

# Fellowship for Impact in Early Childhood Policy

## 2025-2026 Fellows

### **Kim Alleyne (she/her/hers)**

Director, Special Projects, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science, Boston Children's Hospital

Kim Alleyne, MCP, EdD, has over 20 years of experience leading training and community building initiatives. She has held leadership roles in early childhood, youth development and corporate philanthropy. She serves as the director of special projects at Boston Children's Hospital, Department of Psychiatry. There, Dr. Alleyne has been excited to be part of a team launching an early childhood mental health program. She directed the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement, a training and technical assistance center funded by the Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care (from 2010 to 2020).

Dr. Alleyne is deeply interested in research, practice and training to strengthen urban communities and community leadership. Her research has explored Black and Latina mothers' perspectives of family engagement training needs in early childhood programs as well as neighborhood resident leadership development. She has earned degrees at Yale College (economics), MIT (city planning) and Northeastern (education leadership). A Boston resident with Barbadian roots, Dr. Alleyne cherishes her roles as a mother, daughter, friend, mentor/mentee, and community advocate.



### **Daiane Antonio (she/her/hers)**

Assistant Professor at MassBay Community College and PhD Student at UMass Boston

Daiane Antonio is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at Massachusetts Bay Community College and a PhD student in Early Childhood Education and Care at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She developed and currently leads an innovative Early Childhood Education Certificate Program designed to support multilingual and culturally diverse educators in gaining access to licensure and higher education. Her research focuses on inclusive practices, language access, and special education in early childhood, with an emphasis on shaping policies and professional development opportunities for educators working with children with and without disabilities and developmental differences. As a Brazilian, bilingual, and neurodivergent educator-scholar, Daiane brings an intersectional lens to her teaching, research, and policy advocacy.



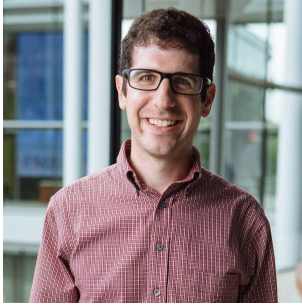
Photo credit to Olivia Moon  
Photography courtesy of Alive  
Dance Collective

### **Brenna Banister**

Lead Teacher, Belmont Cooperative Nursery School

Brenna Banister (she/her) is an Early Childhood Educator, dance administrator, choreographer, and dancer living in Boston, MA. Brenna grew up in rural Vermont and moved to Boston to attend Boston University, where she graduated with a BA in Early Childhood Education in 2012. She has taught at Belmont Cooperative Nursery School (BCNS) since 2014. In addition to her classroom teaching roles at BCNS, she developed a cross-classroom position, served on the Strategic Planning Committee, and completed a Director Shadow program. In 2014, Brenna Banister founded an adult contemporary dance group, Alive Dance Collective. She is the Artistic Director, a choreographer, and a dancer for Alive. In 2023, Brenna began Storybook Movement Workshops to foster creative movement in young children. Workshops use children's literature and music to encourage storytelling with the body. When not teaching or dancing, Brenna enjoys spending time with her wife and dog, traveling to places where she can snorkel, and increasing her American Sign Language skills.





## **Joshua Benjamin**

K2 Teacher, Winship Elementary School (Boston Public Schools)

Josh Benjamin teaches a diverse kindergarten class at Winship Elementary School in Boston. He is passionate about oral language in the classroom, receiving a Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching to study oracy in England in 2015 and developing a city-wide professional development course on oracy for Boston teachers. Josh has also written about education and classroom life for a number of publications, including The Boston Globe, The Hechinger Report, and TES (UK).



## **Jessica Nuhibian Boisvert**

Early Intervention Program Director, The Dimock Center

Biography coming soon



## **Christine Reis-Bortolotto**

Director, Ellis Family Child Care Network, Ellis Early Learning

Christine Bortolotto joined the Ellis Family Child Care Network in 2025, bringing with her over two decades of experience as a dedicated Family Child Care Educator in Boston. Throughout her 20-year career, she has provided nurturing care and early learning experiences to hundreds of children and families. Christine is a proud graduate of Boston College and is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Executive Leadership at her alma mater.

In addition to her professional work, Christine is a devoted mother to two college-aged children and lives in West Roxbury with her husband, an administrator in the Physics Department at Boston College. She has been an active volunteer in various community and educational organizations, including Girl Scouts, Parkway Pop Warner, Holy Name Parish, Boston Collegiate Charter School, and Woods for Others.

Christine also serves as Vice President of the Westzone Family Child Care Network, a collective of entrepreneurial childcare providers throughout the City of Boston, where she continues to advocate for and support family childcare educators across the region.



