



MPPI 2020 Advocacy Conference

Friday, October 2

4:00-6:00 pm ET *Advocacy 101*

Saturday, October 3

2:00-2:15 ET Welcome

2:15-3:30 ET *Research to Inform your Advocacy* with [Dr. Angeline Lillard](#)

The benefits of Montessori education extend well into adulthood and helping policy makers understand both the short-term and long-term advantages of Montessori is an important tool for advocates. Hear about two recent studies that bring to light the lasting impact of Montessori education.

3:30-3:50 ET Break

3:50-4:35 ET *Race, Policy, and Power: Dismantling Structural Racism* with [Dr. Valaida Wise](#)

Racial inequity can be viewed as a long historical process that has, in many ways, been created, supported and framed by public policy. Join the discussion as we review the historical role race, power and policy has played in shaping American economic and social institutions. We will explore the connections between systems of racial oppression and discuss ways in which we can bring racial justice into all areas of our work thus effecting fundamental changes in our Montessori schools, our communities and ultimately our country.

4:35-5:00 ET Break

5:00-6:00 ET Happy Hour

Join MPPI staff and other attendees for networking, conversation and fun!

Sunday, October 4

2:00-3:00 ET *Keynote Address: Solidifying our Villages: Ensuring Educational Excellence through Racial Equity Lens* [Dr. Iheoma Iruka](#)

Poverty, race, culture, religion, or zip code should not determine a child's trajectory, opportunity, and eventual life success. Addressing the opportunity gaps and the education debt that leads to disparities through a racial equity lens must go beyond gap-gazing at third grade test scores and blaming children and families, and many times schools. A sole focus on disparities without consideration of the root causes will continue to ensure the permanency of this gap. This keynote will focus on understanding and addressing inequities and biases in systems and programs with a goal towards equitable opportunities. Participants will reflect on their roles in ensuring that marginalized children especially are

provided with equitable opportunities to meet their potential, especially during the early years.

3:00-3:20 ET Break

3:20-4:35 ET *Deepening our Bonds with Policy Makers*

[Dalia Avello](#), Oregon Montessori Association, [Diane Force](#), Pennsylvania Montessori Alliance, [Vyju Kadambi](#), United Montessori Schools of Indiana, [Martha Teien](#), Colorado Montessori Association

Relationship building is the key to success when it comes to lasting policy change, and we have many state advocacy organizations that have been putting their skills to practice over the last year. Join us for a panel exploring specific ways they have deepened those relationships and creatively used them to bring about positive change in their states.

4:35-4:55 ET Break

4:55-5:45 ET *Taking a Stand for Montessori: Preparing Effective Testimony* Wendy Shenk-Evans, MPPI Executive Director

Whether at a public hearing or in a legislative session, the time will come when offering compelling testimony will be a vital component of your advocacy work. Learn what to expect and how to maximize the effectiveness of your testimony.

5:45-6:00 ET Closing

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Theoma Iruka



Theoma U. Iruka, Ph.D., is a Research Professor in the Department of Public Policy and Director of the Early Childhood Health and Racial Equity program at FPG Child Development Institute at UNC-CH after her 3-plus years as Chief Research Innovation Officer at HighScope Educational Research Foundation. Dr. Iruka is engaged in projects and initiatives focused on how evidence-informed policies, systems, and practices in early education can support the optimal development and experiences of children from low-income and ethnic minority households, such as through family engagement and support, quality rating and improvement systems, and early care and education systems and programs. She has been engaged in addressing how best to ensure excellence for young diverse learners, especially Black children, such as through development of a classroom observation measure, examination of non-traditional pedagogical approaches, public policies, and publications geared towards early education practitioners and policymakers.

Dr. Iruka has served or serves on numerous national boards and committee, including the Brady Education Foundation and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine committees on Supporting Parents of Young Children, and Applying Neurobiological and Socio-behavioral Sciences from Prenatal through Early Childhood Development: A Health Equity Approach.

Dr. Iruka has a B.A. in psychology from Temple University, M.A. in psychology from Boston University, and Ph.D. in applied developmental psychology from the University of Miami, Florida. She is a mother of two children – 7 year-old Aalani and 3 year-old Ares – who attend a Montessori in North Carolina.

