



2016-17 National Family Engagement Fellows

Deidre Anderson is a tireless advocate for underserved minority and impoverished populations locally, regionally, and nationally, grounded in a belief that all families and children deserve access to a high quality education irrespective of their background. She is currently the Executive Director of United Inner City Services (UICS) in Kansas City, Missouri. UICS is a high quality early childhood program that despite being in one of the poorest zip codes in the city is having great success.

Working with families before their children enter kindergarten has afforded Deidre tremendous opportunity to develop skills that support families in being advocates for their child's academic success. She leads from the tenets of service, innovation, life-long learning, being committed to the community you serve, and recognition that all constituents add value. Prior to assuming her role at UICS, Deidre served as the Director of At Risk Programs and Grants for the Hickman Mills School District. Her background in public education, community development and child welfare lend a unique perspective to engaging families. "There is no single way of engaging families, no right or wrong perspective, it is merely imperative that families are recognized, embraced, included and welcomed into their child's educational process."

Garima Bhatt believes that one good teacher can change the entire life trajectory of a student, specifically underprivileged students in low-income communities. Garima is a TNTP Director in Baltimore City where she oversees all program staff in training, evaluating, and certifying hundreds of new teachers, along with managing the Baltimore City Teaching Residency (BCTR) contract with City Schools. Garima's teachers are in over 70 schools across the district, and she knows effective teachers don't just teach students, but also build strong relationships with students, their families, and the school community. She began her work with TNTP in 2013 managing the evaluation and certification of over 100 new teachers entering City Schools through BCTR, recognizing that increasing rigor in classrooms would move the needle forward.

With a passion for working directly with students, early in her career she taught third grade in Baltimore City. She later transitioned into a Site Director position at Thread where she managed 250+ mentors in working closely with high school students in the bottom quartile of their class, who were also struggling outside the classroom. She is keen to learn more about how to ensure all teachers are prioritizing strong family engagement in their work with kids. "I am interested in moving family engagement work forward because I know teachers across the city won't have the impact that is possible without a partnership with communities and families."

As a Social Worker, **Allison Buzard** has spent her career working with numerous systems: Juvenile Probation, Mental Health, Foster Care, and Public Schools. Passionate about people and with an arsenal of knowledge about and experience in diverse communities, Allison facilitates strength-based trainings

that shift individuals' abilities to effectively partner with individuals, families, and communities. "I believe so strongly that families are integral to the education of students."

She currently pioneers, designs, and manages a professional development program for Metro Nashville Public Schools teachers and administrators around the topics of welcoming schools, family engagement, equity and access, and community involvement through a program called Family Engagement University (FEU). FEU's mission is to enhance the skills, knowledge, and perspectives of school professionals to engage in effective partnerships with families and communities that support student success and the improvement of schools. "From the Fellowship, I hope to obtain rich resources for teacher professional development, explore more deeply a coaching model for family engagement, analyze and evaluate expansively my current practices with teacher capacity-building, and learn from other pioneers in this work."

Allison holds a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Asbury University and a Master of Social Work from Saint Louis University and is conversationally fluent in the Spanish language. In her spare time, Allison can be found with her nose in a good book or her hands in the dirt of her beloved veggie garden.

Reilly Pharo Carter serves as the Executive Director for Climb Higher Colorado, an education coalition focused on advancing the implementation of the Colorado Academic Standards and aligned statewide assessments. Prior to her current position, Reilly worked for the state's leading child research and advocacy organization, the Colorado Children's Campaign. There she focused on navigating state politics and policies as the organization's Government Affairs Director and later focused exclusively on education issues as the organization's Vice President of Education Initiatives. It was through that role that Reilly was able to develop her policy expertise focused on issues ranging from accountability and literacy to school finance.