### **Pia Caronongan (she/her/hers)**

Research Associate Professor, Boston University Wheelock Educational Policy Center

Pia Caronongan is a Research Associate Professor at Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development and a faculty affiliate of the Wheelock Educational Policy Center. Her work focuses on developing research-based and data-informed policy strategies to support and improve early care and education (ECE) access and quality. She currently leads a research-practice partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) focused on better understanding the policies and practices shaping the state's early educator workforce. Before coming to BU, she was a principal researcher at Mathematica, where she led rigorous evaluations of early childhood initiatives and in-depth examinations of the systems that support ECE programs.



### **Cherish Casey (she/her/hers)**

Family Engagement Social Worker, Ellis Early Learning

Cherish Casey is a dedicated social worker, community advocate, and developing wellness practitioner with over 20 years of experience in early childhood and family support. She is committed to uplifting children, families, and communities through trauma-informed, strengths-based care. With a deep passion for equity and social justice, Cherish integrates her expertise in early education and family support with her growing practice in wellness, holding space for healing and growth.

She previously served as a racial justice organizer with the Essex County Community Organization (ECCO), where she worked alongside community members to advance systemic change, build collective power, and address inequities. She continues to strive to create inclusive environments where individuals and families can thrive, while centering wellness, justice, and community healing.



### **Danielle Charpentier (she/her/hers)**

Director, Social Finance

Danielle Charpentier is a Director in the Impact Advisory practice at Social Finance based in the Boston office. Danielle works closely with partners to design, implement, and manage initiatives in early childhood, economic mobility, health, homelessness, and public safety. As part of her portfolio, she works closely with the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood on its performance management strategy, including a contracting tool that offers up to \$800K per year in monetary incentives to providers for metrics achieved. Danielle graduated from Cornell University with a major in Economics and minors in Business and Law & Society.



### **Donna M. Denette (she/her/hers)**

Founding Director, The Children First Center

Donna Denette is the Founding Director of Children First, an early learning center in Granby, Massachusetts, serving 150 children from toddlers through 6th grade. She is a passionate advocate for early education and care and has been in the field for over 25 years.

Along with the day-to-day leadership for the administration of the center, Donna guided her organization through two expansion projects, taking the facility from 1,000 to 12,000 square feet, and developed a natural playground on the organization's 4.5 acres. She has also worked as Executive Director of Camp Howe, where her passion for nature-focused education bloomed.

Donna has actively spoken out about the many challenges faced by ECE leaders. She created and implemented a survey to highlight the struggles with work-life balance and job demands experienced by these professionals, sharing the results, ""Pouring From an Empty Cup"", on The 9:30 Call and through public comment with the DEEC Board. Donna was invited to provide testimony to the MA Legislature Joint Committee on Education at an informational hearing regarding Early Education and Care in the Commonwealth.

During the pandemic, Donna immersed herself in creating and critiquing policy, igniting an unexpected spark. She looks forward to strengthening her knowledge as she explores new pathways for leadership and fulfillment, envisioning a next chapter that aligns her talents, values, and contributions to the wider world.



### **Shavon Drayton**

Senior Director of Early Education, Horizons for Homeless Children

Shavon is the Senior Director of Early Education with a demonstrated history of working in the early education and family services industry. She is passionate about developing and implementing equitable workplace policies and environments. Skilled in customer service, communications, presentations, training, and educational leadership. Outside of that work, Shavon is the proud mother of 2 children and enjoys running a community based, youth program in Dorchester. A quote Shavon holds dear is “You are someone’s ancestor, what will your legacy be?” -Vanessa Garrison, GirlTrek COO & Founder.



### **Karen Feeney (she/her/hers)**

Executive Director of Early Childhood, Cambridge Public Schools

Karen Feeney has dedicated her career to early childhood education, with over 25 years of experience spanning both private and public sectors. She began her journey as a teaching assistant in a private child care center, where she rose to the position of director.

Karen then transitioned to public schools, where she has served in various leadership roles, including kindergarten and first-grade teacher, elementary principal, and director of early childhood. In her current role as Executive Director of Early Childhood for the Cambridge Public Schools, she has been instrumental in implementing the Cambridge Preschool Program, which provides free preschool to all 4-year-old residents of the city. Karen's commitment to her field is further demonstrated by her recent achievement of the Certificate of Early Education Leadership (CEEL) from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.



### **Crystal Galvin (she/her/hers)**

Director of Community Services, John F. Kennedy Family Service Center

Crystal Galvin serves as Director of Community Services at the John F. Kennedy Family Service Center in Charlestown, where she oversees programs focused on early childhood development, family engagement, and community well-being. She brings extensive experience in human services and advocacy, with a strong track record in program design, strategic planning, and equity-driven service delivery. Her prior roles at DotWell and Project Place reflect a career dedicated to advancing initiatives that strengthen families, expand opportunity, and address systemic barriers. Crystal holds a Master of Public Administration from Suffolk University and a BA in Community Planning from the University of Massachusetts Boston.





