR

- **Cyndi Soter O'Neil,** *Director of Strategic Philanthropy, ChildTrust Foundation*

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- **Susan Butler-Staub,** *Senior Vice President, Network Impact, Child Care Aware of America*
- **Morgan Ford,** *Program Director, Building Bright Futures, NC Business Committee for Education*

5:00 – 5:30 PM

LEGISLATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Participants will have the opportunity to hear from a bipartisan pair of legislators who have championed early childhood in North Carolina and who can speak to their work on a variety of bills covered in Policy Academy programming or initiatives they are part of to advance sound, evidence informed early childhood policy.

MODERATOR

- **Kelly Eppley,** *Director of Early Learning, The Hunt Institute*

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- **The Honorable Amos Quick, III,** *State Representative, North Carolina*
- **The Honorable Donnie Loftis,** *State Representative, North Carolina*

5:30 – 6:30 PM

RECEPTION

Atrium, Duke Sanford School of Public Policy | 201 Science Dr, Durham, NC 27708

DAY THREE: TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026

8:00 – 9:00 AM

BREAKFAST
JB Duke Hotel | 230 Science Dr, Durham, NC 27708

9:30 – 10:30 AM

HOME BASED CHILD CARE
Duke Sanford School of Public Policy | 201 Science Dr, Durham, NC 27708

This panel discussion will delve into home-based child care, exploring the challenges and opportunities in state and local policymaking to support this sector in full participation in a thriving mixed-delivery system.

OPENING REMARKS

- **The Honorable Suzanne Schreiber,** *State Representative, Oklahoma*

MODERATOR

- **Dr. Nicole Lawrence,** *Senior Research Scientist, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy*

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- **Alexandra Patterson,** *Director of Policy and Strategy, Home Grown*
- **Courtney Alexander,** *Program Director, NC Home Based Child Care Initiative, MDC*
- **Dr. Elizabeth Snyder-Fickler,** *Senior Research Scientist, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy*

10:30 – 11:00 AM

PRESENTATION | STRENGTHENING EARLY CARE & EDUCATION USING A MULTI-LEVEL, RESILIENCE-BUILDING, RELATIONSHIP-BASED APPROACH

Participants will learn about ITTI Care, an evidence-informed model that centers the ECE workforce and offers training and coaching to strengthen their capacity for co-regulation to promote early relational health.

- **Ennis Baker,** *Associate in Research, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy*
- **Dr. Katie Rosanbalm,** *Associate Research Professor, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy*

11:00–11:30 AM

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Participants reflect on their experience in the Policy Academy, consider what policies they might feel ready to pursue, what questions they still have, and what resources they may need to move forward.

11:30 – 11:45 AM

CLOSING REMARKS

- **Dr. Jennifer Lansford,** *Director, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy*

11:45 AM – 12:30 PM | **GRAB-AND-GO LUNCH AND AIRPORT TRANSPORTATION**

EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY ACADEMY RESOURCE EXPERTS



Courtney Alexander

Program Director, Educational Equity for Home Based Childcare, MDC

Courtney is a passionate supporter of the home-based childcare workforce. She is a staunch advocate who equips care workers to understand the systems that impact them and the families they serve. She works diligently to place care workers in positions of power. The positions of power they obtain help to make systematic changes that are needed to destroy discrimination and inequities. Courtney builds relationships with legislators, commerce experts, childcare networks and advocacy organizations to affect policy changes and uplift the plight of the care workers. Courtney is a former childcare center administrator, family, friend, and neighbor care giver to her grandchildren and elder care provider for her mother.



Ennis Baker

Associate in Research, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy

Ennis Baker, MSW, LCSW, IMH-E, has been the Project Director for the statewide Infant & Toddler Trauma Informed (ITTI) Care Project at Duke Center for Child & Family Policy since 2018, training and supporting professionals to effectively promote trauma-informed child care. Baker has specialized in early relational health since 1988 and has served in multiple roles serving children birth to 5 and their families including 18 years as mental health specialist and manager for a local Head Start/Early Head Start program. She is endorsed by the NC Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Association (NCIMHA) as a Reflective Supervisor and Infant Family Specialist. She has provided leadership, training and consultation around trauma-informed approaches, cultural responsiveness, toxic stress, parenting, and strengthening families by promoting protective factors.



The Honorable Eric C. Berthel

State Senator, Connecticut

Chief Deputy Republican Leader Eric Berthel was elected to his fifth term representing the 32nd Senate District in 2024. He is the Republican Ranking Member on the legislature's Banking, Education, and Executive & Legislative Nominations Committees. He is also a co-chair of the Legislative Internship Committee and serves on the legislature's Appropriations Committee and the newly formed Select Committee on Special Education. Eric is extensively committed to public school education and ensuring that we are always doing what is in the best interest of the children of Connecticut. He has also been recognized for his pro-business/small business advocacy and his support of important initiatives in health care, banking, law enforcement and food insecurity.



