

Work Group Members

William “Bill” H. Brown is a professor in the University of South Carolina College of Education, a member of the USC Research Consortium on Children and Families (RCCF), and a member of the Children’s Physical Activity Research Group (CPARG) at the USC Arnold School of Public Health. He has written articles and chapters about services, practices, and policies for young children and their families, and served as co-editor of *Inclusion of Preschool Children with Developmental Delays in Early Childhood Programs* (Brown & Conroy, 1997) and *Social Competence of Young Children: Risk, Disability, and Evidence-Based Practices* (2nd ed.; Brown, Odom, & McConnell, 2008). He also served as the editor of the *Journal of Early Intervention* from 2007-2010 and is an editorial board member for *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* and *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. Dr. Brown has held professional positions as a preschool teacher, service coordinator with families of children with developmental delays, director of a large early intervention program for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with and without disabilities, teacher educator, researcher, and child advocate. Dr. Brown’s professional interests include research related to young children’s social competence, preschool inclusion, and high quality and effective community-based services for young children. Most recently, he has been investigating young children’s physical activity in preschools and community settings.

Heather Brown was born and raised in New Hampshire and currently resides in Pittsfield, NH. She became part of the Head Start family about 3 years ago and has developed from a quiet and timid woman into a fierce and dedicated Head Start Child Advocate. She currently holds seats on the Belknap/Merrimack County Policy Council and the Community Action Program Board of Directors as well as the NH Parents Advisory Council, the New England Head Start Association, and the National Head Start Association Board of Directors. She has also been appointed by Governor John Lynch to sit on the newly formed New Hampshire Early Education Advisory Council. Heather is the mother of two wonderful girls. She says that being a mother has led her to advocate for quality funding and education, not only for her own children, but for all children within her state and country, regardless of race, religion, disability and/or income.

Mary Ann Cornish is Director of Higher Horizons Head Start in Falls Church, VA, a position she has held since 1977. She manages a multi-funded, state-of-the-art Head Start program serving 300 children. Her responsibilities include: developing effective management systems; ensuring program compliance with all applicable standards and funding requirements; developing strategic plans for the organization; and forming collaborative partnerships with local government, for profit, and not-for-profit resources. Her work in the highly diverse community of Bailey’s Crossroads/Falls Church, VA has resulted in a strong reputation at both local and national levels for sharing success stories regarding the role of culture and family in early childhood education, meeting the needs of dual language learners, preserving native languages, and collaboration with community organizations. Throughout her career, she has stressed the importance of “staying rooted in our communities and responsive to the families we serve.”

Marica Cox has spent the past ten years advocating for quality early childhood education programs. Her education advocacy work has been in both administrative and classroom settings. As an employee of the District of Columbia’s Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Marica currently develops and monitors quality enhancement initiatives for early childhood programs and professionals in the District.

Samtra K. Devard is the wife of Leonard and the mother of three – Lauren, Samuel, and Solomon. Samtra is devoted to her family and uses her personal experiences to advocate for systems change on behalf of **all** children and their families. Samtra promotes change and solves issues according to the belief that by **hearing families with openness, passion and empathy**, partnerships are created and success can be achieved. Samtra is passionate about the message of HOPE because it empowers parents like her to be strong and confident advocates; and provides a way for professionals to connect with families to accomplish shared goals. Samtra holds a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering degree from Drexel University.

Ida Rose Florez is assistant professor of early childhood education at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, where she conducts research in early childhood assessment and policy, school readiness, and early childhood teacher preparation. Dr. Florez is currently Vice President of Professional Development for the Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children (AzAEYC). Her professional background includes over twenty years of experience as a certified school psychologist in PreK-12 settings.

Jim Lesko is Director of Early Development and Learning Resources for the Delaware Department of Education. He administers programs targeting services to children aged birth through kindergarten. He is the state's lead early childhood specialist and responsible for programs focused on services for young children at risk. Jim's evaluation experiences at the state level include managing the full/part day kindergarten analyses, longitudinal study on early education experiences, the IDEA/619 early childhood accountability initiative, and the state prekindergarten accountability project. His background is early childhood special education and he has been a classroom-based and itinerant educator, school administrator, researcher, professional development trainer, and technical assistance specialist. He has co-led several RTI/EC projects within Delaware. Jim has worked with the Open Society Institute, Step by Step Program, and provided training, technical assistance and evaluation support to Ministries of Education in six European countries.

Donna Nylander is the Principal of the Valley View Early Childhood Center for School District 365U in Bolingbrook/Romeoville, IL. Since 2006, the center has been learning and implementing RTI practices, Positive Behavior Strategies, and Early Childhood Outcomes. Donna has been a teacher, regional coordinator for the IL Statewide Professional Development System, and an Administrator involved in the start-up of three early childhood centers. Professional contributions include co-chair of IL Early Learning Council committee, founding member of IL RTI workgroup, and contributor to the state Early Learning Standards. Donna has presented at state and national conferences. Her publications include an article entitled Quality Inclusive Early Childhood Programs: 10 Things to Look For (2009). In 2006, Donna received the Rose C. Engel Award for exemplary contributions to the field of early childhood from the Division for Early Childhood (DEC).

Connie Robers has been the Executive Director of Rock-Walworth Comprehensive Family Services, Inc., since 2000. RWCFS provides Head Start and Early Head Start services in a two-county area in south-central Wisconsin. She has a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction, with emphasis in infant-toddler and early childhood development. Her work in early care and education spans 35 years and includes experiences as a Head Start Education Coordinator, child care administrator, college instructor, and preschool teacher in parent co-op, public school, and private preschool settings. Over the past seven years, Connie has led a local SpecialQuest team, promoting the inclusion of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities through a community approach. For the past three years, she has served as a SpecialQuest Ambassador for Wisconsin, promoting inclusion practices among Wisconsin Head Start programs.

Diane Tunis has been an early childhood classroom teacher for more than 30 years in the Washington, DC area, and is currently teaching a full day Head Start class in Montgomery County Public Schools at Arcola Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland. She has been trained in a variety of early childhood approaches (e.g., The Responsive Classroom, The Project Approach, Reggio, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Tools of the Mind, Arts Integration) and has been a trainer and workshop leader in literacy, science, and math. Diane has written and received grants and sat on Advisory Boards, and not 1 of the 20 children in her class is interested in her professional credentials. They come to school with expectations of fun, play, structure, books, running, singing and dancing, making choices, interesting centers, accepting responsibilities, new friends, a few rules, breakfast and lunch, and caring adults.

Bea Vargas is the director of El Papalote Inclusive Child Development Center, an NAEYC-accredited program in El Paso, TX. She has been in this position for over 10 years and has over 30 years of experience in early childhood education. Bea has served as president of the Paso del Norte Association for the Education of Young Children (the local NAEYC affiliate) and the Governance Chair for the Texas AEYC. She chairs or sits on several local boards such as Texas Department of Family and Protective Services advisory board, the Upper Rio Grande at Work, Child Care Services Advisory Board, an Economic Opportunities Collaborative, and the El Paso Community College Early Childhood Education Advisory Board. She currently is part of a statewide Task Force for Children with Special Needs, where she serves on the Early Childhood Detection and Intervention Subcommittee. A strong advocate, Bea's passion is helping children—especially those with special needs—and their families.