



**children
atRisk**

Early Childhood Education Summit
Seeds of Change: Cultivating Big Ideas for Little Learners
August 14th | 10:00AM CT

Featured Speakers



Kim Kofron, Senior Director of Education, C@R
Kim Kofron is the Senior Director of Early Childhood Education for C@R. Previously; she served as the Executive Director for the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children from 2014-2021. She hails from the great state of Illinois receiving her Bachelor of Science in Child Development from the University of Illinois but found her way to Texas where she received her Master of Education in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Texas. Kim has worked in many capacities in early childhood, working in both for-profit and non-profit child care

settings as a 3-year-old teacher to Director to Manager of Education for a multi-site statewide child care company in Texas. Kofron has served on Governor Perry's Commission on Licensing Standards and currently serves on Governor Abbott's Texas Early Learning Council.



Mandi Kimball, Chief Government Affairs Officer, C@R
Mandi has been advocating for Texas' children since 2004. In January 2006, she became CHILDREN AT RISK's Public Policy Analyst and quickly made her way to Director. She received her Master's in Social Work from the University of Houston and received her bachelor's degree in social work from St. Edwards in Austin, Texas. Social justice is a priority on Mandi's advocacy agenda. Her experience and knowledge of the Texas Legislature has assisted her efforts in achieving quality care and services to Texas' most vulnerable youth in the areas of early education, human trafficking, juvenile justice/mental health, public education, and

food insecurity. Mandi oversees the Public Policy and Law Center's advocacy efforts, all policy briefs and bills drafted and filed by the Center and provides expert testimony to support positive policy changes. Mandi is highly active within communities in Texas and serves in leadership capacities on multiple local and state coalitions. In 2011, Mandi

received the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Award. Furthermore, Mandi works to build coalitions with community stakeholders, business stakeholders, non-profits, and service providers, to ensure a united front of child advocates.



Texas House Representative Armando Walle, Texas
House District 140

Texas State Representative Armando Walle, now in his ninth term in the Texas House of Representatives, grew up in the Aldine community and graduated from MacArthur High School. The oldest of five children raised by a single mother, he was the first in his family to attend and graduate from college. The values and lessons of his humble upbringing inform his legislative priorities, including the health, safety, and economic well-being of Houston's working families, disaster relief, and flood mitigation. He is also a member of several legislative

caucuses, including the Mexican American Legislative Caucus (for which he serves as General Counsel), and the Legislative Study Group (which he chairs).

Representative Walle is currently a member of the House Committee on Appropriations, and has served as Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Articles VI, VII, VII (natural resources, business & industry, and regulatory entities) for three sessions. He also sits on the House Committee on Licensing and Administrative Procedures.

Before Representative Walle was elected to the Texas House, he served on the staffs of multiple elected officials, including Congressman Gene Green and Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. Now a practicing attorney, Representative Walle earned his bachelor's and law degree from the University of Houston. He remains a staunch supporter of the University of Houston System and an advocate of UHD. State Representative Walle lives in North Houston with his family-- his wife, Debbie Walle, and their two young sons.



Elliot Haspel, Senior Fellow, Capita

Elliot Haspel is a nationally-recognized family policy expert and commentator, with a specialty in child care issues. He is the author of *Crawling Behind: America's Childcare Crisis and How to Fix It* and the forthcoming book *Raising a Nation: 10 Reasons Every American Has a Stake in Child Care For All*, in addition to many policy reports, and the Substack *The Family Frontier*.

Elliot has testified before the U.S. House of Representatives, appeared on television as an analyst, and his writings have appeared in a wide variety of top publications, including *The New York Times*, *The*

Washington Post, and The Atlantic. He is regularly sought out by journalists, and has been quoted in such mediums as NPR, The Guardian, and TIME Magazine. He lives in Denver with his spouse and two children.



Tonya Williams, Education Division Director, Arkansas Department of Education

Tonya Williams serves as Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. She has served in that role for more than 20 years and is responsible for overseeing Child Care Licensing and Regulatory Checks, Direct Services and Operations, Content and Professional Development, Local Leads, as well as several federal programs that serve young children and families. Tonya is passionate about improving the quality of early childhood education for all children in Arkansas. She is a graduate of Arkansas Tech University. She has worked in early childhood education for more than 27 years,

serving in several leadership roles.

She and her husband Randall have five daughters, including a former Italian exchange student, and five grandchildren.



Amy Jacobs, Commissioner of Bright from the Start, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

Amy M. Jacobs is commissioner of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the agency responsible for helping meet the early child care and education needs of hundreds of thousands of Georgia's children and their families. Governor Nathan Deal appointed her to lead the department in June 2014. As DECAL Commissioner, Jacobs oversees an annual budget of more than \$1 billion for programs focused on child care licensing, subsidized child care, child and adult care nutrition,

child care quality, and early childhood education, specifically Georgia's Pre-K Program.



Lyn Lucas, Associate Director, Early Childhood Education, C@R

Lyn holds a master's degree in educational leadership with a focus on Early Childhood. She has 30+ years' experience in early education, including direct services, leadership, and advocacy. In 2019 she led the development and implementation of the first Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship in Texas. Lyn currently works at Children at Risk focusing on early childhood education advocacy work and coordinating the Texas Prenatal-to-Three Collaborative.