Following the failure of a statewide ballot initiative that would have been the final element to modernizing the school finance formula and positioning Colorado as a national leader in advancing equity through financial supports, Reilly left the state to pursue a Master's degree at Brown University's Urban Education Policy program. The transition came as Reilly began to realize the limits of statewide policy, particularly when community is not a part of the policy development or implementation process. The driving interest behind Reilly's work is identifying strategies and opportunities to advance equity through education. Reilly recognizes that "meaningful and lasting impacts can only truly be accomplished when solutions are developed collaboratively and as a result of listening and learning from those interfacing directly with the system."

Yoni Geffen is the Manager of Family Empowerment and Academic Partnership in the Office of Family and Community Engagement for Denver Public Schools (DPS), Colorado's largest school district serving over 90,000 students and 140 languages. Through leading efforts such as the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project and Academic Standards Events, Yoni strives to educate, engage and empower parents, families, and communities. "It is imperative that we operate from the mindset that every parent and family cares about their children," says Yoni. "We as educators and advocates must understand that every family has essential knowledge or skills that we can learn from in order to better support the needs of that child, and working from this position of humility and curiosity opens up limitless possibility."

Having taught 4th, 5th, and 9th grade in Denver's schools, Yoni is acutely aware of the opportunities for real and impactful partnership between families and schools as well as the challenges to creating that bridge between the home and school learning environments. "The opportunity to dialogue with and learn from thought leaders from around the country with the express intent of elevating and deepening family and community engagement practice is truly inspiring. This Fellowship has the potential to create dramatic change for not just our students, families, educators, and leaders here in Denver but also across Colorado and throughout the country."

Dr. Maritza E. González is the current Executive Officer for Equity & Diversity at Metro Nashville Public Schools. She was born in El Salvador and came to the United States at the age of 6. She was the first in her family to graduate high school and to pursue higher education. Maritza attended the University of Maryland, College Park where she earned the College Park Scholar's Public Leadership Program Citation, a Bachelor of Science degree in General Business with an International Business specialization, a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Studies, a Master's degree in Education Leadership & Policy Studies, and her Ph.D. degree in Higher Education, Student Affairs, and International Education Policy.

Maritza has served as Diversity Officer working on Latino Affairs for Prince George's County Public Schools. She has been a research assistant in various projects related to ELLs across elementary schools in the Mid-Atlantic area, served as a Latino/a Parent Empowerment Liaison at a local middle school, coordinated a mentoring program for graduate students of color in STEM field, and was Education Assistant at the Library of Congress as well as at the Office of Presidential Libraries within the National Archives and Records Administration. She taught a course on Leadership in Family, School & Community Partnerships as an Adjunct Professor at Trinity University, and facilitated English Conversation classes for Spanish speaking adults at a faith based organization. Maritza was appointed by Governor O'Malley and served on the Universal Design for Learning Task force, and was selected as the recipient of the Carolina Rojas-Bahr Outstanding Latina/o Graduate Award for her commitment to the University of Maryland and the surrounding community. Additionally, she has co-lead two trips to rural communities in El Salvador through International Partners, a non-profit organization.

Natalie Lewis is on this planet to impact the education and safety of children, of this she is certain. Though her career pathway to becoming an educator was nontraditional, it now serves her well as she navigates the world of education reform.

As a MIT-trained Chemical Engineer and University of Texas MBA graduate, her knowledge and experience as a system-level thinker helps her to synthesize large amounts of information and understand the roles of the various stakeholders. Natalie's over 12 years of experience as a certified middle school teacher and a non-profit community partner with the school district gives her first-hand knowledge of the challenges teachers and administrators face while attempting to educate future first-generation college goers, some of who see more hardship in an evening than she has seen in a lifetime.

Natalie also brings firsthand experience in building a student-centered network to support his education and mental wellness as the foster parent for a 15-year old male who was significantly behind academically. Add to all that, Natalie currently serves as an elected board member for Kansas City Public Schools District. It is these experiences that feed her passion and commitment to fight for a public education system where ALL means ALL. "My interest in participating in moving family engagement work forward in my community is because for the children I serve, family engagement is

the critical piece to the education reform puzzle and we must overcome the assumptions, myths and hopelessness that currently surround this issue.”

