Early Learning Fellows Meeting: Policy, Research and Innovations

McCormick Place • 2301 S. King Drive • Chicago

Speaker Biographies

**Kim Boller** is a senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research where she co-directs the Supporting Evidence-Based Home Visiting to Prevent Child Maltreatment cross-site evaluation and is principal investigator on the Early Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (Baby FACES). As principal investigator on the Child Care Quality Rating System (QRS) Assessment and the Early Learning Initiative projects, Boller studied state QRS and developed evaluation tools. As director of the Evaluation of the UNICEF-Government of Netherlands Cooperation Programme on Early Childhood Development, she studied policies and services for children in 10 countries in Africa and Asia. She currently directs a study of a teacher professional development intervention to improve the quality of pre-primary education in Tanzania.

**Jonathan Doster** is a policy specialist at the Ounce of Prevention Fund. With colleagues from the Illinois Policy team, he leads the agency’s state legislative advocacy, working directly with the legislature and other policymakers in Springfield to increase access to and funding for early learning programs across Illinois. Doster holds a BA from the University of Michigan and an MPPA from Northwestern University.

**Iheoma Iruka** is director of Research and Evaluation at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. Iruka received her master’s degree and Ph.D. from the University of Miami (Florida) in applied developmental psychology. She joined the Buffett Institute in 2014 and oversees applied research and evaluation studies involving children from birth through grade 3 and their families. She previously served as associate director for research at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on determining how early experiences affect the development of low-income and ethnic minority children and the role of the family and educational environments in this process.

**Carlise King** is executive director of the Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC) at Child Trends. The ECDC supports state policymakers’ development and use of coordinated state early care and education (ECE) data systems to improve the quality of ECE programs and the workforce, increase access to high-quality ECE programs, and ultimately improve children’s outcomes. King leads ECDC’s national survey of states’ early care and education data systems and directs the delivery of policy consultation and strategic communications that promote the development, implementation, and use of early childhood data. King has over 15 years of experience conducting state and national level research on early childhood issues and examining the impact of state and federal policies on parents’ access to child care services, licensed child care supply, child care costs, and the child care workforce.
Deborah Leong is director of Tools of the Mind, and Professor Emerita of Psychology from Metropolitan University of Denver. Leong’s interests include the application of the Vygotskian approach to early childhood education and authentic assessment. She has coauthored (with Elena Bodrova) “Tools of the Mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education” and a series of educational videos on Vygotsky. She is co-director of the Tools of the Mind Project, which was chosen as an exemplary educational innovation by the International Bureau of Education, NESCO, and United Nations. Leong’s writing includes “Assessing and Guiding Young Children’s Growth and Development” as well as several articles on dynamic assessment. She has also written about early childhood standards. Leong has a Ph.D. from Stanford University.

Geoff Nagle is president and chief executive officer of the Erikson Institute, the nation’s premier graduate school in child development. Nagle joined Erikson in January of 2014 after serving as the founding director of the Tulane University Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Tulane University School of Medicine. There he worked closely with Louisiana government leaders to strengthen the state’s early childhood system and expand high-quality early care and education. His advocacy resulted in Quality Start, Louisiana’s child care quality rating and improvement system, and the School Readiness Tax Credits, which, since implementation in 2008, has benefited Louisiana residents with tax credits in excess of $90 million in support of quality child care. In 2016, the tax credit program was replicated in Nebraska. Since joining Erikson Nagle has championed new strategies that draw from Erikson’s core strengths to broaden the institute’s impact in the complex and ever changing early childhood arena. He has driven the development and implementation of a new strategic plan that addresses how Erikson will work to transform the early childhood workforce, inform the use of technology in early childhood, improve support for families and communities, and influence leadership and policy to benefit young children, families, and communities. Under his leadership, Erikson launched a Master of Social Work degree program, the first in the nation to integrate a child development perspective into a social work curriculum. Nagle earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science from Duke University, and both a Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health from Tulane University. His doctorate, also from Tulane, is in Mental Health Policy Research, an interdisciplinary degree that combined his interests in social work and public health.

