



CRISTINA H. PACIONE-ZAYAS, PhD
STATE SENATOR – 20TH DISTRICT

Education Roundtable Co-Chairs



Dr. Alberto López-Carrasquillo was born and raised in the U.S. Territory of Puerto Rico. He completed his undergraduate studies in secondary social studies and history education at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus. In Puerto Rico, he had the opportunity to teach social studies for several years in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. In 1996, he completed his master’s degree with a concentration in school supervision and administration at the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico. By the end of the 1990s, he decided to move to Illinois, where he also

taught social studies and Spanish at different levels, including the University of Illinois at Chicago and Purdue University at Calumet City in Indiana.

In 2006, he finished his Ph.D. at the Ohio State University in Teaching and Learning with a specialization in social studies education, curriculum integration, and teacher education. In 1994 he published one of the first articles documenting the Dominican students' experiences in Puerto Rico. This study has been cited in the first handbook of qualitative education in Puerto Rico as an example of a case study with immigrant students. His research is centered on the influences of social and institutional contexts on teachers' practice and the role of curriculum and teaching in building a democratic society in the face of the antidemocratic structures within society that promote social injustice and intolerance.

In 2007, he joined the Northeastern Illinois Faculty in the Teacher Education program. He has taught graduate and undergraduate courses in social studies methods and curriculum. In 2013 he was named associate dean and associate professor at Goodwin College Education. A leadership position that helped him serve the advancement of the college mission and help prepare future teachers, school principals, and school counselors. He has presented at national and international conferences in Cuba, Mexico, and Italy and published several peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. When he is not teaching and doing research, Dr. Lopez-Carrasquillo likes to be with family and friends, cooking, watching movies, and walking along the Lake Michigan shoreline.



Cecily Relucio is an accomplished professional educator with over two decades of professional experience working in, with, and outside public school systems in Chicago and across the Midwest. She believes that the challenges of fighting for a just and humane public education for all young people—especially those who have been most systemically disenfranchised—are immense, and require all stakeholders to collectively reimagine and rebuild.

Cecily began her career in education as an elementary classroom teacher at a neighborhood Chicago Public School in Gage Park. She has been a teacher professional developer, instructional coach, program leader, and university-based teacher educator at the University of Chicago, University of Illinois at Chicago and Northwestern University. She has served in leadership capacities in both teacher education and new teacher induction programming and policy, developing a specialized focus on anti-racist, anti-colonial, ethnic studies education.

Through her professional experiences, Cecily has developed a nuanced understanding of the educational system—the challenges as well as promising interventions—from a range of vantage points. She brings her lived experience of the barriers that educators of color face on a daily basis and difficult lessons learned about leadership, as well as clarity about how her experiences and knowledge as a Pinay (Filipina) woman are an asset and strength that she brings to her work. Cecily has spent the second half of her career focused on developing current and future Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) educators to become culturally and community responsive leaders who can lead transformative change within the educational system, by facilitating their understandings of the complex historical, social, political and economic conditions that profoundly impact day-to-day life in urban schools. Cecily currently serves as the Chicago Program Director at the Surge Institute, leading a cohort-based fellowship for Black and Latinx educational leaders in Chicago. She is a Partner and Principal Consultant at C. Marron Collective LLC, whose mission is to dismantle structural racism and the false hierarchy of human value, and to reimagine and rebuild a society in which all people can live into their fullest human potential.

Cecily's research and teaching as a doctoral student in Curriculum Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago was centered on using Critical Race Theory and woman of Color feminist theory and praxis to critique and transform urban teacher education and teacher professional development. She is committed to identifying interventions that de-center whiteness and center BIPOC values, beliefs and practices, by addressing structural barriers that interfere with the recruitment, preparation, retention, career trajectories, well-being and self-determination of BIPOC educators.

While her identity and experiences as an educator are central to who she is and how she hopes to make an impact upon the world, Cecily's most cherished, important and challenging role in life is mothering her two biracial daughters, Vanessa and Mia, ages 17 and 13. Cecily, her partner, and their blended family of 5 children live in Albany Park, and all of their children are current Chicago Public Schools and City Colleges of Chicago students.

Health Roundtable Co-Chairs



Aida Luz Maisonet Giachello, Ph.D is an educator and a writer and uses research to address health equity and social justice issues. She is a research professor at the Department of Preventive Medicine, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University (NU)-Chicago. Dr. Giachello has been advocating for programs, services and policies to reduce disparities and increase equity in diverse areas related to diverse health and human services issues, including prevention and mitigation strategies of COVID-19 on Hispanic/Latino communities and other vulnerable populations.

Dr. Giachello has a bachelor's degree from the University of Puerto Rico; a Master's degree and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. For her activism, research and policy work, she has been featured in local and

national/international English and Spanish TV, radio and printed media and has received over 50+ awards and recognitions, including being named as *One of 25 Most Influential Hispanic in American* by Times Magazine in 2005, and receiving the Health Equity Champion by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (2014), and being selected by the President of the University of Chicago (Dr Robert Zimmer) for the Diversity Leadership award (2014).