As senior program officer at Rose Community Foundation, **Janet Lopez, Ph.D.** directs the Education program area, which seeks to eliminate the achievement gap and create equitable opportunities for all children to achieve academic success in the K-12 public school system. Her portfolio focuses on improving public education through systemic change and educator effectiveness. She has also been instrumental in partnering with local and national funders to create and direct the Denver Opportunity Youth Investment Initiative, the Colorado Education Organizing Fund, and the Climb Higher Colorado Coalition.

Janet’s career has focused on P-20 (preschool through graduate school) education. Prior to joining the Foundation, she served as the director of P-20 Education Initiatives at the University of Colorado Denver. During this time, she supported Denver Mayor Michael Hancock as the interim director of the Denver Education Compact. She has also served as the deputy director of former Colorado Governor Bill Ritter’s P-20 Education Coordinating Council. The Council made education policy recommendations to the Governor, which were then advanced from bills into law each legislative session.

With an emphasis on ensuring student access and success, she has also worked at the Daniels Fund, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the State Higher Education Executive Officers. Janet received a bachelor’s degree from Southwestern University, a master’s degree from the University of Colorado Boulder and a Doctor of Philosophy in Education from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her book, *Undocumented Students and the Policies of Wasted Potential*, focuses on the experiences of college-ready, undocumented high school students in North Carolina. She believes that “bolstering the role of parents in schools and positioning parents as partners to teachers in their children’s education is a critical component of overall academic student success.”

Janet’s community involvement has included serving as a board member of Colorado Public Radio’s Community Advisory Board, Colorado Youth for a Change, Denver Urban Gardens, Mental Health of America Colorado, and The Latina Initiative. She is a 2013 German Marshall Fund Marshall Memorial Fellow and a National Hispanic Institute Gen X Women of Distinction. She and her husband Doug are new parents to a curious and happy baby boy.

Dr. Landon Mascareñaz is the Executive Director of Strategy Development and Family Empowerment with the Office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) in Denver Public Schools. He leads a team responsible for the educating, engaging, and empowering Denver parents and community leaders to build great schools in every neighborhood. “The future of the education reform movement is to move beyond policy wins and towards deeper work with parents and families,” posits Landon. “We need to build the education system around profound, sustained partnership with communities that focus on academic success and civic empowerment.”

Before working at Denver Public Schools, Landon served as the Executive Director of Teach For America – New Mexico for five years, nearly tripling dollars raised and leading the organization in staff satisfaction. Along with others, he co-founded the Native Alliance Initiative, a multi-region effort within Teach For America to develop authentic partnerships with tribal communities, recruit more indigenous teachers, and develop culturally responsive instruction. While in graduate school, Landon worked in the

Tennessee Department of Education and supported the design and launch of the NACA Inspired Schools Network, the nation's first indigenous charter school network. He began his career teaching first grade on the Navajo Nation in Church Rock, New Mexico.

Landon completed his Doctorate of Education Leadership from Harvard's Graduate School of Education with a focus on politics, boundary-spanning leadership, and policy. Being born in California, raised in Colorado, schooled in Oregon and beginning his professional career in the four corners region leads Landon to consider the entire western United States his home. He enjoys spending time with his family and friends across the region, dynamic conversations, reading, bicycling and developing his meditation practice.

Patsy Roybal's passion for engaging families as academic partners surfaced from her own personal experiences as a daughter of a strong, resilient and resourceful single mother, and as a parent of three children. After receiving a teaching degree, Patsy chose to dedicate her career to empowering families as she immediately recognized the disconnect between school culture and familial culture and the huge information gap that existed in schools that served culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse families. Patsy knew that effective parent engagement was the key to closing the achievement gap and helping every child experience success in school and life.

