



## **Early Childhood Policy Council Council and Committee Member Biographies**

February 2026

### **Early Childhood Policy Council Members**

#### **The Governor's appointees are:**

**Claire Ramsey**, of South San Francisco, is the appointed Chair of the Early Childhood Policy Council. Ramsey has been Chief Deputy Director at the California Department of Social Services since 2021. She was a Senior Staff Attorney at Justice in Aging from 2016 to 2021. Ramsey was an Associate at ADZ Law LLP from 2015 to 2016. She was a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County from 2012 to 2015. Ramsey held several positions at the Child Care Law Center from 2006 to 2012, including Senior Staff Attorney and Equal Justice Public Works Fellow. Ramsey is a member of the South San Francisco Library Board. She earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco, a Master of Arts degree in Drama at San Francisco State University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Ristyn Woolley**, of Sacramento, has been Director of the California Head Start Collaboration Office at the California Department of Social Services since 2023, where she was a Child Development Consultant in the Policy Office from 2021 to 2023. She was a Child Development Consultant in the Early Learning and Care Division at the Department of Education from 2019 to 2021. Woolley held several positions at the YMCA of the East Bay from 2015 to 2019, including Child Development Services Manager and Education Analyst. Woolley was an Assessor and Assessment Coordinator for SEED of Early Literacy Initiative at the Kenneth Rainin Foundation from 2014 to 2015. She was an Associate Governmental Program Analyst at the California Department of Mental Health from 2010 to 2012. Woolley was an Associate Governmental Program Analyst at the California Department of Education from 2008 to 2010. She was a Primary Intervention Specialist at the Elk Grove Unified School District from 2004 to 2005. Woolley earned a Master of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education from Mills College and a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the University of the Pacific.

**Stephen Propheter**, of Lincoln, has been Director of the Early Education Division at the California Department of Education since 2019, where he has held several positions

since 2015, including Associate Director of the Early Learning and Care Division and Staff Services Manager of Fiscal and Administrative Services Division. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Accountancy from California State University, Sacramento.

**Karla Pleitez Howell**, of Los Angeles, has been Chief Executive Officer of First 5 Los Angeles since 2023. She was Branch Chief of the Child Care and Development Division at the California Department of Social Services from 2021 to 2023. Pleitez Howell was Chief of Policy and Programs at Advancement Project from 2014 to 2021. She was a Supervising Staff Attorney for Public Counsel from 2006 to 2014. Pleitez Howell was a Directing Attorney at El Rescate from 2004 to 2006. She is a member of the Los Angeles County Prevention and Promotion System Governing Committee and Los Angeles Chamber. Pleitez Howell earned a Juris Doctor degree from University of California College of the Law, San Francisco and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from University of California, Los Angeles.

**Diana Ramos**, of Laguna Beach, has been the California Surgeon General since 2022 and Adjunct Assistant Clinical Professor at the University of Southern California, Keck School of Medicine since 1999. She was Founder and Chief Executive Officer of GamiFi Health from 2018 to 2022. Ramos was a Per Diem Physician at Kaiser Permanente from 1998 to 2022. She held several positions at the California Department of Public Health between 2017 and 2022, including Public Health Administrator in the Center for Healthy Communities and Public Health Medical Officer. Ramos was Director of Reproductive Health, Child and Adolescent Health, at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health from 2005 to 2017. She was Chief Medical Officer at Alpha Medical Center Inc. from 2003 to 2005. Ramos was Senior Regional Medical Research Specialist at Pfizer Inc. from 2000 to 2003. She was Staff Obstetrician at Clinica Humanitaria from 1999 to 2000. Ramos is an Executive Board Member for the California Maternal Care Quality Collaborative. She earned a Doctor of Medicine degree from University of Southern California, a Master in Public Health degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, a Master of Business Administration degree from University of California, Irvine, and a Bachelor of Arts in Communications, Arts and Science, from the University of Southern California.

#### **The Legislature's appointees are:**

**Natali Gaxiola**, of Hawthorne, has been teaching at Felton State Preschool in the Lennox School District since 2003. As a preschool teacher and instructional leader, she has been featured in print and online materials, such as the teaching channel, Development and Research in Early Math Education Network resources, and Heinemann's *Young Children's Mathematics* (Carpenter et al. 2016). She presents regularly at local and national mathematics conferences and coauthored the "Preschool Connections" chapter in Stenhouse Publisher's *Choral Counting & Counting Collections: transforming the PreK-5 math classroom*. She was awarded Early Childhood Educator of Laos Angeles County in 2019. She is a member of the California School Employees Association. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from California State University Dominguez Hills.