Susan Butler-Staub

Senior Vice President, Network Impact, Child Care Aware of America

Susan Butler-Staub serves as the Senior Vice President or Network Impact at Child Care Aware of America, bringing over two decades of experience in North Carolina's Early Care and Education system. Her career spans a variety of impactful roles, most recently as the Policy and Community Engagement Coordinator for the North Carolina Early Education Coalition, where she collaborated closely with early childhood professionals, advocates, and policymakers to advance systemic improvements. Previously, Susan was the Program Chair for the Early Childhood Education program at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, NC, where she led curriculum development and faculty support.



Dr. Rushina Cholera

Executive Director, NC Integrated Care for Kids | Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Duke University

Rushina Cholera, MD, PhD is a pediatrician and epidemiologist in the Division of General Pediatrics with appointments at the Duke Margolis Center for Health Policy and the Duke Department of Population Health Sciences. Her research and health policy work focus on understanding unmet social needs and identifying optimal approaches for social and health care sector integration to promote health and health equity for children and families. Dr. Cholera aims to design and implement cross-sector, community-engaged, and scalable interventions to improve child health disparities across the clinical practice and health policy levels. She draws on interdisciplinary mixed-methods research approaches leveraging her expertise in epidemiology, community-based participatory research, and implementation science.



Linda Chappel, E.D.

Senior Vice President, Triangle Area Child Care Resource & Referral Services | Project Lead, Durham PreK

As senior vice president of Triangle Area Child Care Resource and Referral Services at Early Years, Linda Chappel leads services and teams focused upon increasing equity and access to high quality early education. These teams implement family support, quality improvement technical assistance and professional development activities for North Carolina's Region 12 of the CCR&R system, which includes Durham, Orange, Wake and six surrounding counties. Linda's leadership portfolio also includes the statewide infant toddler technical assistance pilot project and Durham County's universal preschool initiative, a multi-agency collaborative guided by a Governance Committee, parents, families and early childhood educators.



Gerry Cobb

Director, Pritzker Children's Initiative

Gerry Cobb is Director of the Pritzker Children's Initiative, the national initiative of the JB & MK Pritzker Family Foundation focused on a comprehensive whole child/whole family approach to improved state policy and investment for children prenatal to age three and their families with issues including maternal and child health beginning prenatally, housing and food insecurity, paid leave, early intervention, child tax credits and early care and education. Previously, she served as State Services Director for the BUILD Initiative and worked for the Smart Start Initiative, creating the Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center to support states that wanted to learn from NC's experience in the development of its own comprehensive early childhood system.



Samantha Cole

Child Care Business Liaison, North Carolina Department of Commerce

Samantha Cole is the Child Care Business Liaison for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, where she works together with partners in state agencies, economic and workforce development, the private sector, and philanthropy to expand access to affordable, high-quality child care and early education statewide. Prior to joining N.C. Commerce, Samantha served as Director of Workforce Partnerships with the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County, where she led the organization's initiatives to connect people experiencing significant barriers to employment with rewarding opportunities and helped area employers engage with innovative workforce development solutions. Samantha is passionate about supporting children and families and volunteers as a Guardian ad Litem in the North Carolina court system, as well as on the board of her son's child care center.



Debra Derr

Senior Director of Government Affairs, NC Chamber | Member, U.S. Chamber Foundation Early Childhood & Business Advisory Council

Debra L. Derr's career is defined by her adaptability and willingness to "take a chance on herself." Starting in radio and TV production, she gained technical expertise that fueled her transition into public relations and government affairs. Notably, she served as a congressional press secretary and spent years as a top-ranked lobbyist for BellSouth, where she helped secure video competition in North Carolina. Her leadership spans both public and private sectors, including roles as Chief Deputy Secretary for the NC Department of Cultural Resources and a founding director for the Wake County Commission on Women. Currently, with the NC Chamber, Derr advocates for education, childcare, and workforce policies. A "Women of Achievement" award recipient, she remains a dedicated champion for community and economic development.



Morgan Ford

Program Director, Building Bright Futures, NC Business Committee for Education

Morgan Ford serves as Program Director for Building Bright Futures (BBF), an initiative of the North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE) focused on developing and scaling early childhood education apprenticeships across North Carolina. NCBCE is a nonprofit organization operating out of the Office of the Governor that connects North Carolina employers with education systems through high-quality work-based learning opportunities. Since graduating from the University of Virginia, Ms. Ford has spent more than 30 years leading impactful community outreach and communications efforts across public schools, nonprofit organizations, and local, state, and federal government.