Lee Posey is federal affairs counsel with the Education Committee of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). She conducts NCSL lobbying activities on education, representing state positions and concerns to Congress and the Administration, and was NCSL's chief lobbyist on ESEA reauthorization. Posey has been at NCSL since 1999. Her experience at NCSL has also included policy and lobbying work on a wide variety of issues including TANF, federal child care grants, child welfare, child support, food and nutrition programs, agriculture, and rural development. She helped staff NCSL’s Executive Committee Task Force on Welfare Reform Reauthorization (2001-2005), and staffed NCSL’s Farm Bill Working Group for the 2008 Farm Bill Reauthorization. Before coming to NCSL, Posey was a Policy Analyst for the Georgia Senate, focusing on education and early childhood issues. In that position, she staffed the Georgia Senate Education and Higher Education Committees and interim study committees and commissions. She also worked for the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget while in Georgia, analyzing budget requests from state education agencies and assisting with implementing programs and policies. She holds a Master's degree in Political Science from Georgia State University and a Bachelor’s degree in English from Davidson College.

Anna Potere is a policy specialist on the Illinois Policy Team at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, a public private partnership that seeks to close the achievement gap for at-risk children by improving the quality of and access to early education for children birth to age five. Potere advocates at the city, state, and federal levels to improve early education policies for at-risk children and families, specializing in home visiting, sustainable financing mechanisms, and maternal and child health policy, especially in the prenatal to 3 age range. She is also currently the Manager of Policy for Illinois’ federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) formula and competitive grant programs, through which she designs and oversees
the projects and innovations funded through the grants and monitors opportunities for policy opportunities and future funding. She also consults regularly with other states on home visiting policy and funding. Since 2011, she has been a Fellow in the National Women’s Law Center Progressive Leadership and Advocacy Network (PLAN). She graduated cum laude from Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service with a Bachelor’s of Science in Culture and Politics, and earned a Master’s of Science in Political Economy of Late Development with honors from the London School of Economics.

**Steve Tozer** is founding coordinator of the University of Illinois at Chicago EdD Urban Education Leadership program and an expert on urban school leader preparation. Tozer was educated at Dartmouth College, Loyola University, and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). After an early career of teaching and leadership in early childhood education, he joined the Policy Studies faculty at UIUC, publishing a textbook for teachers that has been continuously in print for over 20 years. He later served as head of Curriculum and Instruction at UIUC; Chair of Policy Studies at UIC; President of the American Educational Studies Association; and President of the Council for Social Foundations of Education. He was named a University Faculty Fellow and University Scholar at UIC and received the Association of Teacher Education Robert J. Stevenson Award for Outstanding Leadership and Dedication to the Education Profession. Tozer has led several public policy initiatives. In 1997 he chaired a State Board of Education Task Force that revised teacher licensure in Illinois. In 1999-2001 he chaired the Governor’s Council on Educator Quality in Illinois that founded the Illinois Education Research Council. In 2008 he chaired a joint State Board of Education and Board of Higher Education Legislative Task Force that changed principal licensure laws in Illinois. In 2010 he chaired the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) committee that wrote the education portion of the award-winning policy document for the six-county Chicago metro region.

**Conor Williams** is senior researcher and founding director of the Dual Language Learners Work Group at New America. Williams holds a PhD and M.A. in government from Georgetown University and an M.S. in teaching from Pace University. He is also a senior researcher in New America's Education Policy Program. His work addresses policies and practices related to educational equity, dual language learners, and school choice. Before joining New America, Williams taught first grade in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

**Thomas Q. Weitzel** is the Chief of Police for the Riverside, Ill. Police Department. Chief Weitzel has been on the Riverside Police Department since September 1984. Chief Weitzel has held various positions within the Riverside Police Department including Crime Prevention Coordinator, Evidence Technician, Public Information Officer (PIO), MCAT member (Major Crime Assistance Team), Field Training Officer, and Internal Affairs Supervisor. Chief Weitzel holds a Master’s Degree in Criminal Social Justice from Lewis University and is a graduate of the Illinois Law Enforcement Executive Institute’s Executive Management program and was recently honored as a Certified Police Chief for the State of Illinois. He is a graduate of Northwestern University Center for Public Safety School of Staff and Command and served as Vice President of Class 115. Chief Weitzel holds certificates of graduation from The Institute of Police Technology and Management, University of North Florida, The National Crime Prevention Institute, Louisville, Kentucky, F.B.I National Academy, Quantico Virginia, Session 218, The Police Executive Role in the 2151 Century, Bloomington, Illinois and the Law Enforcement Executive Development Program (LEEDA) F.B.I. Chief Weitzel is a graduate of the Southwestern Law Enforcement Institute's Center for Law Enforcement Ethics, Richardson, Texas. He is a nationally certified Ethics instructor through the Southwest Legal Foundation.