

**THE CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION OF MISSISSIPPI
THE PHIL HARDIN FOUNDATION
AND THE MISSISSIPPI ECONOMIC COUNCIL
PRESENT**



TAPPING INTO OUR POTENTIAL

2023 SUMMIT PROGRAM GUIDE

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- Early Childhood Councils
- Blueprint Phase 2
- Child Welfare Advisory Board
- Student Advisory Board
- Jim Hill High School
- Excel by 5
- Vroom
- Mind in the Making
- GIFT Connect

AGENDA

09:00 Registration

entertainment by the Jim Hill High School Concert Choir

09:45 Welcome

09:50 Early Childhood Councils Panel

Dedra Clark-Allen, Alisia Bland, Dr. Angela Bonner, Dr. Kaysie Burton, Mayor Keith Gaskin, Dr. Adrian Hammitte, Rebecca Nelson, Dr. Toy Watts, Dr. Kathy Young

moderated by Chad Allgood, Ph.D.

10:20 Early Childhood Resources Panel

Heather Martin, Erin Ramsey, Dan Torres

moderated by Connie Baird-Thomas, Ph.D.

10:50 Child Welfare Panel

Audrey Reid, Andrea Sanders, Russell Woods

moderated by Judge John Hudson

11:20 2023 KIDS COUNT Factbook release

presented by Sanford Johnson

11:30 Lunch

12:00 Special Recognition and Thanks

Lloyd Gray

Speaker - Senator Nicole Boyd

12:30 Student Involvement Projects

Kristy Luse, Bailey Shelton

moderated by Carla Evers, Ph.D.

12:55 Break

1:10 Speaker

Sam Beard

introduced by Scott Waller

1:20 Speaker and Special Announcement

Haley Fisackerly

*introduced by CFM Board of Directors
Chair Dave Dennis*

1:50 Closing Remarks

The Children's Foundation of Mississippi (CFM) is an independent operating foundation focused on improving the policies and systems that affect the well-being of children in our state. We were founded in 2019 to serve as a convener, facilitator, advocate, and catalyst for positive change.

When we make sure that children and youth get off to a strong start, we're setting the stage for Mississippi to realize new possibilities. Today's young people are tomorrow's neighbors, leaders, and workforce. By supporting their wellbeing, we are building a better future for our state.

The foundation of lifelong wellbeing is built in childhood, when the brain and body are developing rapidly. But right now, Mississippi's children and youth are often missing the essentials of a strong start in life. It is better to create a sturdy foundation than it is to repair it later. We need to ensure that our systems, programs, and policies support strong development, right from the start, and throughout childhood and adolescence.

We aim to develop more effective and more intentional systems by advocating for better policies, and by convening policymakers, agencies, organizations, and communities to work on systems-level problems. Our goal in creating a Blueprint for child well-being in Mississippi is to articulate what our state can do to address important children's issues, bring stakeholders together to implement the plan, and provide updates on the progress. We take on Signature Initiatives— multi-year strategic projects that have the potential for major impact. We deliver data through a variety of resources — such as Mississippi KIDS COUNT — and we monitor and report the critical indicators of our state's child well-being that advocates and decision makers need to be informed.

For Mississippi to reach its potential, our children must meet theirs.

Visit childrensfoundationms.org for more.

Find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn at @childrensfdnms

CFM is also the home of **Mississippi KIDS COUNT**. KIDS COUNT is the leading resource for comprehensive information on Mississippi's children and serves as a catalyst for improving outcomes for children, families, and communities. Mississippi KIDS COUNT is housed within the Children's Foundation of Mississippi. KIDS COUNT provides data, statistics, and original research about the health, education, safety and well-being of children to policymakers, educators, program administrators, parents, caregivers, advocates and the general public.



The Mississippi KIDS COUNT program is made possible, in part, through grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Mississippi KIDS COUNT releases an annual Factbook containing information in the areas of children's education, health, and economic well-being within the state. Visit the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national KIDS COUNT Data Center at aecf.org for the latest national data book and to create custom reports from Mississippi's data.

Meet the Team



Linda Southward
Executive Director



Maribeth Kitchings
Programs Manager



Bailey Shelton
Communications and
Outreach Coordinator

Board of Directors



Dave Dennis
BOD Chair
President/CEO,
Specialty Contractors



Mary Currier
Professor of Preventive Medicine,
University of Mississippi
Medical Center



Dr. Carla Evers
Superintendent,
Pass Christian School District



Patti Marshall, J.D.
Assistant Attorney General (Retired),
Mississippi Attorney
General's Office



Sammy Moon
Executive Director,
Mississippi Alliance of
Nonprofits and Philanthropy



Yumeka Rushing
Chief Strategy Officer,
NAACP

SPECIAL THANKS...

KIDS COUNT ADVISORY BOARD



Patti Marshall, J.D., KIDS COUNT Advisory Board Chair

Assistant Attorney General (Retired),
Mississippi Attorney General's Office



Mike Clayborne

President, CREATE Foundation



Dr. Portia Espy

President/Chief Executive Officer,
Mississippi Urban League



Lloyd Gray

Executive Director, Phil Hardin Foundation



The Hon. John N. Hudson, J.D.