### **Mary Muse-Fisher (she/her/hers)**

Early Intervention Coordinator of Special Education, Boston Public Schools

Katie Muse-Fisher began her career in early childhood education in 2007, starting in early intervention, where she developed a passion for supporting young children and their families--a commitment that has defined her career. Today, she continues her work in the early childhood field, helping families as their young children transition into special education. Her dedication to public service and education was inspired by her mother's example. As a teenager, Katie watched her mother advocate for others in her roles as a judge, school committee member, and community advocate. In her free time, Katie enjoys spending time with her family, including her husband and three children. She also loves to listen to podcasts and go for walks in the Arnold Arboretum.



### **Emily O'Brien (she/her/hers)**

Senior Educator of School Readiness Resources and Programs, Boston Children's Museum

Emily O'Brien is the Senior Educator, School Readiness Resources and Programs at Boston Children's Museum. She has a master's degree from Lesley University with a concentration on the Complementary Approach of combining Montessori and Reggio Emilia inspired approaches. Her experience as a classroom teacher in public, private, and outdoor education settings fueled her passion for advocacy in early childhood education. Emily is an alum of Strategies For Children's Advocacy Network and she continues to advocate for accessible, high-quality early education experiences and playful learning. Through her work at Boston Children's Museum, she aims to create and support these early education experiences for children and families as they get ready for school. In her downtime, you'll find her exploring the mountains, sleeping under the stars, or balancing in a new yoga pose.



## **Maridel V. Perdomo (she/her/hers)**

Senior Director of Programs, Families First

Maridel Perdomo is originally from Caracas, Venezuela. She moved to Massachusetts almost 30 years ago to follow her dream to enhance educational opportunities for children. She is deeply passionate about strengthening the interrelationships between caregivers/parents and their children.

Maridel currently serves as the Senior Director of Programs at Families First, where she oversees parenting programming in Greater Boston and Western Massachusetts. Previously, she has been in educational leadership roles such as the Director of Extended Learning Programs at Schools for Children, Inc., Site Director of the YMCA at the Gardner Pilot Academy, Preschool Director at Pine Village, and Youth Program Director at Centro Latino.

Maridel is actively developing My EduCore, a series of modules that empowers educators and program leaders through high-quality professional development that fosters excellence in teaching and learning. Driven by a deep passion for growth, this program equips professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to create engaging, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate learning environments in early education. She also enjoys reading, visiting libraries, the outdoors, yoga and movement, being with friends, traveling, and trying new experiences.

She holds a B.A. in Psychology from Salem State University and a Master's in Public Administration from Framingham State University. With decades of experience as an educator, Maridel understands the critical importance of early childhood development and believes that collaboration with parents and caregivers is essential to raising resilient children and closing the academic gap.



## **Catherine Stoddard**

Instructional Coach/Telescope Networker, Boston Public Schools

Catherine Stoddard is a passionate educator dedicated to early childhood learning. With degrees from the University of Vermont and Boston University, she has spent her career creating supportive, equitable learning environments. Currently a district-level coach with Boston Public Schools, she designs professional development and coaching systems that strengthen teacher practice and student outcomes. Her experience includes mentoring new teachers, co-founding a professional learning community, and serving as an early childhood coach. Outside of work, Catherine loves spending time with her husband, son, and daughter.





### **Kiara T. Vann (she/her/hers)**

Education Assessor, SRI International

Kiara T. Vann is an early childhood researcher and policy professional with a background in neuroscience and a deep commitment to equity and systems change. She currently serves as an Education Assessor at SRI International, where she supports projects focused on early learning quality, including the implementation of the Pyramid Model and behavior support strategies. Her work is driven by a desire to ensure research is not just published but applied in ways that improve outcomes for children, families, and educators, particularly in under-resourced communities. Kiara brings an interdisciplinary lens to her work, rooted in developmental science, policy analysis, and community voice.



### **Emmanuelle Verdieu (she/her/hers)**

Policy Analyst, Neighborhood Villages

Emmanuelle Verdieu is a Policy Analyst at Neighborhood Villages. In her role, she supports Neighborhood Villages' state and national child care policy portfolio. Previously, she was a research fellow at the Christensen Institute, focusing on business model innovation in the child welfare system. She also worked as a staff attorney at the Health Law Advocates, Inc. and the Project on Predatory Student Lending helping children with unmet mental health needs and students who were taken advantage of by predatory for-profit colleges. She holds a BA in Crime and Justice Studies from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, and received her law degree from the J. Reuben Clark Law School.