

## Building the Bridge: How Early Relational Health Fuels Early Learning and Third-Grade Reading Success

**Tuesday, October 28**

3:00-4:30 pm ET/Noon-12:30 pm PT

### *Panelist Bios*



#### MODERATOR

**Michelle Sioson Hyman**

**Senior Consultant, Campaign for Grade Level Reading  
Senior Director, Books from Birth, Book Harvest**

Michelle Sioson Hyman has spent nearly two decades creating programs and partnerships that help children and families thrive. As Senior Director of Books from Birth, she focuses on expanding access to early literacy and nurturing the bond between families and books from the very beginning.

She also serves as a Senior Consultant for the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and previously led program innovation and partnerships at Raising a Reader. Earlier in her career, she spent more than a decade at Silicon Valley Community Foundation, advancing early learning and family well-being across communities. Now based in Salt Lake City, Michelle is a certified birth doula who loves outdoor adventures and searching for the perfect bakery.



#### AUTHOR PANEL LEAD

**David W. Willis, MD, FAAP**

**Founder and Director, Nurture Connection,  
Thrive Center for Children, Families, and Communities, Georgetown University**

David W Willis, MD, FAAP is Professor of Pediatrics at Georgetown University, within the new Thrive Center for Children, Families and Communities. There, he leads [Nurture Connection](#), an impact network, to advance early relational health at the growing intersection of child health transformation and resilient community building in partnerships with families with a social justice commitment. He also is the current Co-Chair of National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine's Forum on Children's Wellbeing. Dr. Willis was previously a Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Studies in Washington DC, the Inaugural Executive Director of the Perigee Fund of Seattle, WA, the Division Director of Home Visiting and Early Childhood Systems at HRSA during the Obama Administration, and an early brain and child development clinician and leader in Oregon and the American Academy of Pediatrics. He currently lives in Alexandria, VA with his wife in close proximity to his oldest son's family.



**Lee Savio Beers, MD, FAAP**

**Professor of Pediatrics**

**School of Medicine and Health Science, George Washington University**

Lee Savio Beers, MD, is a professor of pediatrics, the A. James & Alice B. Clark Distinguished Professor of Early Childhood Intervention and Advocacy, and the medical director for Community Health and Advocacy at Children’s National Hospital. She oversees the Child Health Advocacy Institute’s Community Mental Health CORE, which includes initiatives such as the Early Childhood Innovation Network, and serves as a catalyst to elevate the standard of mental healthcare for every young person in Washington, D.C. She is additionally the medical director for behavioral health with the Pediatric Health Network. She was the 2021 president of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She earned her medical degree from Emory University School of Medicine and completed a pediatric residency at the Naval Medical Center in Portsmouth, VA. Prior to joining Children’s National, she was a general pediatrician at the Naval Hospital in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. She lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband Nathaniel and two children.



**Elisabeth Wright Burak, MPP, MSW**

**Senior Fellow**

**McCourt School of Public Policy’s Center for Children and Families, Georgetown University**

Elisabeth Wright Burak is a Senior Fellow at Georgetown University’s Center for Children and Families with 25 years of experience in federal and state policies supporting low-income children and families. At Georgetown, Elisabeth leads projects on Medicaid’s role supporting early childhood development and maternal health. She previously led health policy and legislative affairs with Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families, served as policy director at the Arkansas Department of Human Services Office of Policy and Planning, and worked at the National Governors Association. Elisabeth holds MPP and MSW degrees from the University of Michigan and a BA from Smith College.



**Margaret Caspe, Ph.D.**

**Senior Research Consultant**

**National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement (NAFSCE)**

Margaret Caspe, PhD, is the NAFSCE's Senior Research Consultant. She co-leads the Pre-Service Family Engagement Consortium which is a collaborative of national partners and state and higher education teams dedicated to supporting educator preparation in family engagement. Over the past 20 years, she has studied how partnerships among families, schools, and communities influence children's development in a variety of areas, including language and literacy, and bilingualism, as well as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Prior to joining NAFSCE she worked with the Global Family Research Project and Harvard Family Research Project where she developed tools to support faculty in developing courses on family engagement topics and oversaw a project to amplify family engagement in public libraries. She is co-editor of Promising Practices for Engaging Families in STEM Learning and author of a variety of articles published in journals such as Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Public Library Quarterly, School Community Journal, Childhood Education, and Young Children. Margaret earned her Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University, where she currently teaches courses as an adjunct faculty member. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and three daughters.



