

## Revisiting the Promise of the Early Care and Education Workforce

March 31, 2026

Speaker Bios



[Dr. Ola J. Friday](#) is the inaugural Executive Director of The Early Educator Investment Collaborative (The Collaborative). In her role, Dr. Friday leads The Collaborative's efforts to help early educators achieve their full potential as professionals and to ensure that all children are prepared for success in school and life. As a child of immigrant educators, Dr. Friday was raised with an appreciation for the power of education to change lives. Initially drawn to the classroom, the urge to impact systemic issues compelled her to pursue work at the early childhood education policy implementation levels. Dr. Friday led the implementation of New York State's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and most recently she led statewide efforts to support the professional development and higher education access of over 65,000 educators in Massachusetts.

Dr. Friday holds a doctorate in Education Leadership from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a Master of Public Policy from the Goldman School at UC Berkeley, a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Tufts University, and a Regents diploma from Stuyvesant High School in her hometown of New York City.



In 2015, Sara Slaughter (she/her) was named Executive Director of the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation where she oversees investments designed to build equitable systems in K-12 education, early childhood education and youth development in five major urban areas. Prior to joining the Stone Foundation, she served for ten years at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation as the Director of the Education Program, and during her tenure, the Council on Foundations awarded the Education Program the 2008 Paul Ylvisaker Award for Public Policy Engagement.

Ms. Slaughter's focus on supporting equitable systems is also informed by her experience in the fields of law and government. She clerked for a federal district court judge following her graduation from law school and then served as a litigation associate at Kirkland & Ellis in Chicago. From 2004 until 2007, Ms. Slaughter also served as a policy advisor to former Indiana Governor, Evan Bayh. Ms. Slaughter is a member of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, and served as its chair for almost four years, guiding the organization through a two-year strategic planning process that resulted in hiring its first Executive Director. She has served in leadership roles in a variety of early childhood and education organizations, and currently is a member of the Education Funders Strategy Group, the Illinois Early Learning Council, and the Metropolitan Family Services Head Start Oversight Board.

Ms. Slaughter holds a bachelor's degree from Duke University and a Juris Doctorate from Indiana University Maurer School of Law — Bloomington. She resides in Chicago and is the proud mom of two graduates of Chicago Public Schools. When she isn't thinking about equitable systems, she enjoys spending time with her family, walking her two Labrador Retrievers, and riding horses.

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**Sherri Killins Stewart Ed.D** is the President/CEO of Leaders Making it Possible, Inc. Dr. Stewart works directly with state leaders to advance early childhood systems efforts in health, early learning, child safety and permanence, and family support, e.g., economic security, housing, and employment. She leads work to define and create intentional practices to tailor actions in early childhood systems, policies, programs, and leadership to prevent and reduce marginalization and increase opportunity. Her equity work includes co-leading the Equity Leaders Action Network (ELAN), a network of early childhood system leaders that aims to advance efforts to increase opportunity and remove barriers in policies, practices, and programs. Dr. Killins Stewart has worked at multiple levels in various states and communities to create tailored actions to benefit young children, their families, and communities.

Dr. Killins Stewart has worked as an advocate for children and families in various ways for more than 35 years, both as a direct care provider and in leadership roles on issues relating to children, families, and communities. Throughout her career, Dr. Killins Stewart has been committed to supporting families, both children and the adults who care for them as a nurse, through leadership and strategies in the workforce, housing, health, and education. Her efforts seek to increase access for families and communities to high-quality formal and informal opportunities and remove barriers in health, early care and education, employment, and other programs, strategies, and institutions, e.g., libraries and museums, to support family wellbeing. She is known for crossing organizational boundaries to create a child wellbeing and development lens in the work of informal organizations and within multiple state and local agencies, including education, public health, and housing.

Dr. Killins Stewart is the former Director of System Alignment and Integration and Co Director of State Services, Commissioner of Early Education and Care for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Vice President of Human Development and Operations at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and CEO of Empower New Haven. She was a mayoral candidate in New Haven, Connecticut.

Dr. Killins Stewart has served on various boards, including the New Haven Housing Authority, New Haven Regional Workforce Board, and Connecticut Trails Girl Scouts. She was appointed and formerly served on the Regional Advisory Committee under the U.S. Department of Education and the M.A. Commission on Postpartum Depression. She formerly served as a member and co-chair of the New Haven Early Childhood Council. She currently serves on the Boston Children's Museum Board of Advisors. She is presently the Vice Chair of NHChild. Several organizations have recognized Dr. Killins Stewart; examples include the Massachusetts Reading Association Legislative Award for her leadership in promoting early childhood literacy and the Horizons for Homeless Children Public Leadership Award. She recently received the West Haven Black Coalition Community Service Award.

Dr. Killins Stewart holds a nursing degree from the University of Pittsburgh, a Master of Administrative Science from Johns Hopkins University, and a Doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Sarasota. Dr. Killins Stewart resides with her husband in New Haven, Connecticut, and Guyton, Georgia. She is the mother of three adult daughters.