



# Future of ECD Working Retreat

May 13-15, 2015 | Serenbe Inn, Chattahoochie Hills, Georgia

Joe Waters, Vice President, Institute for Child Success

[jwaters@instituteforchildsuccess.org](mailto:jwaters@instituteforchildsuccess.org)



INSTITUTE for CHILD SUCCESS



OPENFIELDS



## “We used to build programs. Now we have to build a community.”

Dr. Joan Lombardi | May 15, 2015 | Future of ECD Working Retreat

### Retreat Overview

Building on an ECD Design Blitz hosted in October 2014, the Institute for Child Success partnered with learning and leadership design firm, Openfields, to empower leaders in ECD with the creative space, perspective, tools, and relationships to imagine how the entire early childhood sector might look in 30 years. ICS invited twenty leaders from policy and provider groups, funders and for-profits, to meet together to imagine what the future could hold. The result was a remarkable two-day summit, in which a new generation of leaders considered how a small committed group, one that could think and act beyond their single organizations and beyond ECD, might forever change the way the United States serves its youngest children.

### Key Outcomes

“What if the tech sector and consulting firms came to ECD look for the most creative young talent instead of ECD always scrambling to find good people?” These are the kind of disruptive “what if?!” questions participants were challenged to ask.

Three key outcomes stand out:

#### **1. Cohort of Rising Leaders Catalyzed with a Vision for System Impact**

A cohort of next generation leaders were connected, inspired, and equipped with a powerful set of innovative tools to improve outcomes for their organizations and to collaborate on impacting the national ECD system now and 30 years from now.

#### **2. Clarity & Connection around the Pivotal Issues Shaping ECD**

Based on data they gathered, participants developed a sense of clarity and consensus around the top trends, issues, and influencers within ECD. Those issues were mapped into an infographic to help motivate and sustain a systems-level conversation.

#### **3. Clear Set of Leadership Development Priorities**

With systems impact in view, participants collectively identified the leadership development resources they needed to move themselves and their organizations forward. Results from that survey are included below and will inform future efforts.

### Next Steps for the Future of ECD

Along with the organizations represented, ICS sees the critical need to continue to develop creative, high-capacity leaders within ECD. ICS is committed to 1) helping launch a series of partner leadership programs (several of which were imagined at the retreat and noted below) and 2) designing and launching a national network for ECD leadership development. ICS is seeking partners and funding to make these efforts possible over the next 2-3 years.



## Retreat Execution

### Preparation

Key to accelerating trust within the group and making the most impact in just two days was the expected preparation work. Each participant was asked to spend approximately 3 hours in preparation for the event and 19 of the 22 attendees submitted their material ahead of time.

Participants were asked to:

1. **Collect the essential statistics** and research that define the challenge your organization is trying to solve within ECD
2. **Read and respond to “The Dawn of System Leadership”** by Senge, Hamilton, and Kania (*Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2015)
3. **Compose a story of inspired leadership** (your own story, or of someone who inspires you)
4. **Complete a survey about the state of ECD.** Questions include:
  - o What are the major trends shaping ECD today?
  - o What is working within ECD? Within the wider social sector? Within our culture?
  - o What isn't?
  - o Who are the major influencers / players shaping the debate?
5. **Draw a picture** that captures 3-5 of your leadership strengths.

### Agenda

The agenda was designed as a “working retreat” with time for guests to break off into conversation over meals and breaks.

#### Wednesday, May 13

- o Session 1: A Vision for ECD Leadership
- o Conversation with **Clay Johnson**, Founder of The Department of Better Technology and Senior Fellow at American Progress

#### Thursday, May 14

- o Session 2: Assessing the ECD System
- o Session 3: Mapping ECD – Challenges, Opportunities, and Evidence
- o Session 4: Leadership Vision – From a System Map to a System Leader

#### Friday, May 15

- o Session 5: Designing an ECD Leadership Network
- o Conversation with **Dr. Joan Lombardi**, “A New Generation of ECD Leadership”

### Location

The retreat was hosted at the Inn at Serenbe, a unique retreat center which is part of a progressive social, architectural, educational, and real estate movement highlighted in the *New York Times* articles “Outside Atlanta, A Utopia Rises” (2009) and “Farm to Table Living Takes Root” (2014), and most recently in a *Smithsonian Magazine* feature “How Farms Became the New Hot Suburb” (2015). Both as a reflective setting for conversation and as a evidence of visionary leadership, Serenbe was ideal.