**Dominique Charlot-Swilley, Ph.D**

**Clinical Child Psychologist, Assistant Professor**

**Thrive Center for Children, Families, and Communities, Georgetown University**

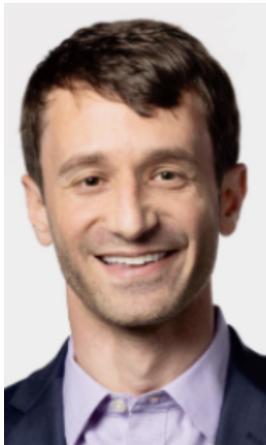
Dr. Dominique Charlot-Swilley is a clinical child psychologist and Assistant Professor at Georgetown University's Thrive Center, with over 25 years of experience in early childhood settings. She focuses on intervention science promoting early relational health and provider wellbeing. She developed CPR<sup>2</sup> (Compassion, Practice, Relationship & Restoration), a wellness intervention for providers. Dr. Charlot-Swilley led the clinical implementation of Washington, D.C.'s first HealthySteps program and serves on the Zero to Three National Advisory Committee. She is co-director of the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Family Leadership certificate program and contributing author to the NASEM report on advancing early relational health.



**Ron Ferguson, Ph.D.**  
**Founding Executive Director**  
**The Basics, Inc.**

Ron Ferguson is an MIT-trained economist whose teaching, research, and social entrepreneurship span from economic development to school reform to family engagement. His current priority is an initiative that he launched while Faculty Director of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University to mobilize communities for infant, toddler, and preschool learning and brain development. It operates through a nonprofit, The Basics Inc., and The Basics Learning Network, a community of practice with affiliated coalitions in the US and abroad.

Ron's most recent book, coauthored with Tatsha Robertson and published in 2019, is [\*The Formula: Unlocking the Secrets to Raising Highly Successful Children\*](#).



**Justin Lavner, Ph.D**  
**Professor and Director of Clinical Training**  
**Department of Psychology, University of Georgia**

Justin A. Lavner, PhD, is a Professor and Director of Clinical Training in the Department of Psychology at the University of Georgia. Dr. Lavner's research aims to understand and improve couple and family health and well-being, particularly among underserved and marginalized populations. He has more than 125 publications, and his work has been supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, and the Mental Research Institute. He received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from UCLA and is a licensed clinical psychologist in the state of Georgia.



**Adrián Pedroza**  
**National Executive Director**  
**Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors**

Adrián Pedroza is the National Executive Director of Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors. AP/OD's mission is to honor and support parents/caregivers as leaders and as their children first teachers. With over 25 years of community-based experience, Adrián has worked in social impact areas from cradle to career, developing educational and economic opportunities for communities and families. Before joining AP/OD, Adrián spent ten years as the Executive Director of the Partnership for Community Action (PCA) in New Mexico, an organization dedicated to strengthening communities by investing in families. In 2011, President Obama

appointed Adrián as a Commissioner to the President Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, where he focused on raising awareness and resources for early childhood education for six years. Adrián is a 2022 Ascend at AspenInstitute Fellow, a W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Leadership Network Fellow alumnus, and serves on multiple non-profit boards including Brazelton Touchpoints Center, CHI St. Joseph's Children, National Parent Leadership Institute.



**Jade Woodard**  
**President and Chief Executive Officer,**  
**Family Connects International**

Jade Woodard has served as the President and CEO of Family Connects International since April 2025. She is a seasoned nonprofit executive with extensive experience in organizational leadership, program scaling, and family support services. In her previous role as Executive Director of Illuminate Colorado, Jade created a unified entity focused on child maltreatment prevention and strengthening families. With expertise in child maltreatment, public health, and community partnerships, Jade has a passion for expansion of effective programs. Jade holds a Bachelors in Social Work from Colorado State University, and a Masters in Public Administration and Certificate in Nonprofit Management from the University of Colorado Denver.