Dr. Lisa Gennetian

Pritzker Professor of Early Learning Policy Studies, Duke Sanford School of Public Policy

Dr. Gennetian is an applied economist whose research straddles a variety of areas concerning child poverty in the U.S. from income security and stability to early care and education with a particular lens toward identifying the causal impacts of child poverty on children's development. She is a co-PI on the first multi-site multi-year randomized control study of a monthly unconditional cash transfer to families with low income starting at birth in the U.S. called Baby's First Years; applying insights from behavioral economics to design strategies to support parent and family engagement in, and enhance the impacts of, existing childhood interventions. Dr. Gennetian also has an extensive body of research examining the economic well being of Hispanic children and families and strategies to support parent and family engagement in, and enhance the impacts of, existing early childhood interventions.



The Honorable Missy Irvin

State Senator, Arkansas

Senator Missy Irvin was elected to the Arkansas Senate in 2010. She is the Chair of Public Health, Welfare & Labor, Chair of Senate Ethics Committee and serves on the Insurance and Commerce Committee, as well as Joint Budget, Arkansas Legislative Council, Energy and many others. She has served on the AR Supreme Court Commission on Children, Youth & Families for 10 years and is a founding member of Human Rights For Kids.



Armeer Kenchen

Executive Vice President of Small Business Capital, NC Rural Center | Executive Director of the Small Business Credit Initiative & CornerSpace Community Capital

Armeer Kenchen is the Executive Vice President of Small Business Capital at the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center. In this role, he serves as Executive Director of North Carolina's State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI), which is a suite of capital support programs that total more than $250 million dollars. He is also Executive Director of CornerSquare Community Capital, an affiliate of the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, which has deployed more than $45 million since its founding in 2021. Together, SSBCI and CornerSquare manage $300 million in small business and investment capital, with $65 million in annual origination. This capital leverages more than $500 million in debt and equity each year throughout the country.



Dr. Jennifer Lansford

Director, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy

Dr. Jennifer E. Lansford is the S. Malcolm Gillis Distinguished Research Professor of Public Policy and Director of the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University. She is a developmental psychologist whose research has been groundbreaking in demonstrating how culture and family-level factors interact to influence human development. Her research informs scientific understanding of the etiology of health-compromising and risky behaviors from childhood to adulthood and is used to promote child wellbeing worldwide. Dr. Lansford has consulted for UNICEF on the evaluation of parenting programs in several countries and on the development of a set of international standards for parenting programs. She is President of the Society for Research in Child Development.



Dr. Nicole Lawrence

Senior Research Scientist, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy

Since joining Duke University in 2006, Dr. Lawrence's work has focused on designing and conducting community-based research and evaluation studies of programs serving at-risk children and their families across a number of topic areas including early childhood and elementary education, mental health, and social services/child welfare. Her research interests were established through prior professional experiences in program development and management within non-profit organizations underscoring the need for, and the challenges associated with, conducting research and evaluation of human services programs in community-based settings. Her work bridges these areas through building partnerships with city, county, state, and non-profit agencies that serve children and families, for the shared purpose of collecting and analyzing data in "real time" to improve practice, enhance outcomes, and inform public policy.



The Honorable Donnie Loftis

State Representative, North Carolina

I have been serving in the NC House since November 2021, and previously served as a County Commissioner for eight years. My committee assignments in the NC House includes Chair- General Government, Chair- Homeland Security & Military & Veterans Affairs, Vice Chair- Appropriations, Health, Transportation, State & Local Government, Child Fatality Task Force. My work background includes being employed as a District Training Store Manager for fifteen years with CVS/pharmacy. I served over thirty years in the U.S.Army and NC National Guard.



Dr. Manoj Mohanan

Interim Dean of the Duke Sanford School of Public Policy

Manoj Mohanan is the Creed C. Black Professor of Public Policy and Interim Dean at the Duke Sanford School of Public Policy. Manoj is an applied economist, focusing on health and development economics, and health policy. His research focuses on topics broadly related to health and health care in developing countries including performance-based contracts, measurement of provider quality and performance, social franchising, health insurance, and social accountability / monitoring for delivery of public services. He also studies the role of subjective expectations and beliefs in health care behavior. Mohanan's research has been funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and World Bank. Several of his projects feature field experiments, policy interventions, and large-scale policy evaluations.