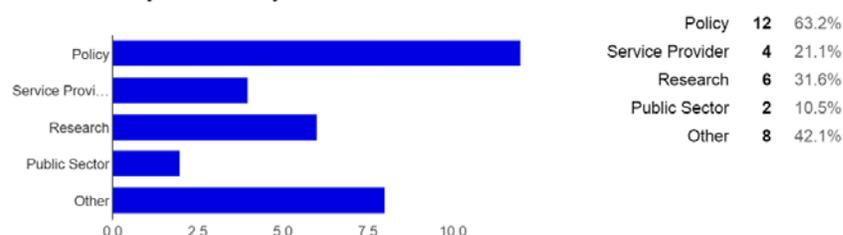
## Attendees

ICS received a remarkable response to the initial invitation, which, on short notice, yielded a highly diverse group of leaders from top organizations from around the country including LA, Chicago, DC, Salt Lake City, and New York. Dr. Joan Lombardi agreed to join the group at the end of the retreat to hear what participants had learned and to offer her encouragement.

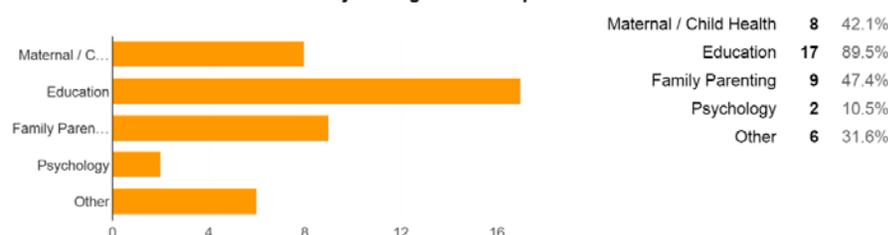
<b>Annette Ricchiazzi</b>	LAUP, Dir. of Advancement & Strategic Partnerships
<b>Bryan Boroughs</b>	ICS, General Counsel & Director of Legislative Affairs
<b>Carie Bires</b>	The Ounce, Fund Policy Manager - Illinois Policy Team
<b>Chris Ellis</b>	United Way of Salt Lake, Partnership Director - Early Learning Outcomes
<b>Christina Triantaphyllis</b>	Collaborative for Children, Chief Public Policy Officer
<b>Derek Lewis</b>	Greenville First Steps, Executive Director
<b>Dr. Joan Lombardi</b>	US Dept. of HHS, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Early Childhood
<b>Emily Carroll</b>	ICS, Research & Policy Counsel
<b>Jennifer Monson</b>	Teach for America, Manager, ECE,STEM, & Diverse Learner Initiatives
<b>Joe Waters</b>	Institute for Child Success, Vice President
<b>Johanna Anderson</b>	The Belk Foundation, Executive Director
<b>Kelly Etter</b>	The Policy Equity Group, Director of Early Childhood Equity Initiatives
<b>Kelly Lambrinatos</b>	VOCEL, Executive Director
<b>Larrisa Wilkinson</b>	University of DC-Early Childhood Lab School, Director
<b>Lexi Barrett</b>	America Forward at New Profit, Policy Director
<b>Lola Adedokun</b>	Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Director of Child Well-Being
<b>Megan Carolan</b>	ICS, Associate Director for Policy Research
<b>Melissa Dahlin</b>	Education Development Center, Research Associate
<b>Miriam Calderon</b>	BUILD Initiative, Specials Projects
<b>Sam Aigner-Treworgy</b>	The Ounce, National Policy Director
<b>Sara Mickelson</b>	Rhode Island Dept. of Education, Specialist in Early Learning
<b>Sunita Mohanty</b>	Lumosity, Director - Lumosity Kids
<b>Tobeka Green</b>	National Black Child Development Institute, President and CEO

### Attendees' Roles and Channels of Impact

**How do you describe your role?**



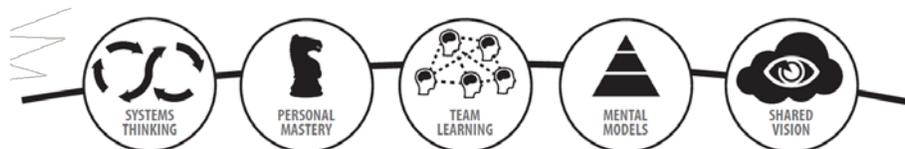
**In which channels within ECD does your organization operate?**





## Concepts & Activities

The complexity and bureaucracy of the national early childhood system discourages innovation. The goal of this retreat was to put the wider system in perspective and then to equip participants with innovative tools to help them begin to imagine new approaches.



5 Core Capacities of a Learning Organization from Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of a Learning Organization* (Currency/Doubleday, 2006). Graphic by Mike Wirth Art.