Jurist-in-Residence, Mississippi Supreme Court



Sanford Johnson

Executive Director, Teach Plus



Sammy Moon

Executive Director,
Mississippi Alliance of Nonprofits and Philanthropy



Brian Pugh, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Stennis Center for Public Service



D.D. Sidhu, M.D., FAAP

CEO & Medical Director,
University of Tennessee Medical Sciences and
Desoto Children's Clinic

LEARN MORE ABOUT KIDS COUNT ON PAGE 01

SPECIAL THANKS...

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Research and State Partnerships



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The Phil Hardin FOUNDATION

Phil Hardin was an innovative and visionary businessman whose success never caused him to lose sight of his own humble beginnings. Mr. Hardin valued education as the most important ingredient for success in his life and knew that better educational opportunities for all would not only benefit individuals but would also make Mississippi's communities stronger and more prosperous. Acting on this belief, he decided in 1964 to use the wealth he had created as the owner of the Meridian-based Hardin's Bakeries to "improve the education of Mississippians," and the Phil Hardin Foundation was born. More than half a century later, Mr. Hardin's vision of an excellent education as the norm for all Mississippians continues to find expression in the work of the foundation he established.



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Entergy Mississippi serves approximately 461,000 customers in 45 of Mississippi's 82 counties. Entergy companies employ some 2,500 people in the state. There are more than 1,200 Entergy retirees living in Mississippi.



Dave Dennis **Specialty Contractors** **& Associates, Inc.**

Specialty Contractors has grown to be one of the most respected and successful subcontractors in the region, with a resume of over 5,000 projects which include commercial office buildings, industrial facilities, hotels, churches, hospitals, schools, casinos, and other projects.

Specialty Contractors expanded into Mississippi in the early 1960s with Ed Rumpf from Mobile, Alabama pioneering the market. Jane and Dave Dennis moved to the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 1976 to manage the Gulfport office, and bought the entire company in 1985.

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SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Chad Allgood, Ph.D.

Director of Early Childhood Care and Development,
MDHS

Chad Allgood is an early childhood expert with a demonstrated history of working in the fields of early childhood education and family-centered intervention. He is highly skilled in leadership development, state and local-level systems building, child development and education, family engagement strategy, research, grant management, and work team development. He has extensive experience in social services with an MBA in Management and a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Science from MSU.



Dedra Clark-Allen, M.Ed. - Ed. Leadership, M.A.,

CCC-SLP Assistant Director of Support Services,
District SLP/Dyslexia Liaison at Simpson
County School District

Dedra Clark-Allen was born and raised in Topeka, Kansas. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communicative Disorders from Jackson State University (JSU), a Master of Arts in Speech-Language Pathology from The University of Akron in Ohio, and a Master of Education in Education Leadership from the University of Southern Mississippi. She is currently a Doctoral Candidate in Early Childhood Education at JSU.

Dedra is a Licensed Speech-Language Pathologist and worked as an SLP (which will always be her first love) for 14 years before going into school leadership. She worked as an AP for nine years before becoming the Interim Assistant Director of Support Services. She currently serves as the Student Services Coordinator for the Simpson County School District. Dedra is Married to Monroe "Chuckie" Allen Jr., an educator and football coach. She is the proud mom of three children: daughters Clarke (26) and Corinne (15) and son Christian (22).



Connie Baird-Thomas, Ph.D

Associate Director, MSU Social Science Research
Center for Policy Studies & Director of the MS Health
Policy Research Center

Dr. Connie Baird-Thomas is the Associate Director of the Social Science Center for Policy Studies and Director of the Mississippi Health Policy Research Center (MHPRC), Mississippi's only research center devoted to health policy issues. Through the MHPRC, health and health services data are provided to a number of stakeholders, including state agencies, advocacy groups and political officials.

In the area of program evaluation, Dr. Baird-Thomas led the evaluation of a statewide effort to reduce health disparities among minorities. She also has served as the lead Investigator for the assessment of other statewide programs including the school nurse component of the Mississippi Tobacco Pilot Program and Mississippi's Drug-Free Schools and Community Program. Other activities for which she was the lead investigator include a feasibility assessment of implementing the Nurse-Family Partnership Program in Mississippi and the Evaluation of the Mississippi Disaster Case Management Pilot Program.

Dr. Baird-Thomas's research has been funded by the Mississippi Department of Public Safety Planning, the Mississippi State Department of Health and the Office of Rural Health Policy (HRSA). Her work has been published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, International Journal of Crime, Criminal Justice and the Law, and Criminal Justice and Behavior.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Sam Beard
President, GIFT Inc.

As a visionary and long-term thinker, Sam Beard has spent six decades transforming ideas into far-reaching impact. Sam created and implemented public service programs for eight American presidents from Nixon to Obama, including six initiatives that impacted more than 50 million lives. After completing his education at Yale and Columbia, Sam focused on social justice and the elimination of poverty, working alongside Robert Kennedy in Brooklyn, NY in the mid-1960s. His most noteworthy accomplishment includes the creation of more than ten million jobs in low-income communities. Sam also launched the Jefferson Awards (now Multiplying Good), the American Nobel Prize for public service and youth leadership, with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Senator Robert Taft, Jr.