**Mary Ann Hansen**, of Ferndale, is the Executive Director of First 5 Humboldt. Hansen has worked to support children and families for more than 40 years. She began her career as a substitute in a family child care home, then worked for her local Resource and Referral agency, before becoming a licensed family child care provider. She has mentored emerging professionals at both UC Davis' and Cal Poly Humboldt's lab schools, founded and directed a non-profit community-based child care center, taught at both the community college and state university levels for more than two decades, and served as a consultant on quality improvement in K-12 schools. She co-chaired the California Surgeon General's Network of Care Committee, which produced a roadmap for how communities can work together to address Adverse Childhood Experiences.

**Sonia P. Jaramillo**, of Gonzalez, has been in the Preschool-12 educational system for 25 years. Jaramillo has been a teacher, a principal and director of categorical programs. She is an elected official and serves as the board president for the Gonzales Unified School District. She earned a Master of Education degree from San Jose State University and holds a Reading Specialist Credential, a Bilingual Teaching Credential and an Administrative Credential. Currently, Jaramillo is the Senior Director for the Monterey County Early Learning Program.

**Robin Layton**, of San Diego, is the Past President and CEO of Educational Enrichment Systems (EES)—a San Diego not-for-profit agency that provides subsidized child development and preschool services to over 1,100 children from low-wage working families. Layton expanded EES operations from just 3 sites in 1984 to 21 child development centers and preschools throughout San Diego County. Layton has actively participated in several local and statewide early education initiatives throughout her career, including current membership on the California Child Development Administrators Association Policy Advisors Committee and the Jewish Family Service Public Affairs Committee.

**Socorro Martin**, of Salinas, is a home daycare provider.

**Andrea Fernandez Mendoza**, of Los Angeles, has been the Vice President of Education/Program Director for California Children's Academy since 2006 and joined the organization in 1993. In her current role, Mendoza is fully responsible for the development, direction and coordination of 15 full-day, subsidized early education and development programs serving infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Her 30+ years of experience in the field has brought her a wealth of hands-on knowledge and practical experience in the field of Early Childhood Education. Andrea holds a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education Leadership, earned her Bachelor of Arts degree with a specialization in Human Development and Social Change, and an Associate of Science degree in Infant Studies. She is currently working towards her PhD in Education.

**Laura (Kay) Ruhstaller**, of Stockton, is the Chief Executive Officer for Family Resource and Referral Center in San Joaquin County (since 2003). She served as a First 5 San Joaquin, Children and Families Commissioner for 10 years prior to joining the Early Childhood Policy Council. She is currently the Financial VP for the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce. Ruhstaller is one of the founders of the San Joaquin Children's

Alliance, as well as the Breastfeeding Coalition of San Joaquin County. She served two terms as Public Policy Chair and Board Member with the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network. Ruhstaller is also a Registered Dietitian.

**Donna Sneeringer**, of Sacramento, is Director of Government Relations for Child Care Resource Center, where she works with advocacy organizations and service providers to identify the need for early education and childcare across Los Angeles and California. She has worked for over 25 years on early childhood programs and policy throughout California. She earned a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Southern California and a Bachelor of Child Development degree from California State University Northridge.

#### **The Superintendent of Public Instruction's appointee is:**

**Shanna Birkholz-Vasquez**, of Folsom, has been Associate Director of the Early Education Division at the California Department of Education since 2024. She started working at the California Department of Education in 2022 as the Administrator of the UPK Implementation and Support Office. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and a minor in Chicano Bilingual/Bicultural Studies from the University of California, Riverside, a Master of Science Degree in Reading from California State University, Fullerton as well as a degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Denver.

#### **The Advisory Committees' appointees are:**

**Miren Algorri**, of Chula Vista, has been a childcare provider for Algorri Family Childcare since 1996. She is a member of the San Diego Family Childcare Association and California Family Childcare Network. Algorri is also a member of the Early Childhood Policy Council's Workforce Advisory Committee.

**Lisette Frausto**, of Oakland, has been a parent and community organizer for Kidango Child Care Center since 2018 and a medical biller for Optima Ophthalmic Medical Associates since 2015. Frausto is also a member of the Early Childhood Policy Council's Parent Advisory Committee.

**Mary Ignatius**, of San Francisco, is the Executive Director of Parent Voices California. Prior to this position, served as a statewide organizer for Parent Voices California from 2005 to 2023. She served on the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education. Ignatius earned a Master of Social Work degree from Temple University. Ignatius is also the Chair of the Early Childhood Policy Council's Parent Advisory Committee.

**Tonia McMillian**, of Bellflower, is a Family, Friend and Neighbor child care provider. Prior to this role, McMillian was owner of Kiddie Depot Family Child Care from 1996 to 2025. She is an instructor for the American Red Cross and a childcare provider-organizer at SEIU Local 99. McMillian served on the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education. McMillian is also the Chair of the Early Childhood Policy Council's Workforce Advisory Committee.