### Systems Leadership

Systems thinking helps leaders gain perspective on an integrated, interconnected process in order to find the most significant points of leverage. It forces individuals and groups to take responsibility for their role in a system – rather than assigning blame – and to look to for ways to change their basic methods of thinking and interacting. Systems thinking invites reflection on what is most important and on the underlying assumptions and stereotypes that drive our behavior. It also provides a model for inviting substantial dialogue around complex issues.

As Senge puts it in the SSIR article mentioned above:

“System leaders work to create the space where people living with the problem can come together to tell the truth, think more deeply about what is really happening, explore options beyond popular thinking, and search for higher leverage changes through progressive cycles of action and reflection and learning over time.”

### Visualization & Design Methodologies

Design thinking, prototyping, storyboarding, and other visualization techniques were employed to provide participants with a creative, collaborative method for understanding the ECD system and to more clearly communicate what is most important.



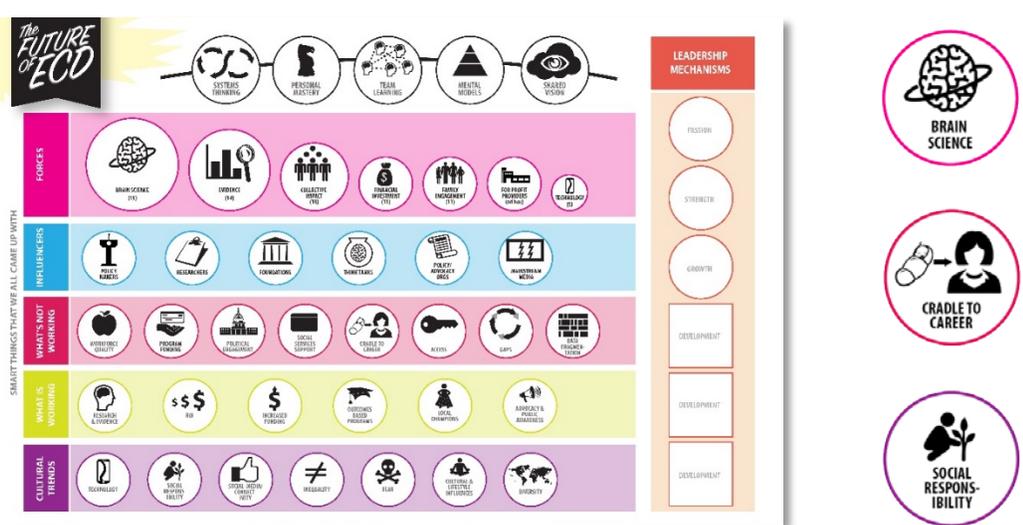


# Outcomes

As mentioned, ICS identified three main impacts from the retreat a beginning with **the initiation of a cohort of rising leaders with a vision for system impact**. One attendee has already initiated conversations about a DC-based ECD leadership meet-up. Another has invited retreat participants to LA to discuss partnerships. The other two key outcomes provide the basis for accelerating a systems leadership conversation on a wider scale.

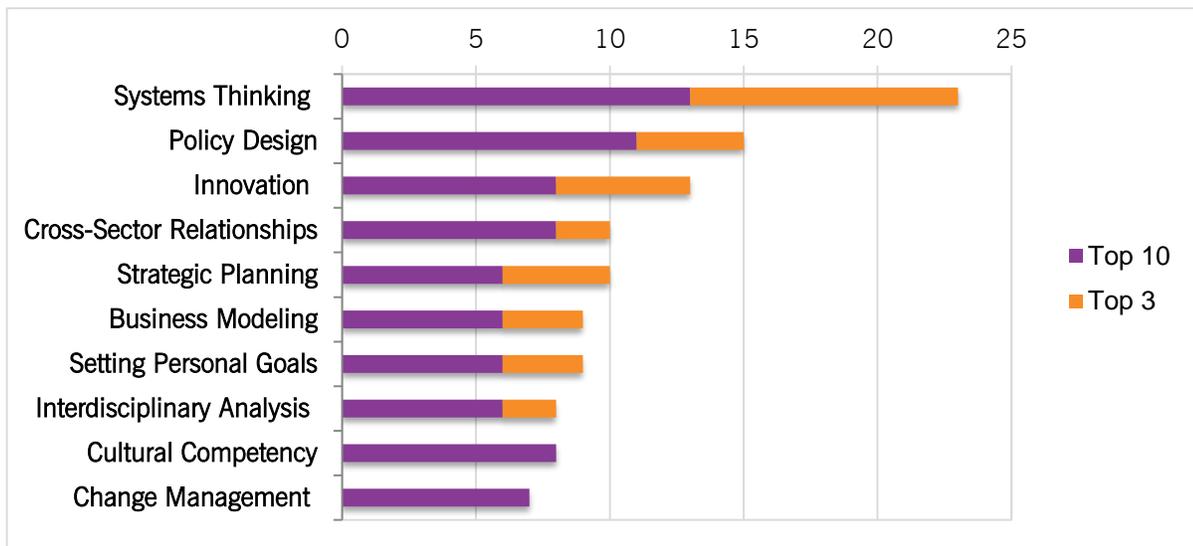
## Clarity & Connection around the Pivotal Issues Shaping ECD

Based on data collected in the prep work, the group discussed, curated, and presented the most significant forces, opportunities, challenges, and influencers in ECD and our wider culture. The result was an infographic that aided the group in keeping a system perspective in view.