The Honorable Albert Y. Muratsuchi

State Assemblymember, California

Al Muratsuchi represents the 66th Assembly District, located in the Los Angeles South Bay and Harbor Area. A champion for public education, Muratsuchi serves as Chair of the Assembly Education Committee and previously served as Chair of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Funding. He is fighting for public schools to promote student success and the well-being of every child, regardless of where they live. He is the lead author of Proposition 2, a $10 billion statewide school bond on the November 2024 ballot. Muratsuchi also authored the California Climate Crisis Act, landmark legislation setting the goal for California to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045.



Cyndi Soter O'Neil

Director of Strategic Philanthropy, ChildTrust Foundation

Cyndi Soter O'Neil leads IMC's charitable arm, ChildTrust Foundation, which invests in early childhood education in North Carolina. She also serves as co-chair of Invest Early NC, the statewide early childhood funders collaborative. She brings experience from more than two decades working in public education in NC, first as a high school English teacher and later at public education advocacy organizations. An NC Teaching Fellow and a Park Fellow, Cyndi holds degrees in education and journalism from UNC Chapel Hill and a postgraduate diploma from Cardiff University as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. Cyndi currently serves on the Strategic Council of EducationNC and the Board of Directors for the Public School Forum. Her two children are/will soon be proud graduates of Wake County's public schools.



Alexandra Patterson

Director of Policy and Strategy, Home Grown

Alexandra Patterson is the Director of Policy and Strategy for Home Grown, a national collaborative of funders, caregivers, and providers working together to advance an inclusive child care system where home-based child care is visible, valued, and well-resourced. With nearly two decades of experience, Alexandra has worked in the early learning sector in a variety of roles, including Head Start classroom teacher, case manager in Pennsylvania's QRIS system, professional development and technical assistance instructor, and Intermediary Director for Philadelphia's city funded prek program, PHLpreK. Alexandra holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Delaware in Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education, along with a Master's degree in Education from Bank Street College in New York City.



The Honorable Amos Quick, III

State Representative, North Carolina

Representative Amos Quick, III is in his 5th term representing District 58 in the NC House. He is also a Democratic Whip. Rep. Quick is the Pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Lexington, NC as well as the Associate Pastor at New Light Baptist Church in Greensboro, NC. Prior to serving in the legislature, Rep. Quick served 3 terms in the Guilford County Board of Education.



Dr. Katie Rosanbalm

Associate Research Professor, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy

Katie Rosanbalm, Ph.D., is an Associate Research Professor with the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University. Trained as a child clinical psychologist, Dr. Rosanbalm's work focuses on program development, implementation, and evaluation in the areas of self-regulation, child welfare, and trauma-informed systems. She co-authored a series of papers and briefs on self-regulation and toxic stress that form the basis for her trauma-informed initiatives in K-12 schools and early childhood settings. In partnership with state and community organizations, these interventions have been delivered in nearly half of the counties in North Carolina, with ongoing research trials underway. Dr. Rosanbalm has also conducted longitudinal research on child welfare reform and early childhood Systems of Care to inform improved systemic support for children and families.



The Honorable Suzanne Schrieber

State Representative, Oklahoma

Suzanne Schreiber is an Oklahoma State Representative, representing Tulsa since 2022. She is known as one of the most effective lawmakers, passing laws addressing childcare, public safety, and common sense solutions to everyday problems. Outside of the legislature, she has a legal background and works for a local family foundation in Tulsa. Suzanne is married to Tony and has four children that inspire her to make Oklahoma a great place to live and work. In 2025, Representative Schrieber passed legislation to recruit and retain early childhood teachers and staff. It was the first time Oklahoma had committed new money to the childcare system in over 30 years.



Dr. Elizabeth Snyder-Fickler

Senior Research Scientist, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy

Liz Snyder-Fickler is trained as a research psychologist with a concentration in cognitive development. Her work focuses on conducting rigorous community-based research and evaluation. Centered on vulnerable children and families and the systems that serve them, her research broadly spans the areas of child welfare, children's mental health, and early childhood and elementary education. Research interests include design, implementation and analysis of interventions, and the use of actionable data to improve practice and policy within these human service settings. Together with a multi-disciplinary team of Duke researchers she has conducted numerous research and evaluation studies aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of children and families in North Carolina.



Dr. Sarahn Wheeler

Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Duke University School of Medicine

Dr. Sarahn M. Wheeler is a practicing maternal-fetal medicine specialist at Duke University Medical Center. Dr. Wheeler was born and raised in Mt. Laurel, NJ. She graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University. She completed medical school at the University of Chicago's Pritzker School of Medicine. Dr. Wheeler went on to residency training in Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. Dr. Wheeler completed her maternal-fetal medicine sup-specialty training at Duke University in June of 2016.Dr. Wheeler currently serves as Assistant Professor in the Duke University School of Medicine. In this role, Dr. Wheeler is both a practicing clinician and research faculty. In her clinical role, Dr. Wheeler is the director of Duke's Prematurity Prevention Program, a specialty clinic that is geared for women with risk factors for preterm birth.



