

More Hopeful Futures or Children as Collateral Damage? Head Start as Cornerstone for Early Learning and Development

May 27, 2025 | 3:00-4:30 pm ET/Noon-12:30 pm PT

Panelist Bios



MODERATOR

Tammy Mann
President and CEO
The Campagna Center

Dr. Tammy Mann has worked at the intersection of research, practice and policy in early care and education for more than three decades. Since 2011, she has served as President and CEO of the Campagna Center, a community-based nonprofit that equips over 2,000 children and families with a comprehensive set of tools they need to thrive. Head Start as well as state and local resources are leveraged to support Campagna's early care and education services. She is actively involved in several initiatives aimed at improving access to early care and education opportunities across her community and the Commonwealth of Virginia.



Brittany Alexander
Research Assistant Professor
Children's Equity Project
Arizona State University

Dr. Brittany Alexander is an Assistant Research Professor for Early Childhood at the Children's Equity Project at Arizona State University. Brittany's work has broadly focused on access to quality care in Head Start and child care settings. Her areas of expertise include teacher-child interactions, classroom quality frameworks, and social-emotional learning from an equity lens. She uses quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, advanced statistical analyses, and evaluation approaches to answer key policy questions. She has also co-authored policy briefs on Head Start, child care, and exclusionary discipline policies, as well as research publications on the development of hope.



Lori Ferris
Executive Director
Iowa Head Start Association

Lori Ferris, Executive Director of the Iowa Head Start Association, has over 30 years of experience in business management, policy development, health and nutrition administration, and public speaking. As a former Head Start and Early Head Start Program Director, she offers valuable insight into the needs of early childhood programs. Lori holds a B.S. from Upper Iowa University and is a passionate advocate for youth and at-risk families. She is committed to continuous learning and growth and values strong relationship building as a foundation for advancing the missions of Head Start and IHSA.



Bernadine Futrell
Senior Fellow, Institute for Educational Leadership
Former director, Office of Head Start
US Department of Health and Human Services

Dr. Bernadine Futrell worked in the Biden-Harris Administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education and Director of the Office of Head Start. In this role, she led the nationwide reopening of Head Start programs during the pandemic, spearheaded policy changes to expand Head Start eligibility, oversaw K–12 discretionary grants, and championed efforts for equitable learning environments. She is co-author of *ConnectED Leaders: Network and Amplify Your Superintendency* and serves on Howard University’s School of Education Board of Visitors. She earned a Ph.D. in education policy from George Mason University and a B.S. in psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University.



Khari Garvin
Former director, Office of Head Start
US Department of Health and Human Services

Khari Garvin is a national leader with over 20 years of experience in ECE and policy across government and non-profit sectors. He has modeled service at every level of Head Start programming. Khari was appointed by President Biden to serve as the director of OHS. Immediately prior to this appointment, he served as the president and CEO of United Way of Greater Greensboro. Khari has led the NC Head Start Collaboration Office and served as an administrator of numerous Head Start programs across the country. Garvin has an M.Ed. from SIUE and a BA in Psychology from Emory University.



Cleo Rodriguez
Executive Director
National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association

Cleo Rodriguez, Jr. is Executive Director of the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association in Washington, D.C. Under his leadership, the organization has expanded resources and launched signature initiatives like the national Summer Internship for former Head Start students. Cleo received the Othli Award from the Mexican Government and serves as Honorary Consul of Mexico. He has co-chaired the National Hispanic Education Coalition, and serves on several national boards. Cleo’s parents are former migrant farmworker and he himself did summer work. Cleo holds a BS from Texas State University, which named him a Distinguished Alumnus for his international leadership and advocacy.



Cynthia Yao
Former Regional Program Director
Region IX, Office of Head Start
US Department of Health and Human Services

Cynthia Yao is a seasoned public sector leader whose 25-year career in early childhood education and human services has been defined by innovation, impact, and purpose. Formerly Regional Program Director for the Office of Head Start Region 9, she conducted oversight of federally funded organizations serving over 100,000 children across five states and territories while managing a budget exceeding \$1.8 billion.

A Head Start alumna and mother of two, Cynthia blends personal passion with professional expertise. Now, she consults with mission-driven organizations to elevate leadership capacity, guide strategic planning, and support positive system changes in early childhood.