## Clear Set of Leadership Development Priorities

Based on a leadership development survey conducted at the retreat, participants identified their top 10 and top 3 leadership development needs. These needs will be taken into consideration, and expanded upon, in future leadership development programs.





## Feedback from Participants

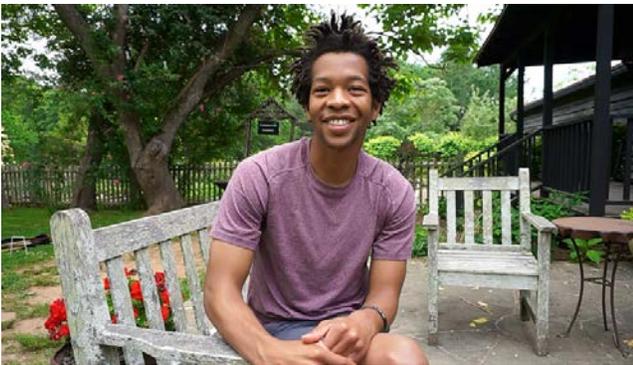
### Select Interviews



#### **Kelly Etter, The Policy Equity Group**

“Asking the ‘what if?’ questions was so powerful...”

“Everyone here is just as excited and passionate about this work as me, so from the moment we stepped on the shuttle at the airport, it was ‘Let’s talk about kids and how we can help families...’”



#### **Chris Ellis, United Way - Salt Lake**

“Systems level work is so important and our ability to build capacity and leadership around systems level thinking will be the key to the community goals and outcomes we are trying to impact.”

### Additional Comments

I wanted to say thank you again for the opportunity to attend this exciting conversation! I found myself **feeling energized** coming back from the conference about the ideas that came forth, and for being able to step outside my "practitioner bubble" to hear about **the incredible work that is being done around the country to further ECD.**

A huge thank you for inviting me to join the Future of ECD at Serenbe. It was an amazing opportunity and I **am so motivated to bring the experience, connections, and big-picture brainstorming back to my day-to-day work.** I look forward to staying in touch with members of this wonderful group, and I am so glad that you brought everyone together for this opportunity!

Thanks again for putting this retreat together and for inviting me. It's **the first time I've been inspired in quite a long time** and I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity. I even have our future of ECD graphic hanging in my cubicle! I'm looking forward to what's coming.

I took a little bit of Serenbe home with me but as I hit LA traffic this morning, it quickly slipped away. What has not faded is the **memory of the great conversation, creativity, thoughtfulness and ideas produced last week.** I am honored to have been a part of it.



## Challenge from Dr. Joan Lombardi

Dr. Lombardi joined the group for a Friday morning recap. She asked the group to help her better understand what her generation can do to support the next generation of leaders. For an hour the participants shared their need for coaching, mentoring, and collaborative work on the new issues. A fear was surfaced that, because of stereotypes, a technology divide, and past failures, there might be a break in leadership at this critical moment. There was a clear call to find time and space where the standing leaders and luminaries within ECD might share their knowledge and wisdom with this rising cohort.



---

## Next Steps

ICS is committed over the long-term to convening, supporting, and equipping the next generation of leadership in ECD and is seeking funding and partnership support to launch a series of initiatives over the next two years, 2015-2017.

### Possible Partner Leadership Programs Discussed at the Retreat

#### Leadership Transition Summit

As noted above, there was a clear call to host a working summit in which the standing generation of leaders within ECD might pass along wisdom, coaching, and mentoring in a setting where young and old could discuss some of the most difficult challenges facing the sector.

#### ECD Leaders of Color

Tobeka Green of the National Black Child Development Institute has proposed developing a similar retreat focused on resourcing and inspiring leaders of color within ECD.

#### Child Health Leadership Event

A subset of retreat participants have requested a leadership event focused on health outcomes.

### A National Network for ECD Leadership Development

As a means of raising a national conversation, of attracting the very best talent, of promoting the work of outstanding leaders and organizations, and ultimately inspiring the development a 30 year vision for shaping ECD, ICS is seeking funding and partnerships to design and launch a national ECD leadership network in 2016.