Patsy has successfully implemented parent engagement structures in schools and has led family engagement efforts in the Denver Public Schools and at the state level in her role as Deputy Director for the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition. She is currently the Interim Colorado Director for the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project.

Patsy firmly believes that "We have a moral obligation to provide families with the information, training and support they need to help themselves and their children succeed."

Glennys Sánchez has devoted her professional career and personal journey to integrating the voices and participation of historically marginalized communities in different spaces ranging from nonprofit leadership, access to higher education, to community engagement research. In her adopted home of Lawrence, Massachusetts, Glennys has infused her roles with a commitment to justice and empowerment. "The most powerful partnerships flourish when people are empowered to define their realities to find solutions to their issues. In the world of family engagement, empowerment is the ultimate goal," says Glennys.

Glennys believes all families have the capacity to support students in realizing their potential. From that premise, she is excited to participate in the fellowship with a team member from the Lawrence Public Schools to take a closer look at the district's current family engagement practices and how the work of 1647 could be expanded and redefined in ways that are relevant and meaningful to Lawrence's families. As a parent in the Lawrence Public Schools, Glennys is personally invested in this unique district-nonprofit partnership.

Sherrell Savage is the Manager of Community Engagement at the KIPP Baltimore Public Charter School. Sherrell is also the parent of three students in Baltimore City Public Schools, is a native Baltimorean, and graduated from Frostburg State University. Sherrell is a professionally trained Community Organizer through the Industrial Areas Foundation and their local affiliate, BUILD, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development. In her work, she creates and fosters the development of blended teams of

leaders that consist of school Administrators, parents, teachers and students. These teams work together to tackle problems and change them into issues that they win on together ranging from issues that affect the KIPP community or all students city-wide. All of the leader development and training facilitated by Sherrell is rooted in the community organizing universals of BUILD and their parent organization, The Industrial Areas Foundation.

“It is my personal philosophy that true engagement with families goes beyond the task of simply making sure homework is done and projects are completed,” Sherrell says. “It requires building a reciprocal relationship where families believe that they are a true partner in their student’s education and where the school can view parents as a partner to advocate/organize on their behalf when necessary.”

Since 1998, **Molly Sehring** has devoted her career to public education in Nashville, TN. During her twelve years teaching English Learners in the ethnically and linguistically diverse schools of south Nashville and two years teaching abroad in Honduras and Colombia, she worked passionately to ensure access to quality educational opportunities for all students and families. “I had the honor to work with extremely talented and dedicated students from all over the world, and I realized supporting families in navigating the educational system was just as important as any classroom lesson,” says Sehring.

After transitioning to an administrative role as assistant principal in one of the most diverse high schools in Tennessee, Molly led an initiative to increase female and minority students in Information Technology pathways. She notes that “transformative leadership requires that we convene and collaborate with various stakeholders to achieve meaningful, sustainable change.” In her current role as MNPS Director of Family and Community Partnerships, Molly builds on this belief as she works in partnership with dozens of district and community partners to foster a culture of robust engagement throughout a network of 167 schools serving over 87,000 students.

Demetria Singleton is a professional educator and corporate trainer with over 20 years of experience in all aspects of education design and delivery including course development, content writing, instruction, program evaluation, and program management. Her career in education spans the full continuum of ages including early childhood education and professional development programs for adults.

Currently, Demetria is the Family and Community Engagement (FCE) Training and Development Specialist for Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools). In her current role, Demetria is responsible for developing, implementing and managing parent education programming for families and trainings for school-based staff around parent engagement through the Family Institute. Throughout the school year, the Family Institute provides structured learning opportunities and supports to families and school staff around parent and community engagement. About her work with City Schools, Demetria says, “ I am committed to seeking innovative opportunities for families to increase their knowledge of how to support their children’s success in school and in life.”

As assistant superintendent for Lawrence Public Schools, **Denise Snyder** has oversight for community and family engagement, communications, and the student information system. LPS is a public school district located in a gateway city north of Boston, serving 14,000 students PK to Grade 12, the vast majority of whom are first or second generation immigrants.