La **Dra. Geraldine Luna** es la Directora Médica del Departamento de Salud Pública de Chicago y



Directora de la Junta Ejecutiva en MOLA (Organización Médica para el Avance Latino). Lleva más de 10 años ejerciendo el cuidado médico con un enfoque en geriatría y en medicina interna. La Dra. Luna es graduada de la Universidad de Illinois en Chicago (UIC) y alumna en el programa Ejecutivo de Maestría en Administración Empresarial de la Universidad Northwestern. **Dr. Geraldine Luna** is a Medical Director at the Chicago Department of Public Health and Executive Board Director at MOLA (Medical Organization for Latino Advancement). She has been involved in healthcare for more than 10 years with a focus on geriatrics and internal medicine. Dr. Luna is a graduate of the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and a graduate student at Northwestern University's Executive Master of Business Administration.

Housing Roundtable Co-Chairs



Christian Diaz is housing director at Logan Square Neighborhood Association and Co-Chair of Elevated Chicago, a regional collaborative to advance equitable development near transit. Previously he served as executive director of Chicago Votes where he designed models of civic innovation with young people in Chicago Public Schools, City Colleges of Chicago and helped steer a coalition to pass Automatic Voter Registration in Illinois. He brings 9+ years of experience in nonprofit management, community engagement and racial equity policy & advocacy, having worked in coalitions to win driver's licenses for undocumented residents, to require data transparency on student arrests in publicly funded schools, and to ban 10-day suspensions of high school students in Illinois. Christian graduated with a B.A. in Global Studies at Warren Wilson College in 2012. In earlier lives, Christian volunteered at a home for children with disabilities in northern India, worked at a wolf sanctuary in rural New Mexico and taught English at a monastery in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Proud alumni of the Multicultural Leadership Academy with Latino Policy Forum.



At an early age, **Rubén David Feliciano** discovered his passion for helping others and what it meant to be a servant leader. These experiences were embedded in his journey coming to the United States from Puerto Rico and facing adversities related to language barriers, identity and poverty. Furthermore, witnessing how his mother, a single parent of five, struggled to care for her family was a driving element in building his character, compassion and dedication to others. His mother would often remind Rubén and his siblings to always maintain their faith in God, get an education and work hard to accomplish their dreams so that they would not endure the hardships that she had to go through. In her eyes: faith, perseverance, hard work, and education where the necessary ingredients to overcome any situation.

Rubén is a proud Aspirante, was selected as a Community Development Fellow in the Teresa and Hipolito Roldan Hispanic Housing Scholarship Program and is a former Research Assistant (RA) at the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP) at the University of Illinois College of Urban Planning and Public Administration (CUPPA). He has worked in the nonprofit sector around a myriad of issues ranging from affordable housing, education, mental health, education, substance use, policy advocacy and coalition building for more than fifteen years. Throughout his professional trajectory, Ruben has been involved in drafting legislation, advancing policy initiatives, engaged in community development and event planning. He is co-author of chapter 20: "Participatory GIS: The Humboldt/West Humboldt Park Community GIS Project, Chicago, USA" in the book entitled: Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place, published in 2007 by Routledge. He is also the co-author of the 2008 Latino Policy Forum report "Nuestro Hogar: Addressing the Foreclosure Crisis in the Latino Community" which he presented at the Federal Reserve Bank of

Chicago and successfully collaborated with an Illinois State Senator in drafting Senate Joint Resolution (SJR 030) before the Illinois General Assembly that established a working group as part of the Illinois State Housing Taskforce with the objective of examining strategies and making recommendations to proactively counteract the impact of the housing crisis on the people in the state of Illinois.

Ruben has served on several boards both locally and nationally. These include being part of the Board of Directors of the ASPIRA Association Inc. in Washington D.C. as well as the local chapter of ASPIRA Inc. of Illinois, a national Puerto Rican/Latino youth leadership development initiative whose mission is to empower youth through education. He also served on the Boards of the Near Northwest Neighborhood Network and the Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services Program Student Advisory Taskforce at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Ruben currently serves on the Board of Directors of Army of the Kind (AOTK), a Christian not-for-profit organization whose mission is to feed hungry children around the world physically, mentally, educationally and spiritually as it works towards the goal of stopping the cycle of poverty.

Ruben holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago with a major in Latin American & Latino Studies and minor in Political Science and a Master's Degree in Urban Planning and Policy with a concentration in Community Development.

Small Businesses & Workforce Co-Chairs



Jin Lee is a respected figure in Chicagoland's Asian American business community having served on numerous boards, which include past Chairman of the Secretary of State's Asian American Advisory Council, Member of State Comptroller's Advisory Collective and State Treasurer's Community Affairs Council. He is the president of JLEE & Associates, a consulting firm specializing in Government and Nonprofit Organizations. He was elected to the Maine Township District 207 School Board in the Spring of 2013 and re-elected in 2017. He was a member of Northeastern Illinois University's Board of Trustees (2005-2016), and served as Vice-Chair from 2008 to 2016.