The Honorable Leo Williams

Mayor of Durham, North Carolina

Mayor Leonardo (Leo) Williams is a former teacher and school administrator. He was elected to Durham City Council in December 2021 and sworn in as Mayor in December 2023. Mayor Williams is a proud graduate of North Carolina Central University, earning a Bachelor's in Music Education and a Master's in Educational Leadership. While attending NCCU, Leo met his wife, Zweli, and they are the proud parents of their son, Izaiah Williams. While serving on the City Council, Mayor Williams continues to apply his experience and passion in education, entrepreneurship, and commitment to addressing deep social issues to make Durham a united community that provides safety and prosperity for all. Mayor Williams has been a champion for small businesses, workforce development, and strengthening youth engagement in Durham. In 2024, he launched the Bull City Future Fund, in collaboration with community partners, to provide direct investments into local youth-serving organizations.

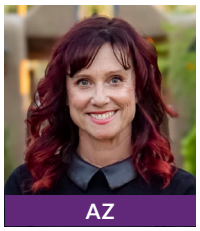
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CT
Eric Berthel
State Senator

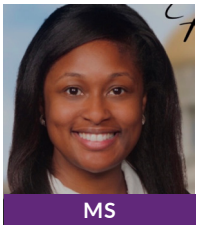

AR
Keith Brooks
State Representative


NC
Gloristine Brown
State Representative


NC
Aisha Dew
State Representative


AZ
Nancy Gutierrez
State Representative


AR
Missy Irvin
State Senator


MS
Lataisha Jackson
State Representative


NM
Leo Jaramillo
State Senator


NC
Tim Longest
State Representative


NC
Donnie Loftis
State Representative


NJ
Angela McKnight
State Senator


DE
Sherae'a Moore
State Representative

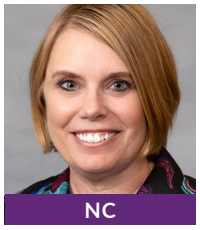

CA
Al Muratsuchi
State Assemblymember


NC
Amos Quick, III
State Representative


CT
Moira Rader
State Representative


ME
Rachel Talbot Ross
State Senator


OK
Suzanne Schreiber
State Representative


NC
Julie von Hafen
State Representative

POLICY ACADEMY COHORTS

POLICY ACADEMY COHORT 1-2 | FALL 2021


MO
John Ashcroft
Secretary of State


ND
Kirsten Baesler
Superintendent of Public Instruction


MI
Ryan Berman
State Representative

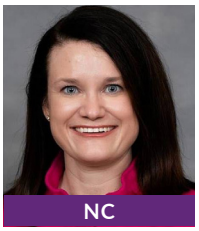

NE
Carol Blood
State Senator

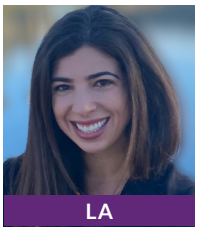

VT
Jessica Brumsted
State Representative


MT
Alice Buckley
State Senator


CT
Beth Bye
Commissioner of Early Childhood


CA
John Chiang
Former State Treasurer


NC
Ashton Clemmons
State Representative

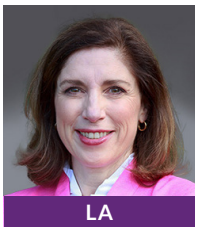

LA
Alison Cohen
Policy Analyst, Louisiana Budget Project

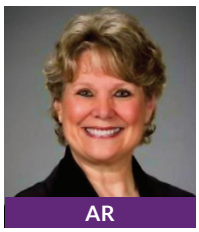

VA
Jenna Conway
Deputy Superintendent, Division of Early Childhood Care and Education