Libbie Sonnier, PhD, Chief Executive Officer, Louisiana Policy Institute for Children

Libbie Sonnier, Ph.D., has served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children since 2019. Recognized for her tenacity and deep commitment to children, Dr. Sonnier has led teams in system-wide initiatives for the betterment of children, families, caregivers, and practitioners for more than two decades. During her time at the Louisiana Policy Institute, she has helped secure and direct more than \$1B for early care and education in Louisiana, including the state's largest new early learning investments in a decade and a 20-year millage that creates one of the nation's largest dedicated funds for infant and toddler care in New Orleans. Since 2019, she also tripled the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children's research and media engagement outputs and staff while quadrupling its annual revenues, and securing its first five seven-figure grants. She also helped conceive, launch, and co-chair the Steering Committee of [Geaux Far Louisiana](#), a comprehensive effort that engages parents and early childhood health and education providers in leading the transformation of the state's early childhood systems to better meet the needs of families.

Prior to taking on leadership of the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, she served as a state director of two federal programs, where she managed multi-million-dollar budgets. She developed and implemented pilot programs for children, birth to age five, in four states across multiple agencies and community partners to improve the efficiency and efficacy of direct services for children and their families. Dr. Sonnier's experiences conducting longitudinal and experimental research allow her to translate scientific findings into meaningful and practical policies that support better life outcomes for children. She is coauthor of multiple publications and technical reports, training curricula, and, with Drs. Sharon and Craig Ramey, The Four Diamonds Checklist and The Quality System to Achieve Results for Young Children in all Settings (Q-STAR).

Dr. Sonnier has received numerous awards and public recognition for her leadership and advocacy for children, including the Hulick Serving Spirit Fellowship Award for her

commitment to individuals with disabilities across the life course, the Rotary Club's Extraordinary Woman "Rising Star" Award, New Orleans City Business' Woman of the Year (2020 and 2022), one of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana's "16 Women Paving the Way for Louisiana's Future," St. Charles Magazine 2022 ChangeMaker, Louisiana Early Childhood Association's 2022 Friends of Children Award, 2023 Greater Baton Rouge Business Report Most Powerful & Influential Business & Community Leader, 2023 Melanie Bronfin Advocacy for Children Award by Clover, 2023 Voice of Children awardee from For Providers by Providers, 2023 Biz New Orleans Executive of the Year, 2023 – 2024 Champions of Choice Award from The Education Trust of Louisiana, Biz New Orleans 2024 Women to Watch, named to Forbes Nonprofit Council in 2024, 2024 Women We Admire Top 50 Non-Profit Leaders, 2024 Women in Government in Relations Advocate of the Year, New Orleans CityBusiness' Power 50 Most Influential People in the Greater New Orleans Area, and the 2025 Baton Rouge Area Foundation John W. Barton Sr. Awardee for Excellence in Non-profit Management.

Dr. Sonnier serves on the boards of Ellevote Louisiana, Volunteers of America of South Central Louisiana, Southwest Regional Education Laboratories Governing Board, and numerous local and state boards and commissions. She is a graduate of Leadership Louisiana. Dr. Sonnier is an assistant clinical professor in Mississippi State University's Human Development and Family Studies Department in the School of Human Sciences as well as faculty with Louisiana State University's Early Childhood Education Institute.

Dr. Sonnier received a Doctor of Philosophy in human development from Virginia Tech, a Master of Education in early childhood intervention and family support services from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a Bachelor of Science in special education with an emphasis in early childhood intervention from the University of Southern Mississippi.



Rochelle Wilcox, Chief Executive Director, Wilcox Academy of Early Learning
Co- Founder & CEO, For Providers By Providers (4PXP)

Rochelle Wilcox is a seasoned leader in early childhood education, with over 26 years of experience dedicated to advocacy, innovation, and impact. Her journey began in the classroom as a teacher and has since propelled her to her current role as the CEO and Executive Director of Wilcox Academy of Early Learning, which operates three centers: Wilcox Academy Southern University at New Orleans, Wilcox Academy Central City, and Wilcox Academy.

Rochelle's academic achievements include an Associate of Arts in Early Childhood Education and a Bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Education in Urban Society. These credentials underpin her visionary approach to advancing the quality of early learning opportunities for children and families in Louisiana. Rochelle has made history as the first early learning center provider to serve on the Board of Agenda for Children. She currently lends her expertise to several boards, including the Children's Funding Accelerator, Propeller, and the Drexel Prep Foundation. Additionally, she is an active member of the steering committees for the

New Orleans Grade Level Reading Campaign and the New Orleans Early Education Network. She also serves as the co-chair of Geaux Far Louisiana, advocating for equitable access to quality education across the state. In 2021, Rochelle co-founded For Providers by Providers, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering Louisiana's Type III early learning centers—predominantly BIPOC- and womenled institutions that accept public funding. The organization focuses on enhancing quality through policy advocacy, professional development, networking, and wealth-building initiatives. Rochelle's contributions have been recognized with numerous accolades, including the 2023 Inaugural Early Childhood Leader of the Year Award, presented by Dream Teachers and the Louisiana Department of Education. Over the course of her career, she has positively impacted the lives of more than 2,000 children, families, and early childhood educators. Above all, Rochelle treasures her roles as a wife, a proud mother of three sons, and a grandmother to her new grandson.