For further info, please visit page 22 of this program or visit gift-connect.org/



Alisia Bland
Social Service Program Coordinator,
Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services

Alisia Bland, who am I, you ask? I serve in many capacities, but my favorite is being a mother. Aside from that, I love serving my community. I am from a small town called Oakland, MS where I currently serve as the Project Coordinator for the Oakland Early Childhood Council, Vice President of the Oakland Area Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of the Oakland Beautification Committee, and a school board trustee for the Coffeenville School District. I hold a Master of Science degree from Arkansas State University and serve as a social service program coordinator for the MS Department of Child Protection Services. My spare time is always devoted to my family, friends, and community. One of my favorite mottos that I live by is "Be the change you wish to see in the world." With the help and dedication of so many, I'm working toward that change every day.



Dr. Angela Bonner
Owner, Right Choice Educational Consultants, LLC. and
Founder of Right Choice Learning Center, Inc.

Dr. Angela Bonner is a 24-year veteran of the Mississippi School System. She is the owner of Right Choice Educational Consultants, LLC. and Founder of Right Choice Learning Center, Inc. She is the President of the Theta Sigma Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., located in Hattiesburg, MS. She believes in doing what's best for children and truly putting Mississippi Children first.



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SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Senator Nicole Boyd
Mississippi, District Nine

Senator Nicole Akins Boyd has been representing the 9th district in the Mississippi State Senate since 2019. Nicole grew up in Oxford and Lafayette County and is a graduate of Oxford High School. She earned a B.S. from Mississippi State University and graduated from the University of Mississippi Law School.

In the Senate, Boyd sits on the following Senate committees: Universities and Colleges (Vice-Chair), Education, Finance, Housing, Insurance, Judiciary, Division A, Legislative Budget Committee, Technology, and Tourism. She previously served in roles such as Special Assistant Attorney General, Division Director of the Youth Services Division, and director of a non-profit healthcare organization. She also served for six years on the Tourism Board and a year as Chair. She is currently a member of the Panola Partnership and Oxford Chamber of Commerce. Senator Boyd is a Mississippi native. She is married to Daniel Boyd. They have two children, Izzy and Speight. Senator Boyd is of the Baptist faith.



Dr. Kaysie Burton
CEO and MS Level-Up Learning Center
Partnership Director

Dr. K. Burton, Chief Operating Officer with 17 years of experience, has collaborated with educators and institutions of higher learning to help grow and sustain a comprehensive reading program to ensure participants gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential for effectively teaching P-12 students the literacy skills necessary for a productive life. Varied theoretical underpinnings, research-based methods, and national standards, which include but are not limited to, Barksdale Reading Institute, National Institute of School Leadership, the National Reading Panel and Common Core Standards, serve as guidelines for the professional knowledge and pedagogical knowledge taught throughout each subject.



Dave Dennis
President/CEO, Specialty Contractors

Dave Dennis is President of Specialty Contractors & Associates, Inc., a commercial and industrial subcontractor. Dave was appointed by the Board of Governors to the New Orleans Federal Reserve Board in November 2001 as a representative from the business community and served as Chairman for three full terms. He has a prolific record of participation in community, civic, and industry activities, currently serving as an Executive Committee member of both the Mississippi Economic Council and the Gulf Coast Business Council. Dave has served as Chairman of Leadership Mississippi, Chairman of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce, State Chairman of Salute to Business and Industry, President of the Gulf Coast Economic Council, Chairman of the Walter Anderson Museum of Art, and State Chairman of BIPEC. He has been recognized as the Boy Scouts of America's Distinguished Citizen of the Year, Mississippi's Volunteer of the Year by the Mississippi Economic Development Council, National Volunteer of the Year by the Southern Economic Development Council, John R. Blossman Humanitarian of the Year, and received the DAR's National Community Service Award.

Dave and his late wife, Jane, together have two children and two grandchildren. He resides in Pass Christian.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Dr. Carla Evers

Superintendent of Schools,
Pass Christian Public School District

Dr. Carla J. Evers proudly serves as the Superintendent of Schools for Pass Christian Public School District. She previously served as Director of Instructional Programs for the Gulfport School District. Dr. Evers served as an elementary principal while in Gulfport as well as during her nine-year tenure with the Natchez-Adams School District. Her greatest joy was seeing both schools improve two performance levels during her tenure (Morgantown: 1 to 3 and West Elementary: 3 to 5). The district has demonstrated its enormous potential by earning the distinction of being one of the top-rated school districts in the state as well as national recognition for its work with students of poverty and achievements in Advanced Placement.

During her 28 years as an educator, she has earned several awards and honors, such as Teacher of the Year and Administrator of the Year. She has also served on several community boards and belonged to community service organizations such as The Lynn Meadows Discovery Center Board of Trustees, Head Start Policy Board, Executive Committee of the MA Gulf Coast Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and Rotary Education Committee, to name a few.

She is married to her husband of 28 years, retired Sergeant First Class Carlos M. Evers; together they have six adult children and two grandchildren. Her family attends First Missionary Baptist Church of Handsboro.



Haley Fisackerly

President and CEO, Entergy Mississippi, LLC

Haley Fisackerly is the president and chief executive officer of Entergy Mississippi, LLC. He was named to the post in June 2008.

Fisackerly, a native of Columbus, Mississippi, holds a degree in business administration from Mississippi State University (MSU) and a master's degree in public policy administration from George Washington University. He served for several years on the staff of U.S. Senator Thad Cochran prior to joining Entergy at its Washington, D.C. office in 1995. In 1999, Fisackerly moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where he was director of system regulatory strategy. He returned to Mississippi in June 2002 as Entergy Mississippi's vice president of customer operations. In 2007, he began a year at Entergy Nuclear as the vice president of governmental and regulatory affairs.