Mr. Lee served as Director of Government Relations and Business Planning and Development for the Albany Park Community Center from 1997- 2021. In 2008, he received the President's Lifetime Call to Service Award. He was appointed as an honorary deputy Cook County Treasurer in 2019.

Organizations / Business Service served:

- * Commissioner at Economic Development Commission-City of Des Plaines (2010-2017)
- * Chairman- Asian American Advisory Council for Illinois Secretary of State (2011-2012)
- * Illinois State Treasurer's Community Affairs Council (2003-Present)
- * Illinois State Comptroller's Community Affairs Council (2003-Present)
- * Illinois Council of Minority Business Organizations (2001- Present)
- * Advisory Council for Hollywood-North Park Business Association of Chicago (2001-2005)
- * Illinois Minority Business Development Task Force. (1996-2001)
- * Director's Advisory Council for the Department of Revenue, City of Chicago (1996)
- * Member of Howard Street Redevelopment Committee (1996-1999)
- * Counselor for Asian-American SBA Development Center (1996- Present)

Dalia Aragon (pending)

Violence Prevention Roundtable Co-Chairs



April M. Rivera-Curtis has utilized her lived expertise to serve as a national consultant for the past 20 years where she worked on developing youth programs, youth councils, grants, board development, strategic planning, and training's for organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. She has also consulted on several conferences, sat on several panels, and has served as a keynote speaker. She has presented and trained both youth and adults in the child welfare community on various topics. She is a founding board member of Foster Care Alumni of America and served on the Child Welfare League of America Board of Directors for 12 years and is now a Senior Fellow for CWLA. She currently serves on the Puerto Rican Agenda Education Committee.

When she is not engaged in child welfare programs, she is volunteering her time in her community to help preserve families and reduce violence. April is on the Board of Directors for two Chicago Humboldt Park Community Organizations, she is on the board for Puerto Rican Police Association and the President and Coach for the Roberto Clemente Humboldt Park Little League Baseball.

April is a facilitator, mentor, educator, and helps develop curriculum and policies. She has also consulted on several conferences, sat on several panels, and has served as a keynote speaker. April is a founding board member of Foster Care Alumni of America, (Chair), a board member on the International Foster Care Organisation, and served on the CWLA Board of Directors for 12 years and is now a Senior Fellow for CWLA. She is currently on the Quality Improvement Center for Adoption/Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG) National Advisory Board. April works with the National Foster Youth and Alumni Policy Council via FCAA. Her work with her state leaders provided an opportunity for her to consult for the Director of DCFS in the Strategic Planning and Innovation Division in transforming the IL Child Welfare System. She helped integrate new normalcy policy, youth bill of rights, reunification strategies, joint youth, and alumni legislative shadow days, transformation summit, systems of care program pilots, permanency policy and procedures revisit, older youth in care support services, education and employment initiatives, stakeholder engagement, and Advisory board redevelopment.

April continues to mentor former youth in care outside of her professional duties. In 2002, she started the tradition to host Sunday dinners at her home and not only does her family participate, but it is open to alumni and their children to come and eat and enjoy each other's company.

April has provided intensive advocacy for ultra-high-risk Chicago Public Schools students City Wide. She had to identify, recruit, hire, train, monitor, and supervise all direct service professionals and administrative staff. She also developed data programs to monitor and manage outcomes for programs, manage budgets, and write grants. She partnered, developed, and served as liaison with Chicago Public Schools, Juvenile Courts/staff, Probation, Community Organizations, Chicago Police Department, and DCFS. She facilitated Child and Family Team meetings and developed Individualized Service Plans for each family and Peace Circles. She is a firm believer that it is not good enough to be trauma-informed but to practice the healing-centered approach when working with our communities.

Since sitting on her first board in 2000, she has been strategizing how to maximize the board, councils, workgroups, and staff productivity. April takes her passion to help an organization thrive by facilitating strategy sessions. She guides nonprofit leaders through a board development strategic planning decision-making process to improve services, demonstrate impact, shape conversation, secure funding, and inspire change in the lives of the people and communities they serve.

April Curtis, an alumna of the Illinois child welfare system. April is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. April, a diligent advocate, and leader, now works to help youth and families in her community solve problems, advocate for themselves, and improve their lives. April is passionate about ensuring kids like herself make it, they never forget their culture, they take advantage of education as it was a safe haven for her.

After working for Youth Advocate Program, Inc. for 11 years and serving our families in Chicago Public Schools, in prevention, juvenile justice, and violence reduction programs, workforce development, she took a position as Chief Strategy Officer at ASPIRA II where the Miguel Del Valle Youth Development Center is under her leadership.

Ric Estrada (pending)