

Webinar: “Incorporating Montessori Programs in State Quality Improvement Systems”
January 25, 2023
2-3:15 PM ET

Panelist Short Bios

Wendy Shenk-Evans

As the Executive Director at the Montessori Public Policy Initiative, Wendy works to expand access to Montessori education by advocating with state and federal policy makers, developing resources and strategies to support Montessori advocates, collaborating with leaders across the Montessori and early childhood community, and offering trainings to prepare Montessori educators to be effective advocates. As a veteran Montessori school administrator and Montessori parent, Wendy has seen the transformational impact that a Montessori education can have in the lives of children. Her passion for making this invaluable, evidence-based educational approach accessible and available to more children inspires her public policy work with the Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI). Wendy holds a B.S. in Psychology and an MDiv from Duke University.

Denise Monnier

Denise Monnier is the Advocacy Director at the Montessori Public Policy Initiative. She was a Montessori student, parent and school leader. She is a dedicated advocate, and advocacy coach, striving for public policy that supports universal access to Montessori education. More than 15 years of teaching in and leading Montessori schools made Denise deeply aware of the need for equity in and access to high quality education. Denise’s journey into education policy began when she founded an early childhood outreach program, securing local funding for families to access Montessori early childhood experiences. As a head of school and through her involvement in the Association of Illinois Montessori Schools where she currently serves as Executive Director, her advocacy efforts turned to statewide and national advocacy. Her work with MPPI is centered around supporting our state advocacy groups and equipping them with the tools and training they need to be effective advocates for children.

Donna Wade

Donna Wade is the Senior Program Director overseeing Early Childhood Investment Corporation’s (Michigan) early care and learning programs. She brings more than 25 years of experience in the early care and education field, specializing in advancing the quality of care for young children. Previously, she served as Director of Quality Services for a non-profit organization supporting the early care and learning field in Alaska. Her portfolio included managing statewide childcare initiatives, improvement systems, leading Alaska’s implementation of QRIS, hiring and supervising staff, and creating and maintaining budgets. Prior to working in Alaska, she worked in a range of roles including quality assessments, professional development, technical assistance, area leads, center director, family provider, was a frequent speaker at conferences, and sought-after ECE instructor in higher education. Her national affiliations include BUILD National QRIS, the National Association for the Education of the Young Child, the National Black Child Institute and the National Professional Development Center for Inclusion. She holds a M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education from West

Chester University of Pennsylvania and a B.A. in Organization Management from Immaculata University.

Tom Layman

Tom Layman is the QRIS Policy Director in the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. He began his career in Head Start and school-age child care and worked for 21 years as Executive Director of a not-for-profit child care center in Chicago. Subsequently, he served for eight years as Executive Director of the Chicago Metropolitan Association for Education of Young Children and ten years as Vice President for Program Development at Illinois Action for Children. In that role, he developed state Preschool for All / child care collaboration programs, a large Head Start program, Early Reading First and Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant projects. Layman earned a master's degree in Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy from National-Louis University and works to advance leadership development, continuous quality improvement and systems collaboration.

Rachael Brown-Kendall

Rachael Brown-Kendall works for the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families where she serves as the Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) Administrator. She is responsible for policy development and statewide implementation of Early Achievers, the state's QRIS. Rachael has been in the field of early learning for over twenty years and she has served in several roles from provider to coach to system partner. She is a collaborative leader who is driven to advance racial equity by learning from the richly diverse communities in her state and continuing to examine and modify the state's quality system.