Fisackerly was named in 2016 to the inaugural class of Mississippi Top 50 and as the MSU College of Business Alumnus of the Year. He is passionate about workforce development in the state and has championed a number of initiatives with the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) and others to improve educational opportunities and job growth for Mississippians. He has committed Entergy's support of over \$1 million toward various workforce development efforts and led the way for a partnership with C Spire and the Mississippi Public Service Commission to help bring rural broadband services to underserved Mississippians.

Fisackerly serves on numerous local and statewide boards, including but not limited to MEC, Mississippi Energy Institute, MSU College of Business Advisory Board, Bankfirst Financial Services, Woodward Hines Education Foundation, the Foundation for Mississippi History and the Nature Conservancy. He also served on the steering committee to establish the Museum of MS History and MS Civil Rights Museum.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Mayor Keith Gaskin
Columbus, MS

Keith Gaskin became Mayor of Columbus on July 1, 2021. He was a first-time candidate who ran as an Independent on the principles of Honesty, Transparency, Civility, and Servanthood.

He has a Ph.D. in Community College Leadership, a master's degree in public policy and administration and a bachelor's degree in journalism. He has over 20 years of experience working in administrative roles in higher and secondary education. Keith believes we owe each other our honesty and forthrightness if we are to live, work and play as good neighbors. This tenet is the cornerstone of his faith, work and hope for a brighter future for Columbus.

He is married to Gaines Bateman Gaskin; he has a daughter, Anna Gaines Johnson, a son, Edmund Gaskin, a grandson named Hus, and a granddaughter named Hazel.



Lloyd Gray
Executive Director, Phil Hardin Foundation

Lloyd Gray is the Executive Director of the Phil Hardin Foundation (PHF). PHF provides grants to support innovative educational programs and partnerships in Mississippi. He is the former executive editor of the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal in Tupelo.

A native Mississippian, Gray is a graduate of Meridian High School and earned a B.A. Degree in History from Millsaps College. He started in journalism as a sports writer at The Meridian Star at age 16 and began his professional career as a reporter for the Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville. He spent 12 years as a reporter, Capitol correspondent, and managing editor for The Sun Herald in Biloxi-Gulfport, before serving as a Mississippi Assistant Secretary of State.

He returned home as editor of The Meridian Star from 1990 to 1992 before moving to Tupelo. There, he served for 23 years as executive editor of the Daily Journal, whose stock is owned by the CREATE Foundation, whose top news and editorial emphasis is education.

Gray is a past president of the Mississippi Press Association and chairman of the MPA Education Foundation board. He has held numerous civic and church leadership roles. He and his wife, Sally, have three grown children.



Dr. Adrian Hammitte
Superintendent, Jefferson County Schools

Dr. Adrian Hammitte is the first appointed superintendent for the Jefferson County School District. He served on the Mississippi Department of Education's Superintendent Task Force for Reopening Schools and currently serves on the Superintendent Advisory Council of the State Superintendent.

Dr. Hammitte's leadership style is consistent with that of a servant leader. He is a forward thinker who implements innovative strategies and initiatives to transform educational outcomes for boys and girls.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Hon. Judge John Hudson
Jurist in Residence (Youth Courts),
Mississippi Supreme Court

John N. Hudson was a judge for the Adams County Court in Adams County, Mississippi. He served as a judge for the court from August 1983 until his retirement from the bench on December 31, 2014. He now serves as Jurist in Residence (Youth Courts) at Mississippi Supreme Court, where he is charged to work with youth courts around the state to improve outcomes. He also works with executive departments touching youth and children's issues as a liaison with the courts and works with the court and legislature on youth and children's issues promoting best practices. Hudson earned both his undergraduate and J.D. degrees from the University of Mississippi.



Sanford Johnson
Executive Director, Teach Plus Mississippi

Sanford Johnson (he/him/his) has been the Executive Director of Teach Plus Mississippi since 2020 and leads the work of the Mississippi Policy Fellowship and the Mississippi Teacher Network. Mississippi Policy Fellows have been involved in increasing teacher pay, strengthening the state's teacher pipeline, and increasing access to mental health resources. Sanford also led the launch of Teach Plus Arkansas, which has recently recruited its second cohort of Policy Fellows. Prior to joining Teach Plus, Sanford was the Deputy Director of Mississippi First (MSF), an education policy research and advocacy organization. He serves on the board for Teen Health Mississippi, the Mississippi Alliance of Nonprofits and Philanthropy, and chairs the Clarksdale Municipal Elections Commission.

Sanford holds a B.A. from Auburn University and an M.P.S from the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service. He lives in Clarksdale with his wife, Amanda, and their two daughters, Lorelei and Ava



Kristy Luse
Vice President of Toyota Wellspring Education Fund,
CREATE Foundation

After nearly 27 years as a public school educator, Kristy believes that by changing the educational landscape, while impacting the economic development of our communities, we can influence the trajectory of future generations. Through the Toyota Wellspring Education Fund's initiatives, students will be exposed to, prepared for, and connected to fulfilling careers in Northeast Mississippi. This work is the core of Kristy's lifelong commitment to the students of our region. Kristy currently resides in Tupelo, Mississippi, and serves as the Vice President of the Toyota Wellspring Fund at the CREATE Foundation.