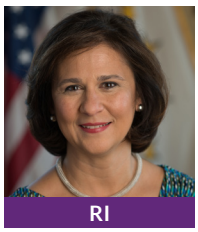

MN
Lisa Demuth
State Representative


AZ
Coral Evans
Northern Arizona Director of U.S. Senator Mark Kelly


WA
Sydney Forrester
Senior Policy Advisor


LA
Aimee Freeman
State Representative


AR
Denise Garner
State Representative


RI
Nellie Gorbea
Former Secretary of State

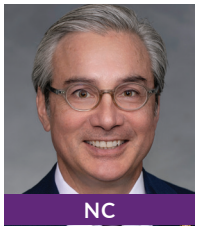

DE
Bethany Hall-Long
Lieutenant Governor


MN
Melissa Halvorson Wiklund
State Senator


GA
Amy Jacobs
Commissioner, Department of Early Care and Learning


ND

Chris Jones
Commissioner, Department of Health and Human Services


NC

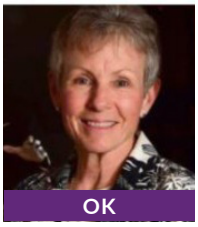
Michael Lee
State Senator


AK

Jahna Lindemuth
Former Attorney General


TN

Harold Love
State Representative


OK

Linda Managh
Interim President/ CEO Potts Family Foundation


CT

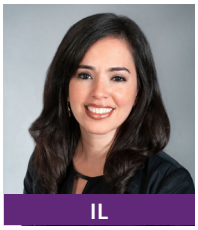
Patricia Billie Miller
State Senator


ME

Rebecca Millett
State Representative


ND

Maria Neset
Policy Advisor


IL

Cristina Pacione-Zayas
State Senator


MN

Dave Pinto
State Representative


OR

Karin Power
State Representative


WI

Bethany Rasmussen
Research Assistant, Office of Senator Ballweg


MI

Michelle Richard
Senior Education Advisor


NJ

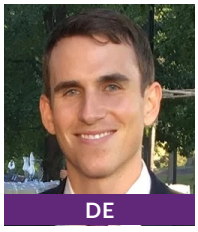
M. Teresa Ruiz
State Senator


WA

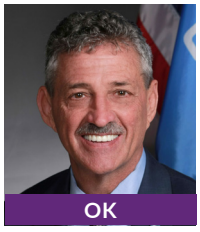
Tana Senn
State Representative


MO

Brenda Shields
State Representative


DE

Jon Sheehan
Chief of Policy and Senior Policy Advisor to the Governor


OK

John Talley
State Representative


OR

Jessica Vega Pederson
Commissioner, Multnomah County


NC

Julie Von Haefen
State Representative


WV

Mac Warner
Secretary of State

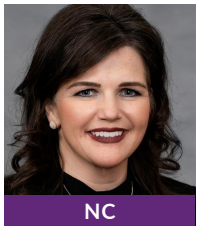

NC

David Willis
State Representative


ID

Greg Wilson
Senior Policy Advisor

POLICY ACADEMY COHORT 3 | SPRING 2022


NC

Deanna Ballard
Former State Senator


WI

Jill Billings
State Representative


TX

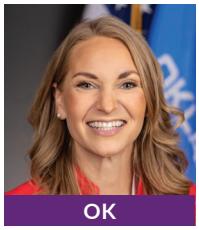
Emily Bourgeois
Executive Director, Texas House Early Childhood Caucus


VA

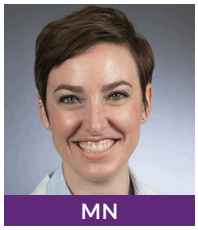
Glenn Davis
Former State Delegate


IA

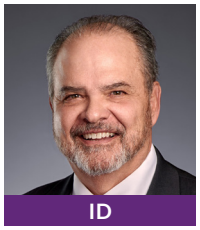
Adam Gregg
Lieutenant Governor


OK

Carri Hicks
State Senator


MN

Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn
State Representative


ID

Dave Lent
State Senator


VA

Mamie Locke
State Senator


MN

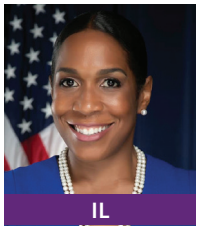
Laurie Pryor
State Representative


WV

Patricia Rucker
State Senator

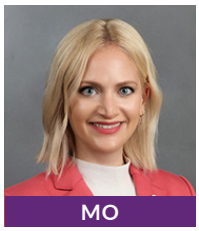

OR

Elizabeth Steiner Hayward
State Senator


IL

Juliana Stratton
Lieutenant Governor

POLICY ACADEMY COHORT 4 | FALL 2022


MO

Lauren Arthur
State Senator


MT

Alice Buckley
State Representative


CT

Beth Bye
Commissioner of Early Childhood


VA

Eva Colen
Senior Policy Advisor to the Mayor and Manager of Office of Children and Families