## Parent Advisory Committee Members

### The Governor's appointees are:

**Mary Ignatius**, of San Francisco, is the appointed Chair of the Parent Advisory Committee. She is the Executive Director of Parent Voices California. Prior to this position, served as a statewide organizer for Parent Voices California from 2005 to 2023. She served on the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education. Ignatius earned a Master of Social Work degree from Temple University

**Lisette Frausto**, of Oakland, has been a parent and community organizer for Kidango Child Care Center since 2018 and a medical biller for Optima Ophthalmic Medical Associates since 2015.

**Yenni Rivera**, of Los Angeles, has been outreach coordinator for People Assisting the Homeless since 2018. She was director of operations for the Masters Workshop from 2014 to 2019 and a sales manager for Marriott International from 2012 to 2013. Rivera is a member of the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence and an ambassador for Parent Voices of California.

### The Legislature's appointees are:

**Deborah Corley-Marzett**, of Bakersfield, has been a family daycare provider in Kern County for more than 20 years. She works with family daycare providers throughout the state—making it her mission to inform, educate and motivate family daycare providers to reach for greatness while demanding transparency in daycare. She is married with four children and seven grandchildren. Corley-Marzett is a Division II Shot Put Champion and an active union member Local 521 in Bakersfield. Corley-Marzett has a business degree from California State University, Bakersfield.

**Naima Facih**, of San Francisco, holds degrees in Education, Child Development, Psychology, and an MBA in Business, bringing a diverse academic background to her professional journey. With extensive experience in administration, accounting, insurance, and health care, Naima currently serves as a dedicated teacher at a private institution, where she is passionate about supporting students' growth and learning. Outside of her professional life, Naima enjoys spending quality time with her children, reading, playing tennis, and caring for her plants. She is also committed to giving back to her community and regularly volunteers with nonprofit organizations on the weekends.

**Patricia Lozano**, of Los Angeles, has been the executive director of Early Edge California since 2017. Prior to joining Early Edge California, Lozano served as a senior program officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and worked on their national Early Learning strategy. In California, Lozano has spearheaded projects at UCLA's Center for Improving Child Care Quality, First 5 LA, and the RAND Corporation, and developed research and evaluation projects to find evidence-based best practices for teachers to work with Dual Language Learners. As a former teacher and associate

director at a child development center, Lozano is passionate about supporting the needs of early childhood educators and improving quality for young children. She is also a member of the board of directors of Parents as Teachers (PAT), the nation's leading and most replicated parental education program, specializing in early childhood development through home visitation. Lozano holds a Bachelor of Arts from Los Andes University in Colombia and a Masters in Psychology (M.A.), Child Development Concentration, from California State University, San Bernardino.

**Patrick D. MacFarlane**, of Los Angeles, is Government Relations Manager at Child Care Resource Center (CCRC). He is a former Public Policy Associate at Crystal Stairs, Inc. and previously served as Senior Field Representative with the California State Assembly. A University of Arizona graduate, MacFarlane was born and raised in Los Angeles, where he resides with his wife Raquel and 2-year-old daughter Leah.

**Cheryl "Cherie" Schroeder**, of Solano County, serves California's foster and kinship caregivers and the children placed in their homes. She has decades of experience with the state's most vulnerable children as an educator, foster parent, and advocate. Since 1985, Schroeder has served as the Director of Foster & Kinship Care Education and Independent Living programs at Woodland Community College in Yolo County. In 2018, under the Child Abuse Prevention Center, she coordinated the development and launching of a statewide AmeriCorps mentoring project, now known as the CA Foster Youth Initiative. She was appointed to the CA Child Welfare Council in 2013, and participates on several CA Department of Social Services committees, including Foster Youth Healthy Sexual Development, Psychotropic Quality Improvement Collaborative, Continuum of Care Reform Stakeholders, AB 175 Up-Dated Foster Youth Rights, and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. The effects of early trauma and loss on a child's development are of upmost interest and concern to Schroeder. To enhance her graduate work obtained at UC Davis, she completed a 2-year Advanced Transdisciplinary Mental Health Practitioner endorsement in the fields of Infant/Family and Early Childhood through WestEd and sponsored by First 5 Yolo.

## **Workforce Advisory Committee Members**

### **The Governor's appointees are:**

**Tonia McMillian**, of Bellflower, is the appointed Chair of the Workforce Advisory Committee. She is a Family, Friend and Neighbor child care provider. Prior to this role, McMillian was owner of Kiddie Depot Family Child Care from 1996 to 2025. She is an instructor for the American Red Cross and a childcare provider-organizer at SEIU Local 99. McMillian served on the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education.

