

***Webinar: Participatory Governance Strategies in Early Childhood
Education***

March 30, 2023

10-11am Pacific / 1-2pm Eastern

Featured Speaker Biography

Marisa Fear

*Associate Director of Research and Policy,
Strategies for Children*

Marisa Fear is the Associate Director of Research and Policy at Strategies for Children (SFC) and supports advocacy, research, policy, and communications efforts at the organization. This includes producing daily advocacy calls for the early childhood field, monitoring data trends, state and national policy and budget proposals, and partnering with the field to build advocacy capacity in local communities.



She is currently leading the work of The Early Childhood Agenda, bringing communities from across the Commonwealth together to work collaboratively across several issue areas, elevate policy priorities and build collective power to transform early childhood in Massachusetts.

She is a former SFC intern and previously served as Project Manager. Prior to joining SFC, Marisa worked as a preschool teacher and program director in Chicago, Illinois. During her time as program director, she focused on curriculum and instruction. She earned a B.S. in Biopsychology, Cognition and Neuroscience, as well as Spanish, at the University of Michigan. She holds an M.Ed. in Human Development and Education (Child Advocacy) from Harvard Graduate School of Education.



Yolanda Ramos

Consultant, Together for Kids Coalition

Yolanda Ramos is a consultant and a clinical mental health provider, specializing in children's behavior and trauma. Her experience is focused on supporting children and their families in developing skills to manage life stressors and connecting them to community resources. Yolanda promotes prenatal and postnatal support, breastfeeding, universal home visiting, early developmental screening, family support and advocacy and high quality and accessible child care. Yolanda is committed to high-impact infrastructure change in our early childhood system. She believes in the importance of a collaborative approach in dealing with mental health, achievement gaps and social justice issues within our community and our educational system. She proudly and respectfully served the Latinx community in the Worcester area, providing mental health services, parenting programs, mental health education programs and trauma intervention in Spanish and English. She currently works as a consultant with Together for Kids Coalition and as the lead counselor for UHAI Health social emotional youth program. Yolanda serves on the Central Mass Conference for Women's board and is a radio host for the Latin American Business Organization (LABO). Yolanda seeks to encourage community businesses and leaders to support maternal health and early childhood and for them to become public policy champions. Yolanda's best role is being a mom, utilizing her experiences as a parent to help advocate for the needs of families in Massachusetts.

Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez

Principal CEO, Children's Playhouse Early Learning Centers

A dedicated advocate for children, Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez has been recognized as a leader in the field of childcare and in the world of business. In March 2022, she was recognized with the *Al Dia* Women of Merit Award in the Entrepreneurial Category, shortly after being the cover story in *Al Dia* where she was called "The Queen of Children's Playhouse." The title resounded with her



because she humbly credits the game of chess for her ability to strategize and plan ahead in all walks of life. In addition, in 2022, Damaris was thrilled to receive the Bronze Medal for Pennsylvania's Equity in Early Childhood Education Champion award.

In addition to owning two childcare centers – Children’s Playhouse Early Learning Centers in South Philadelphia, she launched Innovative Education Consulting Services in 2022, providing services to support the start-up of new businesses and enhancement of existing businesses, especially serving the Latin community.

Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez has been honored to serve in many capacities as an expert in the field – as a speaker, serving on several boards, advisory groups and on various panels talking to Senators and State Representatives. She spoke at the HDPC Hearing on People’s Budget Education on March 1, 2021, and her testimony brought some people to tears, who were so moved by her story and her commitment to children. Always involved in early childhood, Damaris has worked on several initiatives including SEPEEC Advocacy Committee, Pennsylvania Child Care Association Board Member (PACCA), PHLprek SPARK Provider Council, serves as a consultant on Children’s First Racial Equity Providers group, and SEPEEC’s Latinos Educando Junto Latin X Provider group.

In addition, on three different occasions Children’s Playhouse has been granted The Fund for Quality (FFQ), a partnership between Reinvestment Fund and Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC), supported by funding from the William Penn Foundation, and Vanguard Strong Start for Kids Program. Through the provision of business planning support and facilities-related financing, Fund for Quality supports high-quality early care and education providers with expanding their services to reach more low-income families.

Being a business owner has come naturally to Damaris. At age 22, she owned her first business, a restaurant in Brooklyn. By 28, she opened a collections and billing agency for insurance and physician companies. After she moved to Philadelphia in 2003, she was looking for new avenues, and opened first family childcare center that same year. She expanded in 2005 to owning a group center in a building she acquired and expanded capacity in the same building to provide more expansion slots to families on her wait list, in a STAR 4 Center. Seven years later, in 2014, Damaris created a strategic expansion plan to expand her early childcare high-quality programs in areas where it was most needed and moved into 2501 S. Marshall Street with the Whitman Center. In 2017 she added another center at 1426 W. Passyunk Avenue called Newbold. With so much growth in her businesses, it was time to study further and in 2021, she graduated from the 10K Goldman Sachs Entrepreneurship Program.



Ronda Alexander (Moderator)

Director of National Partnerships

Vital Village Networks at Boston Medical Center

Ronda Alexander is a native Detroit native dedicated to working with communities to reach their desired goals by aligning and leveraging their resources.

Ronda joins us from the United Way for

Southeastern Michigan where she served as the

Director of Corporate and Community Alignment on the organization's College and Career Pathways

team. In her role at United Way Ronda worked to

help external corporate partners find meaningful

ways to engage with both students and educators;

as well as worked across teams within the organization to align and leverage resources.

Prior to joining United Way Ronda worked on the premier education initiative of Ford

Motor Company Fund – Ford Next Generation (Ford NGL) for nine years. While at Ford

Fund Ronda served a variety of roles including Professional Development/Technical

Assistance Specialist and Program Manager for STEM initiatives. In all of her roles with

Ford Fund Ronda worked with and supported multiple communities across the country

as they worked to transform their communities through education.