NM

Brian Colón
State Auditor


IN

Suzanne Crouch
Lieutenant Governor


CT

Kristen Dudanowicz
Paralegal Specialist, Office of Early Childhood


DE

Kyle Gay
State Senator


CT

Julie Giaccone
Child Care Development Fund Administrator


WI

Sarah Godlewski
State Treasurer


OK

Toni Hasenbeck
State Representative


VT

Ghazala Hashmi
State Senator


SC

Greg Hembree
State Senator


GA

Amy Jacobs
Commissioner, Department of Early Care and Learning


VA

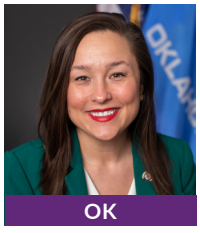
Mamie Locke
State Senator


IN

Matt LoPrete
Policy Analyst, Office of Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch


VA

Jennifer McClellan
State Senator


OK

Cyndi Munson
State Representative


LA

Billy Nungesser
Lieutenant Governor


CT

Kimberly Paluska
Director of Early Childhood Educator


CO

Dianne Primavera
Lieutenant Governor


MN

Laurie Pryor
State Representative


NY

Gustavo Rivera
State Senator


WI

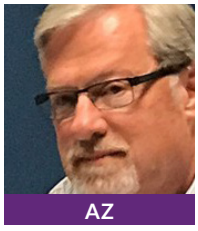
Emma Stutzman
Chief of Staff, Office of the State Treasurer