Kristy formerly served the Tupelo School District in a multitude of roles, including teacher, assistant principal, principal, and Director of Educational Enhancement & Research.

Kristy has earned multiple degrees, including but not limited to, a B.Ed. in Elementary Education and Teaching, and an M.Ed. in School Psychometry from Mississippi College, a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Administration from The University of Mississippi.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Heather Martin
Project Manager, MSU SSRC

Heather Martin is a Project Manager at the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Mississippi State University. Since joining the SSRC, Heather's work has focused on providing evidence-based support and resources around developmental and behavioral health to community-based organizations and state agencies that work with families of very young children, ages 0-5. She serves as statewide Coordinator for Vroom, a global program of the Bezos Family Foundation, and Mind in the Making, an initiative of the Families and Works Institute, both of which promote early brain development.

Heather has sixteen years of experience teaching children in Mississippi's Public Schools as well as experience teaching in private preschools. She also helped establish her school district's first preschool program. Heather's degrees include a B.A. in psychology from Mississippi State University and a B.A. in elementary education from Blue Mountain College.



Rebecca Nelson
Director of Community Impact,
United Way of Northeast MS

Rebecca Nelson grew up in Tupelo and graduated from Mississippi State. She spent 31 years in the field of education before going to work at United Way.

She is married to Andrew Nelson, and they have one daughter, Lindsey, who is a senior at Delta State, and one dog, Lily, who is spoiled rotten.



Erin Ramsey
Senior Manager,
Mind in the Making at Families and Work Institute

Erin Ramsey is the Senior Manager for Mind in the Making (MIM) at Families and Work Institute and is responsible for the implementation and development of partnerships.

Ms. Ramsey has worked for over 30 years in the early childhood field and began her career as a family childcare provider and preschool teacher. She later served for 12 years as Executive Director of a childcare resource and referral agency, where she developed the organization and several programs that were nationally recognized. Ms. Ramsey also served as the director of public relations for a statewide childcare resource and referral agency and was the Director of Early Childhood for the third largest urban school district in Indiana. She has been with MIM for ten years.

Throughout her career, Ms. Ramsey has served on numerous national, state and local boards and initiatives to increase awareness of the importance of early childhood education and to improve the quality and accessibility for families, professionals and communities. She holds an undergraduate degree in Child Development and Psychology from California State University at Sacramento. She also earned a Master of Science in Public Service from the University of Evansville.

Erin Ramsey has four children, has been married for 31 years, and has two dogs and three grandchildren. She resides on her lavender farm in Kentucky. She is an experienced public speaker and author and works to help others see their potential.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Audrey Reid
Co-Founder, Elucidata

Audrey Reid has over ten years of academic research experience in topics related to children and families and holds an MS in Sociology and a BS in Human Development and Family Science with a concentration in Child Development from Mississippi State University. In 2021, Audrey co-founded Elucidata to design and carry out data collection efforts for non-profits and state agencies. In this role, she has aided in the production of dozens of documents that distill complex research findings into digestible and actionable information. Audrey's passion is making research accessible and usable for the general public.



Andrea Sanders
Commissioner, Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services

Andrea Sanders is the Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services, where she was appointed in October 2020. Sanders grew up in Brandon as one of four kids in her family. She was adopted at birth into her family through Canopy Children's Services along with her older brother. She attended Ole Miss and Millsaps before continuing her education at Tulane completing a master's degree in social work. She worked for about ten years in mental health services for children and adolescents, as well as hospital administration in psychiatric hospitals.

In 2005, she got her law degree and worked for ten years in McComb for two circuit judges before moving into private practice. She then moved to Jackson, becoming a lawyer at the Department of Human Services, working primarily with the early subsidized child care program. There, she was part of a group of employees that noticed irregularities and ended up turning in evidence to the governor. The governor then asked her to take this position as commissioner in November 2020.



Bailey Shelton
Communications and Outreach Coordinator,
Children's Foundation of MS

Bailey Shelton currently serves as the Communications and Outreach Coordinator for CFM. She obtained a B.A. in Communication Studies with a minor in Public Relations from the University of Southern Mississippi. Subsequently, she earned a Master of Arts in Communication Studies from the same program. During undergrad, Bailey held active leadership roles in many organizations, including the Honors College, Chi Omega Fraternity, Lambda Sigma Honor Society, EagleTHON, Southern Style, and the Communication Studies Association. She also served in other PR roles in the Hattiesburg community as an event planner, content producer, and social media manager for local businesses. Bailey also held an administrative assistant position for the School of Communication.

While completing her Master's Thesis, she worked as a Graduate Assistant teaching Intro to Public Speaking. She fulfilled a communications and marketing internship with Harpeth Consultant Advisory Group. A native of Hattiesburg and raised in Jackson, Bailey attended private and public schools as a child, giving her a sense of the injustices in our state. Her work at the Children's Foundation will help create systems change to improve the quality of life for all Mississippians.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Dr. Linda Southward

Executive Director, Children's Foundation of Mississippi

A long-time visionary for children's issues in Mississippi, Linda H. Southward, Ph.D., retired in July 2019 after 30 years at Mississippi State University to pursue new horizons through the Children's Foundation of Mississippi. Previously, Linda served as an Associate Director of the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Mississippi State University, where she also held the role of Research Fellow and Research Professor. While at the SSRC, she founded and coordinated the Family & Children Research Unit.

