

## Starting Strong: Preparing Children and Families for Kindergarten Success

### GLR Learning Tuesdays | Kindergarten Matters

June 3, 2025 | 12:30 – 2:00 pm ET

#### PRESENTER BIOS

##### MODERATOR



**Swati Adarkar**  
***Former Deputy Assistant Secretary***  
***Policy and Early Learning***  
**U.S. Department of Education**

Swati Adarkar is Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Policy and Early Learning in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. Adarkar led the Department's early learning initiatives including Kindergarten Sturdy Bridge. Prior to that she served as the National Policy Director for Start Early focused on federal early learning policy and building new partnerships. Swati was the Co-Founder and President & CEO of the Children's Institute in Oregon for 15 years, an early childhood policy and advocacy organization. Swati served on statewide advisory committees on early childhood for three Oregon governors. She provided the vision and leadership to launch and sustain the Early Works initiative, a nationally recognized model program which aligns birth to five services and supports with elementary school. For more than thirty years, she has been a strong advocate for thriving children, families, and communities. Swati has served in leadership roles in government (federal and local) and advocacy (national, state, and local) across a range of policy issues including child and family well-being, health, hunger, nutrition, housing, education, income supports.

##### PRESENTERS



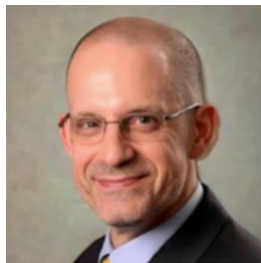
**Jennifer Andrews**  
***Director of Early Childhood Strategies***  
**Chattanooga 2.0**

Jennifer Andrews is the Director of Early Childhood Strategies for Chattanooga 2.0 in Chattanooga, TN. She leads work to improve child outcomes through systems coordination and alignment across the early childhood sectors of health, learning, and family supports. She is currently a Bright Start TN Fellow, helping drive the creation and implementation of the 2025 Early Childhood Action Plan, as well as serving as the facilitator of the Early Matters action team. In 2024, Jennifer was recognized in the Chattanooga Times Free Press 20 Under 40 cohort for her work in early childhood. Prior to finding fulfilling work in the nonprofit education sector, her career consisted of marketing and project management for a variety of private-sector industries. Having lived in Chattanooga for all of her adult life, Jennifer holds an MBA and bachelor's degree in Business Management from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. She believes that where a child is born should not dictate the opportunities they have to develop, thrive, and change the world.



**Deidre DeJear**  
***President and CEO***  
**Oakridge Neighborhood**

As President & CEO of Oakridge Neighborhood, Deidre DeJear leads Iowa's largest affordable housing complex, dedicated to enriching diverse communities through exceptional housing and inclusive support services. Prior to joining Oakridge Neighborhood, DeJear was a long-time owner of a consultancy working with clients on developing and implementing financial education and small business development, and was the 2022 Democratic nominee for Iowa Governor. She serves on the boards of the City of Des Moines Housing Services, The Directors Council, and Wright Foundation, and as Board Chair of Healthy Birth Day. She is a member and officer of the Des Moines Chapter of The Links Incorporated, and she has served on the boards of the Des Moines League of Women Voters, By Degrees, Iowa Community Capital CDFI, and others.



**David Jacobson, Ph.D.**  
***Director, First 10***  
**Education Development Center**

David Jacobson is the director of EDC's First 10 initiative, which supports a national network of school-early childhood-community partnerships that is working to improve outcomes for children and their families. He brings deep experience in early childhood education, school improvement, applied research, and strategic planning.

Jacobson is the author of a report on early education reform, *All Children Learn and Thrive: Building First 10 Schools and Communities*. The report's findings and recommendations focus on coordinated efforts to improve teaching, learning, and care during the first decade of children's lives.

Jacobson serves on the National Advisory Board for an initiative led by Waterford.org that is working to close school readiness gaps in 16 states in the Rural South. Jacobson's publications include articles and reports on community-school partnerships, bipartisan education priorities, building state P-3 systems, and professional learning communities. He frequently presents First 10's work at national convenings and forums. Jacobson holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Chicago, an MA in Philosophy, and a BA in History from Brown University.



**Nadira Rizkallah**  
***Federal Programs Administrator***  
***Administrator of Early Childhood Programs***  
**Eugene School District 4J**

Nadira Rizkallah holds a master's degree in education leadership, Policy, and Methodology. She currently serves as the Federal Programs and Early Learning Leader for Eugene School District 4J, where she drives efforts to build equitable, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive systems in federally funded and early learning programs.

With over 22 years of experience in education, Nadira has served as a school leader, Human Resources Director, and professional development facilitator and consultant. She is passionate about building inclusive structures and supporting diverse educators, and she is recognized for her systems-thinking approach to aligning structures, communication, and practices to ensure every child experiences success and belonging in schools. At the state level, Nadira serves on the Coalition of Oregon School Administrator's Equity Board, guiding professional development for Oregon educators and advancing racial justice. She has also facilitated professional development at higher education institutions on trauma-informed practices and equitable School budgeting.



**Gretta Sagolla**  
***District Early Learning Coordinator, TOSA***  
**Eugene School District 4J**

Gretta Sagolla is the District Early Learning Coordinator for Eugene School District 4J in Eugene, OR. In this role she supports the district's Kindergarten Transitions and Alignment Planning, working to support enrollment efforts, family centered orientation events and resources, KITS summer programming for transitioning kindergarteners and their caregivers, and supporting teachers in aligning the start of kindergarten with developmentally appropriate practices and play based pedagogy. In this role, Gretta also coordinates the district's Preschool Promise program which is a state funded grant providing free high quality preschool programming for income qualifying families. In her 20 years with the district, Gretta's fondest memories are teaching Kindergarten and working with emergent readers. In addition to her district role, Gretta also serves on the board for Parkside Community Preschool, Lane County's oldest licensed center, whose mission is to provide affordable early care and education. She is passionate about building up the partnership between school districts and their early learning stakeholders & community service providers.



**Heidi Schumacher, MD, FAAP**  
***Assistant Professor of Pediatrics***  
**Vermont Child Health Improvement Program**  
**Larner College of Medicine, University of Vermont**

Heidi Schumacher, MD FAAP, is a general pediatrician and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine. In this role, she serves as faculty for the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program, a state-wide initiative that integrates public health, clinical quality improvement and health services research.

Previously, Heidi served as the Assistant Superintendent, Health & Wellness at the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, where she oversaw the health and nutrition portfolio of the District of Columbia's educational system. She has also served as Deputy Chief of Student Wellness at D.C. Public Schools and Medical Officer at the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation. She is an active member of the American Academy of Pediatrics, including previously serving on the Executive Committee of the AAP Council of School Health.

Heidi has played an active role in elevating the connection between school attendance and health within her positions in government, academia and the AAP Council on School Health. She is currently co-authoring a revision of AAP policy on the connection between attendance and health, she has initiated multiple attendance data sharing and cross-sector collaboration efforts between health care and schools and she regularly presents to national audiences on the topic.