

Early Relational Health: *The Cornerstone & Common Thread*

Peer Exchange Learning Conversation | Panelist Bios

September 30, 2025 | 12:30–2pm ET | 9:30–11am PT



Mayra E. Alvarez, MHA

President

The Children's Partnership

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Mayra E. Alvarez, MHA is President of The Children's Partnership, a nonprofit advocacy organization working to advance child health equity through policy, research, and community engagement. She was nominated by Governor Newsom to serve on the Covered California Board of Directors and the Early Childhood Policy Council and by Attorney General Rob Bonta to serve on the Behavioral Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (BHSOAC). Previously, she served at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services during the Obama-Biden administration, including at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Office of Minority Health, and the Office of Health Reform. She also served as a Legislative Assistant in the US Senate and House of Representatives. A native of California, she graduated from the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of California at Berkeley.



Ronald Ferguson, Ph.D.

Founder and Executive Director

The Basics, Inc.

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Ronald F. Ferguson, Ph.D. is an MIT-trained economist whose teaching, research, and social entrepreneurship span topics ranging 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 The Basics Inc., a nonprofit that he founded and The Basics Learning Network, a community of practice with affiliated coalitions in dozens of communities 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*. He retired from teaching at Harvard Kennedy School in 2024 after 41 years on the faculty. He is a father and grandfather and grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, before earning an undergraduate degree from Cornell University and a PhD from MIT, both in economics.



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Miriam Westheimer, Ed.D.

Chief Program Officer
HIPPIY International

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Miriam has spent the last 20 years adapting and disseminating a home-based, early childhood program (HIPPIY) first in the USA as the founding executive director and later built the international network of HIPPIY programs among the 14 participating countries. She now serves as the Chief Program Officer of HIPPIY International.

She had an independent consulting practice that allowed her to work with diverse organizations and individuals as advisor, mentor, manager and facilitator. Her consulting clients include Arkansas Children's Hospital, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Family Support America, Families and Work Institute, The Finance Project, Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Quality Evaluation Design.

Dr. Westheimer co-authored the best-selling international textbook and multi-media series, Focus on Grammar, now in its third edition. Additionally, based on her experience teaching English in Israel, she helped conceive and create a global course to teach teen-agers and adults how to communicate effectively in English.

She has taught at the elementary, junior high and high school levels. Her graduate level courses include teacher supervision, staff development, program evaluation, curriculum development, and early childhood development at Teachers College, Bank Street College of Education, Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



David W Willis, MD, FAAP

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

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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.



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