CA

Tony Thurmond
Superintendent of Public Instruction


CT

Quentin "Q" Williams
State Representative


AZ

Jeff Winkler
Chief of Staff, Senate Democratic Caucus

POLICY ACADEMY COHORT 5 | SPRING 2023


IA

Michael Bergan
State Representative


NY

Jabari Brisport
State Senator


OK

Justin Brown
Secretary of Human Services


IL

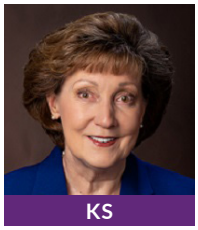
Mary Beth Canty
State Representative


ND

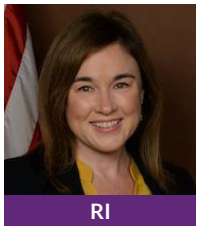
Sean Cleary
State Senator


GA

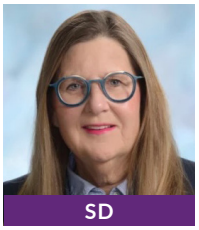
Katie Dempsey
State Representative


KS

Brenda Dietrich
State Senator


RI

Alana DiMario
State Senator


SD

Linda Duba
State Representative


MD

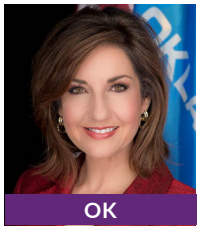
Michele Guyton
State Delegate


NC

Jon Hardister
State Representative


AZ

Erin Hart
Policy Advisor to the Governor


OK

Joy Hofmeister
Former State Superintendent of Public Instruction


OH

Dani Isaacsohn
State Representative


FL

Chip LaMarca
State Representative


MA

David LeBoeuf
State Representative


ND

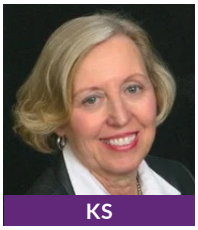
Judy Lee
State Senator


WV

JB McCuskey
State Auditor


WA

T'wina Nobles
State Senator


KS

Pat Pettey
State Senator


KY

Josie Raymond
State Representative


SD

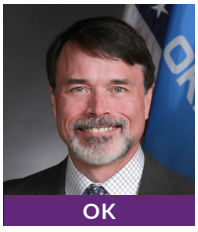
Tim Reed
State Senator


OR

Lisa Reynolds
State Representative


KS

Susan Ruiz
State Representative


OK

John Waldron
State Representative

POLICY ACADEMY COHORT 6 | WINTER 2023


CT

Eric C. Berthel
State Senator


MT

Jennifer Carlson
State Representative


NY

Sarah Clark
State Assemblymember


KS

Susan Concannon
State Representative


TN

Vincent Dixie
State Representative


IL

LaShawn Ford
State Representative


LA

Barbara Freiberg
State Representative


OK

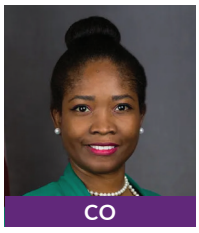
Jessica Garvin
State Senator


TX

Jacey Jetton
State Representative


WI

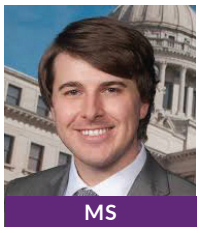
LaTonya Johnson
State Senator


CO

Junie Joseph
State Representative


NH

Tim Lang
State Senator


MS

Kent McCarty
State Representative


IN

Julie McGuire
State Representative


ME

Kelly Noonan Murphy
State Representative


GA

Elena Parent
State Senator


CT

Corey Paris
State Representative


OK

Jacob Rosecrants
State Representative


MO

Kathy Steinhoff
State Representative


VA

Anne Ferrell Tata
State Delegate


NV

Clara Thomas
State Assemblymember


WV

Laura Wakim Chapman
State Senator


OH

Andrea White
State Representative


WV

Kayla Young
State Delegate

POLICY ACADEMY COHORT 7 | SPRING 2025


SD

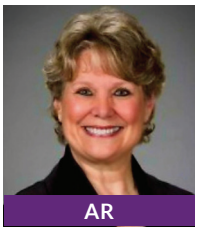
Amber Arlint
State Representative


CA

Mia Bonta
State Assemblymember


IA

Tracy Ehlert
State Representative


AR

Denise Garner
State Representative


LA

Jason Hughes
State Representative


CT

Tony Hwang
State Senator


IL

Joyce Mason
State Representative


SD

Tim Reed
State Senator


SD

Taylor Rehfeldt
State Representative


CO

Emily Sirota
State Representative


WI

Sheila Stubbs
State Representative

THE HUNT INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP & STAFF



@ChicagoCRED

The Honorable Arne Duncan

U.S. Secretary of Education, 2009–2016 | Managing Partner, Chicago CRED
Chair, The Hunt Institute Board of Directors

After serving as a cabinet member under President Barack Obama, Arne Duncan returned home to Chicago in 2016, committed to trying to dramatically reduce the amount of gun violence in our city and allow children on the South and West sides to grow up free of fear and trauma.

View full bio on our website.



@Gov_Martinez

The Honorable Susana Martinez

Governor of New Mexico, 2011–2019
Vice Chair, The Hunt Institute Board of Directors

In 2010, Susana Martinez was elected governor of the State of New Mexico. She became New Mexico's first female governor and the first Hispanic female governor in the history of the United States. Prior to being elected governor, Martinez was a prosecutor for 25 years along the nation's southern border and served as Doña Ana County's elected district attorney for over half that time. As governor, she prioritized keeping New Mexico's communities safe, ensuring all students receive a high-quality education, and diversifying and growing the state's economy.

View full bio on our website.



@jsiddiqi7

Javaid E. Siddiqi, Ph.D.

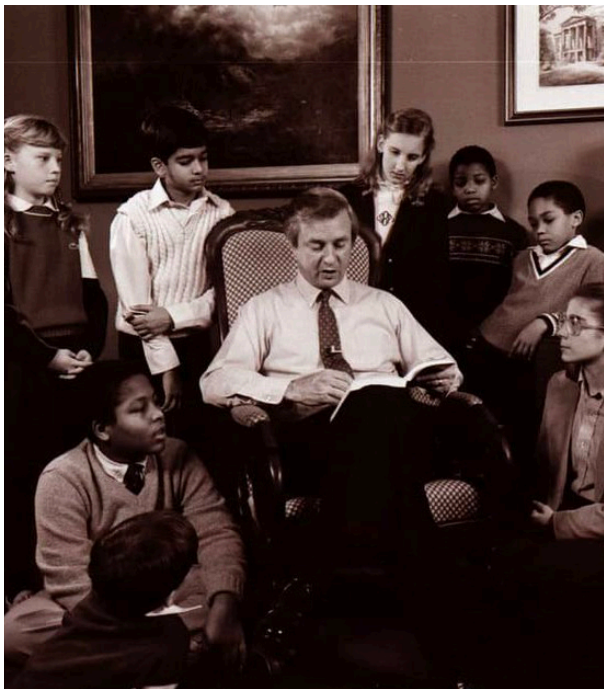
President & CEO, The Hunt Institute

Former Virginia Secretary of Education Dr. Javaid Siddiqi is the President and CEO of The Hunt Institute. During his tenure The Institute has more than tripled its staff and has expanded its scope of work beyond K-12 to include the entire education continuum from early childhood to postsecondary and the workforce. Javaid works with the leadership team to guide the strategic plan for The Institute and develops The Institute's relationships with partners and funders across the nation. He works with senior-level elected officials across the political aisle to help design strategy, shape policy, and drive educational improvements on the national and state levels.

View full bio on our website.

To view a full listing of our staff, please scan the QR code to the right, or visit ***bit.ly/THIStaff***

SCAN ME



Established in 2001, **The Hunt Institute** honors the legacy of the late James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

Learn more at www.hunt-institute.org.

25 YEARS | THE hunt institute

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