Angeline Lillard



Angeline Lillard, Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, is an elected Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Association for Psychological Science. She received her PhD in Psychology from Stanford University in 1991, and her research has been funded near-continuously since 1993 from federal and foundation sources. She is a recipient of the American Psychological Association's Boyd McCandless Award; her book, *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius* (Oxford University Press) received the Cognitive Development Society Book Award and is currently in its 3rd edition. Her primary research interests are Montessori education and children's play.

Dr. Valaida Wise



Dr. Valaida L. Wise (Val) is a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion consultant and a faculty member in the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md. An educator of more than 25 years, Val has been a Montessori teacher and Montessori teacher trainer as well as the Head of 3 independent schools. As a faculty member at Johns Hopkins University, her research efforts focus on the successful implementation of an equity lens in schools and in the workplace. Val received her Bachelor's degree in developmental psychology from Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York; a Masters of Art in Teaching in Early Childhood Education with a specialty in Montessori Education from Trinity College, Washington D.C., and earned a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the George Washington University. Dr. Wise also holds an AMS Primary Montessori certification. She is a sought after public speaker with articles published in a variety of national journals.

Dalia Avello



Dalia is the Executive Director of the Oregon Montessori Association where she has led projects in the areas of advocacy, professional development, inclusion and social justice. She is a trained psychologist, working for over 15 years in private, public and non-profit organizations in the areas of research and organizational development. She has dedicated the last 10 years of her career to the area of Infant and Early Childhood Development, with special focus on adversity and mental health. She has an MA in Education and International Development from UCL and an AMI primary diploma. Dalia shares her time between her work on behalf of the Montessori community, her own consulting company, and volunteering as a NICU baby cuddler in a local pediatric hospital.

Diane Force



Diane Force been the Head of School for the past 16 years at Bala House Montessori School in Bala Cynwyd, PA. She successfully spearheaded Bala House's first capital campaign and first capital improvement project from 2007-2009. Diane is the president and a founding member of the Pennsylvania Montessori Alliance and has been working on advocacy to have the state of Pennsylvania recognize the Montessori Credential as a pathway to state teacher licensure. She was a Board Member for the Montessori Teacher's Association of Pennsylvania (MTA-PA) from 2010- 2019. Diane served a two-year term on the Department of Human Services, OCDEL Division, Think Tank to revision the Keystone STARS QRIS program. She was successful in getting the

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to accept an accredited Montessori school, either from AMS or AMI, to be equivalent to a STAR 4 rating level.

Diane was a founding member and co-leader of a local Montessori Head's Group, and is a local and national speaker on education, diversified leadership, how to manage change, parental education, managing and running successful schools.

Vyju Kadambi



Vyju Kadambi is currently the Assistant Principal at Shining Stars Montessori Academy Public Charter School in Washington, DC. She has over 20 years of experience in Montessori schools as both a teacher and leader. Vyju has served on the United Montessori Schools of Indiana as the Vice President and has been leading the way in advocacy work in the state. In addition, she is an MPPI board member.

Martha Teien



Martha Teien is the Founding and Executive Director of Mountain Montessori in Avon, CO that opened in 2004. She has previously directed three other Montessori schools – one with a partner, one as an individual owner and one as a non-profit organization with a parent board. For over 20 years, Martha also continues as the lead guide in the classroom.

She has a BS in Biology and an Early Childhood Directorship from the State of Colorado. Her Montessori training was completed through Montessori Educational Programs International – MEPI (www.mepiforum.org) in 1995 for the 3-6 year old level. She obtained her Masters of Education in Montessori at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN in 2010. Martha recently completed a Fellowship with the University of Colorado in the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program. Martha serves as the President of the Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI) Board. Previously she served as the President of the Board of Directors for MEPI and Board President for the Colorado Montessori Association (CMA). She remains chairman of the Advocacy Committee for CMA.

Colorado Governor Jared Polis appointed Martha to the Licensing Advisory Committee in 2019 for a 3-year term. She has also been invited onto the Colorado Early Childhood Leadership Council subcommittee for Program Quality and Alignment and the subcommittee for Early Childhood Workforce Development.

In March 2020 she advocated for children as a member of the Emergency Child Care Placement team for the Vail Valley. Her work in this vein continued by representing Early Childhood with the Education committee of the 'Leading the Way Back' Steering Committee of the Vail Valley.

From July 2020 – December 2020 Martha will be working as an advisee to the Early Milestones Colorado team as they work on a project called, Activating Ideal Learning in the Public Sector. This is an effort that has been funded by the Trust for Learning. Martha has five of her own children ages 21-30 years old. She enjoys running and her Peloton bike!