



**Intro:** CCAoA invited Dr. Rebecca Gomez, Program Officer for the Education program at the Heising-Simons Foundation to answer some questions as we delve into the inspiring world of philanthropy and its transformative impact on child care. Heising-Simons Foundation is a beacon of hope and change for the field of early care and education as well as one of our esteemed funders. Join us as we uncover the stories, challenges, and triumphs behind Dr. Gomez’s experiences and the Foundation’s remarkable mission, offering a deeper insight into how support from contributors like you fuels real change for our nation’s children and families.

**Q:** Thank you, Rebecca, for agreeing to this interview with Child Care Aware of America. [We’ve included your bio here](#), but can you share a bit about what inspires you in your role at Heising-Simons and your own journey?

**A:** I started my career in early childhood as a teacher in a child care center, working with 4-year-olds. I had actually taken a job as a labor organizer after college but had worked with children for many years in many different educative/care capacities, and realized that’s what I really enjoyed doing. So I left that job (though I still feel organizing is critically important!) to work with kids. I was only paid \$8.00/hour, and I couldn’t support myself – I had student loans and rent to pay, and being paid poverty wages wasn’t sufficient to live. I went back to school for a degree in early childhood policy and began to work within state systems to try to change that. This work, which included working in early childhood departments in the State of New Hampshire and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and in DC for CCAoA, led to an interest in research on workforce systems and governance. I believed that these system elements, if done well, could be levers for change. In 2016, I was consulting and working with states on these issues when the Heising-Simons Foundation advertised a position as a Program Officer focused on ECE systems and policy advocacy. In particular, the Foundation’s Board was interested in increasing workforce compensation and learning outcomes for children – including children experiencing poverty and children of color. I saw this as an opportunity to support critically underfunded systems work, as well as to support burgeoning grassroots organizing movements within our field in an organization whose values are aligned with my own.

**Q:** Why does the Heising-Simons Foundation care about investing in child care? What’s your NorthStar?

**A:** Early education has been a priority of the Foundation since its inception. Our Board recognizes that there are significant developmental benefits to access to education and care in the early years, and important economic benefits to public support for access to affordable, high-quality education and care. The Education Program’s strategy is grounded in a “north star” goal of contributing to the elimination of the opportunity gap.



This means we invest in grantees that are working towards that goal who are focused on policy and systems, as well as those who are advancing research-based classroom teaching practices. A cross-cutting focus of the Program is workforce stability, recognizing that a well-qualified and appropriately compensated workforce is critical to supporting young children's learning and their family's success.

**Q:** How do you see Child Care Aware of America and CCR&Rs across the country playing a role in shaping the child care system?

**A:** My first policy job was overseeing the CCR&R system/contracts for the state of NH, so I have seen firsthand the critical role that R&Rs play in connecting families with care options that best meet their needs, building the supply of different types of care, and supporting communities to thrive. Additionally, CCR&Rs have long been a resource to educators and program owners/operators on improving quality, supporting them to engage meaningfully with families, and becoming advocates for themselves and others. My CCR&Rs worked on everything from building the supply of off-hour care, to supporting families with deployed parents/spouses, to advocating for increased compensation for educators. In many states CCR&Rs are a lynchpin in the early education ecosystem.

**Q:** What is a "win" or advancement for child care that excites you?

**A:** We came so very close to getting a historic entitlement for child care in this country via Build Back Better. Even though we did not succeed, I think it's important to recognize that advocates and organizers have, working in coalition, fundamentally changed the conversation about child care in this country. It is a wildly popular issue, and I think we will have opportunities to continue to push for universally available, affordable, high-quality child care – this push continues in states and communities, as well as at the federal level. In the interim, we must also celebrate the year-over-year increases in federal funding through the appropriations process that would not have been possible without grantees like CCAoA who keep this issue at the forefront education policy conversations. Finally, ARPA was a huge, and much-needed investment in the child care infrastructure of this country. Though we are now seeing the effects of that funding expiring, without the dedicated work of advocates and organizers pushing for this, the child care sector would have collapsed during the pandemic.

**Q:** What is something you want to ensure that partners and other funders know about the work Heising-Simons does in the philanthropy world?

**A:** Heising-Simons is committed to unlocking knowledge, opportunity, and possibilities in several issue areas outside of education, including climate and clean energy, domestic human rights, and science. Since its founding in 2007, the Foundation has awarded over



\$1 billion to these and related issues across the country. Guided by our values, the organization works closely with grantees and peer funders to ensure its grantmaking addresses critical gaps in these fields. In addition, the Foundation prioritizes hiring staff with lived experience and expertise in their fields of practice, and supporting efforts that center the voices of those most proximate to/affected by the issues we fund.