Among her many research projects, Linda's most recent work at the SSRC included serving as Director of Mississippi KIDS COUNT, funded in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Co-PI on the "Mississippi Data Project" funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. In concert with leadership at the University of Mississippi Medical Center's (UMMC) Department of Pediatrics, Linda was a PI on the Health Resource Services Administration (HRSA) funded Child Health and Development Project, Mississippi Thrive. Prior to her work at MSU, Linda worked in public health and directed a center for children with developmental delays in Northeast Mississippi.



Dan Torres

Senior Program Manager, Bezos Family Foundation

Dan joined the Bezos Family Foundation (BFF) in October of 2019 to focus on supporting and cultivating partnerships for the Vroom program. Prior to joining BFF, Dan has had a number of roles focused on systems work to support families. He was the Executive Director of the Washington State Essentials for Childhood initiative, a cross-systems, public-private partnership with a vision that all children in Washington state thrive in safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments. He also previously served as the Director of Policy and Partnerships at Thrive Washington. In that role, he directed the community momentum strategy for ten early learning regional coalitions and developed Thrive Washington's legislative agenda.

Dan spent the beginning of his career focused on child welfare policy as an associate at the Center for the Study of Social Policy and at Casey Family Programs. Dan earned a B.S. In political science from Oregon State University and a masters degree in public administration from the University of Washington.

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SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Scott Waller

President and CEO, MS Economic Council

Scott Waller took the reins of MEC, the state's largest broad-based business organization, becoming CEO on May 1, 2017 and has focused on taking the organization to a new level.

Under Waller's leadership, MEC plays a pivotal role in providing background and support for major legislative initiatives. Most recently, MEC played a vital role in changing Mississippi's state flag. Since joining MEC in 2006, he has worked to build coalitions and strengthen alliances between MEC members, legislators and other organizations to make the Chamber a policy leader on key issues. In 2014, the prestigious State Tax Notes publication recognized Waller as one of its persons of the year for his work with the Mississippi legislature on the Taxpayer Fairness Act. Prior to joining MEC, he spent over 20 years as a newspaper journalist, including four years as Business Editor of The Clarion-Ledger. A Mississippi State graduate, he is the former owner/editor of the Madison County Journal and was co-owner of a residential construction company.

Waller serves on the State Workforce Investment Board. Nationally, he serves as Chair of the Board of the Council of State Chambers' Center for State Chamber Action and is on the Council's board of directors. He currently serves on the U.S. Chamber's The Chamber of Commerce Committee of 100, the Institute of Organizational Management's National Board of Trustees, and the National Transportation Investment Advocacy Council.

Waller has continued his dedication to scouting since his days as an Eagle Scout and serves on the executive board of the Andrew Jackson Council of the Boy Scouts of America. He is a member of the Jackson Rotary Club and has served on the board of directors of the Mississippi State University Alumni Association's Central Mississippi Chapter. In 2019, the Mississippi Business Journal awarded him one of Mississippi's top CEOs, the same year he was also named one of Mississippi's 50 Most Influential leaders by Y'all Politics. He and his wife Kim live in Madison and are active at St. Matthew's United Methodist Church. Their son, Shane, and daughter-in-law, Whitney, are both graduates of Mississippi State University and live in Washington, D.C.



Dr. Toy Watts

Superintendent, Laurel School District

Dr. Toy L. Watts brings a wealth of experience having served as teacher, counselor, coach, principal and assistant superintendent. With over 20 years in education, she has worked in multiple districts, including Pass Christian, Bay St. Louis, Vicksburg-Warren, Atlanta Public Schools and Moss Point.

Watts received a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Dillard University in 1996, a Master of Education in School Counseling from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2001, a Specialist in Education in Educational Administration from USM in 2008 and a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration from USM in 2012.

Watts has held a variety of positions, including middle school teacher in the areas of science and reading, elementary school counselor, fourth and fifth-grade teacher and alternative school teacher. From 2008-2015 Watts served in the Bay-Waveland School District where she was a high school counselor for one year, alternative principal for three years and an elementary principal for three years. From 2015-2017, she was assistant superintendent at the Moss Point School District. Watts joined the Laurel School District as Superintendent in January 2018.

SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND MODERATORS



Russell Woods

Senior Director,
Casey Family Programs' Systems Improvement Division

Russell Woods currently serves as a senior director for Casey Family Programs' Systems Improvement Division. Woods has demonstrated expertise in leading complex, large-scale special projects, child welfare initiatives, and interventions through research, data analysis, and best practice methodologies. He examines and supports Program Improvement Plans in assigned state child welfare jurisdictions using Implementation Science and specialized tools to execute solutions to address intricate challenges underscored in Child and Family Services Reviews.

Woods has provided strategic consultation and technical assistance on child welfare policy and practice to an array of stakeholders, including child welfare practitioners at all levels and community child and family serving private provider agencies. Woods started his career in Child Welfare 26 years ago as a Crisis Intervention Counselor and Therapeutic Behavioral Specialist at a residential treatment facility in Los Angeles County, serving severely emotionally disturbed boys.

Woods is passionate about educating community members on their rights and responsibilities regarding the safety, permanency, and well-being of youth and families, child welfare reform and prevention, and the importance of father engagement to improve permanency options and outcomes. Russell Woods holds a master of fine arts degree and a master of business administration with an emphasis in public administration.



