

## Children's Books: From Access to Opportunity

A GLR Learning Tuesdays Partner Webinar  
Co-Sponsored by Early Learning Nation

July 16, 2024 | 3-4:30 pm ET/12-1:30 pm PT

### *Panelist Bios*

#### MODERATOR



#### **Leigh Giangreco**

**Journalist**

[Leigh Giangreco](#)

Leigh Giangreco is a freelance journalist based in Chicago where she writes for The Washington Post, Bloomberg Citylab and Pew Stateline. Since 2020 she has contributed to Early Learning Nation magazine, where she has covered preschool television programming, New Mexico's fight for early childhood education aid and the challenges facing bilingual educators in Chicago.

#### PRESENTERS



#### **Tabitha Blackwell**

**Executive Director**

**Book Harvest, Durham**

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In her role as Executive Director of Book Harvest Durham, Tabitha oversees all of Book Harvest's operations and programming in Durham, with a focus on program excellence, scaling the reach and scope of existing programs in Durham, and piloting new and innovative initiatives that provide books and literacy supports to Durham's children and families. From 2016 – 2021, Tabitha served on the Book Harvest Board of Directors and held the role of Board Chair for four years. During her tenure as Board Chair, the organization's reach, staff, and budget all grew significantly, laying the groundwork for the organization's ambitious second decade.

Over the course of her career, Tabitha has held leadership positions in a variety of national organizations devoted to serving youth, families, and communities, with a particular focus on building paths out of poverty for children through housing support, educational equity, and literacy support. Her skills at forging collaborations and partnerships have contributed to better outcomes for individuals and more efficient and effective systems that serve them. At Campbell University, Tabitha earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Government.

She went on to the University of Maryland to receive a Masters of Science in Nonprofit and Association Management and a Certificate in Nonprofit and Association Financial Management.



**Norrine (Nora) Briggs**  
**Executive Director, North America**  
**The Dollywood Foundation**

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Nora Briggs joined The Dollywood Foundation in 2019, pivoting from a successful career in the private sector. Nora was a frequent speaker and Subject Matter Expert on Housing Policy, Construction, Insurance, and Data Topics. A self-professed data geek! She earned a Masters from Georgetown University with an undergrad education focused in Accounting/Finance, Engineering, and Construction Management. Nora's passion for reading and learning perfectly aligns with her key focus in driving the North American expansion of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.



**Iheoma U. Iruka, Ph.D.**  
**Professor of Maternal Child Health and Public Policy**  
**Founding Director, Equity Research Action Coalition at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute**  
**The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**  
[@IheomaIruka](#) | [Iheoma-Iruka](#) | [UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute](#)

Iheoma U. Iruka, Ph.D., (from the University of Miami) is a Research Professor in the Department of Public Policy and the Founding Director of the Equity Research Action Coalition at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at UNC Chapel Hill. Dr. Iruka is leading projects and initiatives focused on ensuring that minoritized children and children from low-income households are thriving through the intersection of anti-bias, anti-racist, culturally grounded research, program, and policy. She serves on numerous national and local boards and committees, including the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the American Psychological Association's Board of Educational Affairs, and the Brady Education Foundation. In addition to being on the National Advisory Committee for the U.S. Census Bureau and a Census Advisor for the National Urban League, Dr. Iruka is the recipient of the 2022 American Psychological Association Mid-Career Award for Outstanding Contributions to Benefit Children, Youth, and Families.



**Alvin Irby**  
**Founder and Executive Director (Chief Reading Inspirer)**  
**Barbershop Books**

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Alvin Irby is an award-winning early childhood educator, social entrepreneur, TED speaker, comedian, and author. He is Founder and Chief Reading Inspirer at Barbershop Books, a national literacy nonprofit that inspires Black boys and other vulnerable children to read for fun. Irby was recognized as a top 10 CNN Hero of 2023, won the 2023 SXSW Community Service Award, was named a PepsiCo Foundation and Doritos 2023 Black Changemaker. In 2016, he

received the National Book Foundation's Innovations in Reading Prize for his work expanding book access for children. Irby is passionate about helping educators, librarians, and caregivers create learning experiences and environments that inspire children to identify as readers and to read for fun. Alvin Irby earned an MS in Childhood Education from Bank Street Graduate School of Education, an MPA in Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy from New York University's Wagner School of Public Service, and a BA in Sociology from Grinnell College.



**Kyle Zimmer**  
**President, CEO and Co-Founder**  
**First Book**

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Kyle is the President/CEO of First Book, an award-winning nonprofit social enterprise advancing educational equity for children ages 0-18 who are growing up in poverty. First Book has built the nation's largest, fastest-growing online community of adults working in the lives of kids in need, and aggregates the knowledge and market power of these formal/informal educators to create systemic change through: First Book Research & Insights, a research arm that gathers data and insights from educators; First Book Accelerator, which expedites strategies from field experts to address issues identified by educators; and First Book Marketplace, a nonprofit site providing eligible educators with relevant, affordable and free books/educational resources. Kyle and First Book have received awards from the Library of Congress, the National Book Foundation, the National Education Association Foundation, and others. Kyle is a Fellow with the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, a program of the World Economic Forum. She serves on the boards of Ashoka and Dr. Seuss Enterprises, L.P. An attorney, Kyle received her J.D. from The George Washington University Law School.