**Miren Algorri**, of Chula Vista, has been a childcare provider for Algorri Family Childcare since 1996. She is a member of the San Diego Family Childcare Association and California Family Childcare Network.

**Virginia Eigen**, of San Jose, has been a child development specialist for the Campbell Union School District since 2002. She is a member of the California Early Childhood Mentor Program and the California School Employees Association Chapter 868.

**The Legislature's appointees are:**

**Patricia Alexander**, of Elk Grove, is a licensed in-home family childcare provider and has provided childcare for over 49 years. She is still operating her family childcare and preschool. She is currently a support leader and mentor with Solutions provider network to family childcare providers in the community and nationally since 1990 to present. Some of Alexander's involvements include being former President of Sacramento Valley Association for the Education of Young Children (SVAEYC) from 2011 to 2018, a past board member for the association, and currently past president of SVAEYC. She also served as the family childcare committee chair, legislation chair, and other duties. Pat is also past Vice President to Family Childcare Providers Association of Sacramento and board member from 2003 to 2017. She is also a former board member for the California Association for Family Childcare Providers (CAFCC). Alexander is currently a member of the Child Care Providers Union (CCPU) and has been a member for more than 16 years. She holds a degree in Early Childhood Education, with a specialization in ages 2-4 and a master teaching permit through the state of California.

**AnnLouise Bonnitto**, of Roseville, is the Tribal Child Development Director for the California Rural Indian Health Board, Inc. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science/American Government and Jurisprudence from the University of California Berkeley. She also holds a Juris Doctorate degree in Law from the Lincoln Law School of Sacramento. With over 25 years of experience in her career, Bonnitto is the Director for both Tribal Head Start and Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant. She is best known for her expertise in health, education, budgets, administrative law, case management, social service and advocacy for tribes. In her current role, AnnLouise is responsible for managing a team of early education professionals for eighteen tribes in California.

**Amelia M. Soto**, of Gardena, is a Family Services Advisor at the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation of Head Start, where she has worked for the last 10 years. She was previously the Head Teacher in their Early Head Start classroom for children ages 18 months to 3 years. Soto has held a variety of roles teaching children from 18 months to 5 years old in her over 20-year career. She is an active member of SEIU Local 99, where she served on the Executive Board committees, participated in training other early educators as a peer trainer in Occupational Health and Safety, and has been a shop steward and bargaining team member. Soto is bilingual and has an Associate degree in Child Development and a director's teaching permit from the state of California.

**Zoila Carolina Toma**, of Signal Hill, was born in El Salvador in December 1981, and is now a resident of Los Angeles County, where she lives with her husband and three children. She is the CEO of Fun Minds, Inc, the corporation that owns Castle in the Sky Daycare and has been a licensed childcare provider and educator since September 2011. For many years, Toma has been a labor union/party activist, an education

advocate, and a childcare provider-organizer at SEIU Local 99/ Child Care Providers Union (CCPU). Currently, she is attending college to complete her education in Early Childhood Education.

**Debra Ward**, of Brea, recently retired, was the Director of Cerritos College Child Development Center from 2006 to 2024. She also served in an adjunct faculty there and at Rio Hondo College. She held various positions with San Bernardino Valley College, first as adjunct Instructor for the Child Development Department from 1988 to 2004, and then as the Interim Child Development Grant Coordinator from 2001 to 2004. From 2004 to 2006, she held the position as full-time faculty and served as the Director of the Child Development Center at San Bernardino Valley College. She worked at the Redlands YWCA and YMCA, where she developed and implemented infant/toddler childcare programs, preschool programs, after-school-age programs, and a Teen/Senior Center for the Redlands community from 1977 to 2001. During her time at the YMCA of Redlands, she held the position of Senior Program Director for Child Care and Family Services from 1981 to 1989; and from 1990 to 2001, the Associate Executive Director. She was one of two women to serve as a member of the Redlands Noon Kiwanis Club in 1987, and the first woman President of the Redlands Noon Kiwanis Club in 1995. She is a former member of the Ebell of Los Angeles and a current member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance. She has been a Mentor Director for the California Early Childhood Mentor Program since 2014 and a Professional Growth Advisor since 1998. She formerly served as a member of the Community Care Licensing Advisory Committee for San Bernardino County. Debra Ward earned a Master of Science degree in Child Development from the University of La Verne.

**Latonda Williams**, of Los Angeles, is the Assistant Director of Program Services at Plaza de la Raza Child Development Services, Inc., where she currently serves on the Executive Team. She has worked within the Head Start Community for the last 11 years, starting as a Family Services Worker. Williams has held multiple positions that allowed her to support families, teachers, and family child care providers. She previously worked as the Early Head Start Manager for Allies for Every Child, formerly known as Westside Children's Center, where she developed and implemented the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership program.