Denise is no stranger to serving diverse, urban populations. Prior to her role in Lawrence, she spent six years as the director of Welcome Services for the Boston Public Schools, where she led enrollment and transition services for 57,000 students and, prior to that, another six years leading the city's Countdown to Kindergarten initiative. Although she holds degrees in public administration and communications, her heart has led to her work with students and their families. "Since the time I enrolled my own daughter in daycare, I have been fascinated with how the policies and practices of educational systems support, or do not support, our children's ability to learn and grow. I've spent 17 years working toward improving conditions that optimize support for our families in equitable ways."

Awais Sufi leads a collaborative donor fund supporting community driven approaches to eliminate the achievement gap for young people in Kansas City's urban core. A graduate of the University of Texas School of Law, Awais left his law practice in Washington, DC over a decade ago to join clients seeking to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth. His roles have included serving as the Managing Director of Education for Employment and Chief Operating Officer of the International Youth Foundation. Through these roles, Awais, brings to the fellowship his experience supporting disadvantaged youth in over 50 countries. "Over and over again, and now in Kansas City, I have seen that diverse constituencies can be rallied around a common cause of helping young people succeed. And when you start showing families and schools what is possible when they partner together, even in small ways, there is no stopping the momentum."

Pastor Cassandra Wainright has devoted much of her career to sowing into the lives of young people. Before having children of her own, she nurtured and cared for her siblings, nieces and nephews. After the birth of her son, she opened a Christian childcare facility and has been engaged in the lives of youth ever since. Having experienced her own share of childhood struggles, Cassandra has made it her mission to make a difference in the lives of children. She seeks to not only assist with the safety and personal well-being of children, she desires to pool her efforts toward working to ensure the academic success of children in Kansas City. As President of the Concerned Clergy Coalition of Kansas City, she believes every child deserves the right to a quality education regardless of their race, culture or socio-economic background. "Every child should be able to read at their grade level or above and I want to work to ensure this can be made possible. The Fellowship is an excellent opportunity to connect with other people who care about the success of our young people."

As a college student working with the LEAP program in New Haven, **Ann Walsh** attended school conferences with her students' families. She quickly realized that teachers spoke more to her, a white college student, than to the actual parents of her students, children of color. That experience informed a 20-year career of working with teens, families, schools, and policymakers in Washington, DC and Boston. She has taught civics to high school students, supported the creation of a school readiness initiative for families, and served as Chief of Staff to the Boston City Council Education Committee Chair, all with the mission of elevating the voices of families from disenfranchised communities. Her own two children have attended Boston's district, charter, exam, and independent schools, providing her the opportunity to build relationships with and learn from families from across the city. She is now the co-founder and Chief of Family Engagement of 1647, a Boston-based non-profit in its third year that works with schools to build partnerships with families. "We are grateful to the Flamboyant Foundation

National Fellowship for this opportunity. I am excited to learn from peers from across the country as we plan our strategy with our school partners to empower more families in Massachusetts.”

Jennifer M. Wilmot knows every family in the urban core deserves a high-quality school regardless of their zip code. As the Kansas City liaison for the Office of Charter School Operations at the University of Missouri-Columbia, she collaborates with her portfolio schools to achieve exceptional educational outcomes through compliance, and building school and community relationships beyond the governance surface.

Working in underserved communities for most of her career, including her native Philadelphia and now Kansas City, Jennifer uses her upbringing as motivation. “Growing up poor in West Philadelphia, I learned firsthand there were some opportunities that were simply out of your reach and I quickly realized this was only further complicated by the education you received.”

In her professional and service roles, Jennifer wants to create better educational opportunities for low-performing and high-poverty schools. She believes “in giving one hope through empowerment; without both there can be no progress. I believe the Fellowship will help us create tools for families to make their own way—to find their own power and speak truth to it.”