Our Work—What, Why and How

What: The Ounce national policy team works to increase the capacity of early childhood advocates, Educare, state agency, and school district leaders (and other state and local leaders) to improve, implement, and expand the policies, investments, programs and services that create high-functioning, high-quality state and local cross-sector early childhood systems.

Why: Comprehensive early childhood systems that include an integrated continuum of policies, investments, programs and services within and across early learning, family engagement and health have a profound beneficial influence on young children and families in under-resourced communities.

How: The national policy team focuses on the intersection of policy and practice—providing consultation, technical assistance, and content expertise to state and local early childhood stakeholders. Additionally, we offer state and local leaders and advocates opportunities that foster authentic peer to peer learning to support best practice, alignment, and coordination across the early childhood field.

Our Team

Kristin Bernhard
Senior Vice President, Advocacy & Policy
kbernhard@theounce.org, 404.545.0577

Kristin leads the advocacy and policy strategy at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, where she oversees the national policy team and the Illinois policy team.

Prior to joining the Ounce, Kristin served as the Deputy Commissioner for System Reform at the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, where she led the implementation of the state's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, Quality Rating & Improvement System, Early Head Start Child Care Partnership Grant, Early Childhood Integrated Data System, and other initiatives to strengthen the state's early learning system. Her career has also included serving as the Education Policy Advisor to Governor Nathan Deal and time in the policy office of Governor Sonny Perdue. Kristin holds bachelor's degrees from the University of Georgia and a juris doctorate from Georgia State University's College of Law. She was selected as a 2018 Aspen Institute Ascend Fellow and is a graduate of the Governor Zell Miller Foundation Leadership Institute.
**Asia Canady**

**Policy Analyst**

acanady@theounce.org, 312.766.8102

Asia Canady is a policy analyst who supports the team's consultation, technical assistance, and peer learning opportunities by providing research and analysis on high quality early childhood policy and systems issues, tracking early childhood trends across states, and providing other needed supports for states.

Prior to her time at the Ounce, Asia served as an elementary school teacher for four years in New York City. Asia holds a master's degree in teaching from Fordham University. She also holds a master's degree in public policy with concentrations in leadership, nonprofit management and philanthropy from the University of Chicago Harris School. Asia received her Bachelor of Arts in urban and environmental policy from Occidental College in Los Angeles.

---

**Jessica Gillard**

**Senior Policy Manager**

jgillard@theounce.org, 517.488.4008

As a senior policy manager, Jessica provides leadership for all of the national policy team's peer learning activities and focuses on co-creation of peer learning and processes that foster sustainable improvement and innovation. She also provides policy and advocacy consultation and support to states.

With over 20 years of experience building capacity within organizations, communities, and systems to improve child and family outcomes, Jessica brings expertise in research, policy, and practice. Jessica's prior experiences include direct service as a teacher, principal, and school improvement coordinator; management of a regional child care resource and referral organization, and leadership of state and local early childhood system-building and policy development efforts. As Director of Early Learning/Innovation for Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation, she supported a statewide network of community collaboratives; managed policy, research, and programmatic issues; and led successful efforts to secure investment in and coordination of early learning programming and system development. Jessica also worked to expand access to high quality early care and education both as manager of Michigan's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge and in providing support to other states as a consultant with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Jessica earned a Bachelor of Arts in education from the University of Michigan, completed graduate studies in early education and social work at Wayne State University, and holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Michigan State University.
### ANNE GUNDERSON
**POLICY ANALYST**
agunderson@theounce.org, 312.453.1989

Anne Gunderson is a policy analyst who conducts policy research and analysis to support the national policy team in building relationships with internal and external stakeholders committed to investing in high-quality early learning programs and systems at the state and community levels.

Anne has engaged in systems building work in the nonprofit arena for five years. Before joining the Ounce, she worked with the Community Programs Accelerator at the University of Chicago as an organization consultant where she provided technical support to nonprofit leaders and launched a support network for nonprofits that served similar communities. She has also worked within veteran nonprofit organizations as a program manager, grant writer, and operations director, which has broadened her view on what systems are necessary for nonprofits and the communities they serve to thrive. Anne holds a Master’s Degree in Public Policy from the University of Chicago Harris School and Bachelor of Science in industrial and operations engineering from the University of Michigan.

### MINA HONG
**POLICY MANAGER**
mhong@theounce.org, 734.645.1478

Mina Hong is a policy manager who provides policy and advocacy consultation and support to states to strengthen and expand high-quality early childhood programs and services.