Dr. Kathy Young

Hattiesburg Excel by 5

Kathy Chase Young is a nearly thirty-year veteran early educator with a great diversity of experiences. As a childcare director, she has led programs in under-resourced areas, as well as those with greater resources. She has served as administrator and classroom teacher of programs serving infants through preschoolers, and after-school programs as well. While most of her career has been spent in faith-based environments, Kathy has experience in both ecumenical, and non-ecumenical settings. She has been an adjunct professor, a CDA trainer, a consultant, and speaker.

Additionally, Kathy is a connoisseur of children's literature, and loves sharing her stories (five published and many more not yet published) with children of all ages! Her commitment to the profession has been nurtured by involvement and leadership in the Mississippi and Southern Early Childhood Associations, serving as president at the state level.

Kathy has recently completed her Ed.S. in Educational Leadership and is working on a doctorate. She holds a Master of Science Degree in Child Development and a Bachelor of Science in Education and Psychology. She has presented at numerous conferences throughout Mississippi and the South, as well as at several for NAEYC.

Kathy Chase Young shares a turn of the century house with her husband/high-school sweetheart of over 30 years. She and Louis travel with and welcome home their young adult children, Chase and Janie, as often as possible! Kathy is employed as a full-time Director of Children's Ministry at First Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg.

Early Childhood Councils

To begin designing a better future, CFM has proudly undertaken signature initiatives to “turn the curve” for children and youth in Mississippi. Recognizing that no one knows what a community needs more than the members of the community itself, the CFM has launched planning grants to establish Early Childhood Councils (ECC) at the local level. We hope to expand this program statewide over the next several years.

The purpose of an ECC is to unite community leaders from all sectors interested in improving conditions for children and families in their neighborhoods, cities, or counties. The CFM will provide data about children’s outcomes at the local level. Still, it will be up to the Council members to collaboratively determine local needs and develop plans to improve outcomes for children ages 0-5 and their families. Through the planning grant phase, the early childhood councils will evaluate their ability to move solutions forward and seek sustainable support to broaden their impact.

Early Childhood Councils will:

- work to expand and deepen civic engagement with policymakers, business leaders, educators, healthcare providers and parents on children’s issues identified in their communities
- support or advocate for policies that continue to expand state funding for high-quality public Pre-K in Mississippi
- serve as a facilitator and connector to build partnerships with existing non-profits or programs with established track records. Examples are Excel by 5, Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Parents Campaign Research and Education Fund, United Ways, Reach Out and Read, Mind in the Making/VROOM, etc.
- determine what programs or services are not currently in their communities but need to be accessed

While each community might be working on different projects, there are eight common priorities that these projects should focus on:

- accessible, high-quality early childhood education and learning programs
- quality pediatric services
- mental health family support
- safe home environment/shelter
- access to high-quality early intervention services
- establish "Resource and Referral" sites for every county
- access to high-quality prenatal care
- universal access to developmental screening and referral services

While children across the state will have differing needs, CFM is offering peer-to-peer support opportunities among early childhood councils. This will allow ECCs to learn from each other, offer help and support, and share best practices and lessons learned. There are no formal criteria for council members. We ask that councils are comprised of passionate and focused individuals that want to actively participate in improving the lives of young children in their communities. While CFM is an active resource, advisor, and initial coordinator for these councils, each council will determine its unmet early childhood needs and then develop and implement strategic solutions.

Blueprint Phase II

It's finally here! You can access the Blueprint 2: Improving the Future of Mississippi's Youth Ages 9-18 at childrensfoundationms.org/project/blueprint-for-success/

Child Welfare Advisory Board

This year, we will launch a new advisory board dedicated to CFM's child welfare research. Please welcome the members of this new group:

Connie Baird-Thomas, Associate Director, MSU Social Science Research Center for Policy Studies & Director of the MS Health Policy Research Center

Tami Brooks, Pediatrician

Tom Broome, Youth Court Judge, Rankin County

Willie Brown, Engineer, US Army Crop of Engineers

David Calder, Clinical Professor, University of Mississippi

Juan Cloy, Deputy Director of Training/Outreach, Council for a Strong America

Kathleen Cook, Special Assistant to Attorney General, MS Attorney General

Trent Favre, Youth Court Judge, Hancock County

John Hudson, Jurist in Residence (Youth Courts), Mississippi Supreme Court

Shirley Kennedy, Director of Child Advocacy, Mississippi College

Toni Kersch, Deputy Administrator, MS Department of Human Services

Angela Marshall, Guardian at Litem, Hinds County

Patti Marshall, Retired, MS Attorney General's Office

Margaret O. Middleton, Attorney III, Division of Medicaid

Kesha Perry, Educational Researcher, Key Concepts, LLC

Eddie Rester, Senior Pastor, Christ United Methodist Church

Carol Russell, County Court Judge, Forrest County

Andrea Sanders, Commissioner, MS Department of Child Protection Services

Pamela Scott, Professor of Social Work, Jackson State University

Christina Simmons, Peer-to-Peer Parent Consultant

Holly Spivey, Director of Government Relations, MS Department of Education

Lynda Stewart, Director of Youth Services, MS Department of Mental Health

Karla Tye, Executive Director, Child Advocacy Centers of MS

Russell Woods, Senior Director, Casey Family Programs' Systems Improvement Division

Student Advisory Board

When we think about the untapped potential in our state, our students should be the first to come to mind. CFM is launching a Student Advisory Board in 2023 for the purpose of:

- Bringing new life and energy to CFM, specifically via digital platforms
- Gaining perspective from individuals who are newly contributing members to Mississippi as adults to help reduce the "brain drain"
- Helping CFM continue gather new data regarding the state of child well-being in MS while helping students hone their personal research skills and goals
- Giving young Mississippians a chance to learn more about their communities and develop stronger bonds and networking opportunities with people working in similar fields/toward similar goals
- Bringing more awareness to CFM in unreached areas through students' social media use and through the events planned by students
- Bringing in more funding for the establishment of new ECCs and sustainability for those Councils already in place

Stay tuned to learn more as this project unfolds!



Under the direction of Ms. Pamela Moody, **Jim Hill High School Concert Choir** is a select group of singers in grades the 9th through 12th. Students come from all over the city of Jackson to attend this school for the International Baccalaureate Academic program. The choir has a rich tradition of high standards of performance and vibrant, energetic singing that has given them notoriety throughout the state, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

It is the vision of the choir to serve as the best possible musical representatives of Jim Hill High School wherever their performances take them. Their music unites the choir and drives their passion to bring joy to those around them. We are Jim Hill High School Concert Choir, "Living the Vision....Fulfilling the Legacy"!



Excel By 5 is a community-based certification designed to improve a child's overall well-being by age five. The first-of-its-kind in the United States, this program emphasizes the important roles communities play in educating their children during their most formative years—birth to five.

Initially funded with a grant from Chevron, Excel By 5 is currently working with thirty-eight communities throughout the state of Mississippi.

Excel By 5 sets forth a variety of standards involving parent training, community participation, childcare and health to help communities focus on supporting young children and their families. The certification process also identifies available resources and existing best practices to help Excel By 5 - Early Childhood Communities reach the goal that all of their children will be ready to learn when they start school at age five. Visit excelby5.com to learn more and see current Excel By 5 locations.

Research shows there is no better time to create a strong foundation for lifelong learning than the first 5 years of life. It's during this period that the brain develops most rapidly. The things that matter most for healthy brain development, like talking and playing, don't require more time, money, or stuff. That's why **Vroom** is here.



Vroom believes all parents want what's best for their children. So we joined with scientists, researchers, and parents to take the science out of the lab and put it in the hands of caregivers. Vroom provides science-based tips and tools to inspire families to turn shared, everyday moments into Brain Building Moments®.

The Bezos Family Foundation provided funding for Vroom, and a lot of passion, because we believe that all parents have the potential to create a bright future for their children. Our goal is to share the science of early brain development in creative ways so all children have the chance to become thriving adults. Visit vroom.org to learn more.

MIND in the Making

In 2000, MITM founder Ellen Galinsky began a research journey fueled by a question: how to keep the fire for learning – which every child is born with – lighting up the eyes of children? To answer the question, she reviewed more than 2,000 studies and conducted in-depth interviews and filmed more than 130 leading researchers who study children’s development and learning.

From what she learned, Galinsky developed a framework of the 7 Essential Life Skills. The work grew into MITM, a national movement to share scientifically based research and strategies for promoting Life Skills, reaching millions of people in communities across the country, and counting.

MITM combines deep research focused on executive function skills, with signature science-fueled training and resources, for professionals across sectors who work with children and families. By taking cutting-edge research and applying the principles of engaged learning to adult learning, the Mind in the Making program helps adults peer deeper to better understand how children learn, what they need to learn and how adults can take simple, effective steps to promote this learning.

GIFT CONNECT has been working since 2017 to bring 0 to 5 education to the United States and the world.



GIFT CONNECT

For five years, the GIFT CONNECT team has conducted research on children ages zero to five across America and developing countries, including state-by-state Governor’s Councils, top experts in the field, selected early childhood organizations and experienced researchers. The GIFT CONNECT professional research and outreach has been persistent and extensive. GIFT CONNECT does not claim to have reached all the important research, organizations or experts but believes we are off to a great start and will continue to expand over time.

Examples include: In 2019, with U.S. Senator Chris Coons and Governor Carney, GC hosted a statewide conference pioneering a major 0 to 5 statewide collaborative emphasis, followed by an all-day 0 to 5 “Call to Action” in the Governor’s mansion with Delaware’s 0 to 5 leadership. In 2020, Dr. John Hutton, MD. MS FAAP, leading pediatrician and clinical researcher from the world-leading Cincinnati Children’s Hospital presented 0 to 5 to the Joint Education Committee of the Delaware Senate and House, with events in Delaware’s three counties.

In 2017, George Halvorson, the former CEO of Kaiser Permanente, Chair and CEO, The Institute for InterGroup Understanding and a world leading scientist and health professional, along with Dr. Roberta Golinkoff (UDEL) galvanized GC to become an important statewide advocate to make early childhood development 0 to 5 - with a special emphasis on the science of 0 to 3 - a policy imperative. Working with Governor John Carney, First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, the Governor’s Early Childhood Council, the Delaware Department of Education, and Rodel along with multiple major diversity, equity and inclusion, health, business, labor and nonprofit organizations, GC has been a significant 0 to 5 voice and advocate.

As a catalyst, GIFT CONNECT has played a leading role making 0 to 5 a policy imperative. Learn more at <https://gift-connect.org>