Previously, Mina was a Senior Policy Associate at Michigan’s Children, a policy advocacy organization focused on children’s issues from cradle to career. There, she led the organization’s early childhood advocacy work, playing a key role in state budget and policy wins including an expansion of the public preschool program, stronger family-focused child care subsidy policies, and Michigan’s first state appropriation for IDEA Part C for families affected by the Flint water crisis. Mina also has experience supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at the University of Michigan Division of Student Life and New Detroit, Inc., a racial justice organization; and has served as an adjunct professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work. Mina holds a master’s degree in social work from the University of Michigan School of Social Work and master’s degree in public policy from the University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.
| **CAROLINE KOHLER**  
POLICY ANALYST  
ckohler@theounce.org, 312.453.1937 |
|---|
| Caroline Kohler is a policy analyst who works primarily supporting the collective policy and advocacy work of the Educare Learning Network. Caroline also supports the national policy team on a wide variety of ongoing projects and consultation work to build and strengthen internal and external relationships at all levels to expand and strengthen high quality early care and learning.  
Prior to her time at the Ounce, Caroline was a fellow in the Governor of Illinois’ Office working on workforce development in the K-12 and higher education sector. Caroline also has experience in the classroom, serving as a first grade teacher for two years though Teach for America in the Oklahoma City Public schools. Caroline holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy with an emphasis in education policy from Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College of Education and a Bachelor of Arts in English from Boston College. |
| **ELE MCKEE**  
SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT  
emckee@theounce.org, 312.453.1826 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ele McKee is the senior administrative assistant who supports the members of the Ounce national policy team. Ele is responsible for executing all administrative tasks of the team, maintaining systems and infrastructure to support the team's work, as well as planning and supporting two annual conferences hosted by the team. Prior to joining the Ounce, Ele worked as a paralegal in real estate development. She holds a paralegal certificate and an associate's degree in business administration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JUDY REIDT-PARKER
DIRECTOR
jparker@theounce.org, 207.730-3424

Judy Reidt-Parker is Director of the national policy team. In this role, Judy provides leadership for the design and implementation of the state consultation for a network of state advocates, Educare leaders and other state and local leaders. Judy also represents the Ounce in policy and advocacy technical assistance partnerships with national organizations and provides policy expertise to other Ounce divisions to advance strategic plan goals and activities.

With 30 years of experience in the early childhood field, Judy previously worked as a consultant and policy analyst providing data analysis and content expertise to local, state and federal government, legislators, community leaders and philanthropists on early childhood systems issues. She also has experience in direct service leading a parent cooperative; designing and implementing after-school and intergenerational programming; and directing programs that provided Early Head Start, Head Start and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children program services. And, she has worked for many years as an advocate at the state and federal levels. Judy received her bachelor's degree in early childhood and her master's in leadership and policy in early care and education, both from Wheelock College.

RIO ROMERO-JURADO
POLICY MANAGER
rromerojurado@theounce.org, 469.230.3000

Rio Romero-Jurado is a policy manager who supports the team's consultation activities to states as well as supports the collective policy and advocacy work of the Educare Learning Network. Rio is also a part of the Partnership for Pre-K Improvement initiative that focuses on advancing a vision for high-quality preschool and continuous improvement with a community of state leaders.

Rio has worked in public policy in the areas of early childhood, public health, and human services. Rio was previously research and policy coordinator at the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, where she wrote about the importance of high-quality early education initiatives in the state. She also provided program support at the National Women's Law Center in Washington, DC. In 2012, Rio served as a mayoral fellow for the City of Chicago, studying issues of early education, human services programming and public education reform. Rio holds a master's degree from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and a Bachelor of Science in human development & family sciences with a certificate in social inequality, health, and policy from The University of Texas at Austin.
Margie Wallen has played numerous roles in advocating for public policies and investments that promote the healthy development of young children. In her current role, Margie oversees the vision and direction of the Ounce national policy team and serves as a primary strategist for the Ounce in supporting organizations and leaders in states outside of Illinois to advance policies and investments that benefit young children and families in under-resourced communities.

Margie has more than 30 years of experience in public policy, and has consulted on a variety of state initiatives to enhance access to high-quality early care and education, including designing a comprehensive early childhood professional development system and the blueprint for the Preschool for All program in Illinois. Through these efforts, Margie has contributed to policy wins that provided new funding and supports to state early childhood systems to sustain and continually improve high-quality programs. Margie is a member of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership's Advisory Board, and holds a master’s degree from the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration.