



Stronger Together: Building Foundations for Children and Families

EPEL Partners, Families and Community,

I am pleased to announce we are adding three new Executive Board Members: Bryon Furdge, Jennifer Godinez, and Jocelyn Vana. They bring valuable skills, diverse perspectives, and deep community experience that will complement our current EPEL board and strengthen our collective work.

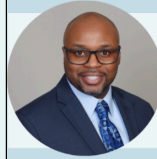
We are excited to welcome them in August for their first board meeting. As one of them shared with me in an email, "Let's get to work." This reflects the energy, commitment, and collaborative spirit they each bring to EPEL. Their leadership will be instrumental as we continue advancing opportunities for young children and families throughout our community.

Please join me in welcoming Bryon, Jennifer, and Jocelyn to the EPEL Executive Board.

Together We Can,

Executive Director
EPEL & Basics of Greater Elgin

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Meet Byron Furdge

Meaningful board engagement goes well beyond attending meetings—it means being an active, accountable partner in advancing the organization's mission through both leadership and action. It involves staying informed, contributing thoughtfully to discussions, and taking ownership of initiatives that drive measurable impact for the community.

Byron Furdge is a financial advisor and small business owner with experience in financial planning, entrepreneurship, and community engagement. He currently serves as a **Financial/Investment Services Advisor with Edward Jones**, where he leads a full-service advisory practice focused on retirement planning, wealth preservation, and long-term financial growth, along with community-based financial education and outreach.

Byron grew up in Chicago and now raises his family in Elgin while working in South Elgin, giving him a strong connection to communities that are part of the Greater Elgin area. He holds an MBA from Keller Graduate School of Management and is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and the National Black MBA Association.

He will help bring forward a strategic, growth-oriented perspective to the EPEL Board, with a focus on **financial stewardship, partnership development, and long-term sustainability**. Through his work with individuals, families, and community organizations, Byron understands the barriers many families face in achieving financial stability and opportunity.

Byron is excited to support EPEL's mission of ensuring equitable opportunities for children and families in the Greater Elgin Area and contributing his expertise in strategic planning, outreach, and resource development.



Meet Jennifer Godinez

I believe that the most important values and priorities I would bring to the EPEL board include: applying a systems thinking lens to the work of EPEL, understanding the importance of more access for the most underserved students in the area, and working collaboratively with others for strong leadership on the EPEL board of directors.

Jennifer Godinez is a **bilingual nonprofit executive, public policy leader, researcher, and trainer** with more than 20 years of experience advancing educational opportunity and equity for children, youth, and families. **A native of Elgin** who recently returned to the community, Jennifer has led impactful nonprofit organizations and **statewide advocacy efforts**, including serving as Executive Director of La Escuelita, an immigrant youth development organization, and Associate Executive Director of the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership.

Most recently, Jennifer served as Senior Director for Education and Training for federal strategies at Race Forward. Throughout her career, she has partnered with educators, families, policymakers, and community leaders to advance systems change, strengthen community engagement, and expand opportunities for underserved children and families. **Jennifer brings extensive nonprofit leadership, board governance, and education policy expertise to EPEL**, along with a collaborative, systems-level perspective and a deep commitment to building strong partnerships that ensure every young child and family has equitable opportunities to thrive.





Meet Jocelyn Vana

I believe effective board members have a responsibility to listen carefully to diverse perspectives, approach decisions with an open mind, and act in the best interests of the community and the organization's mission.

Jocelyn Vana is a finance and operations leader with more than 15 years of experience across the nonprofit, government, and transportation sectors. She currently serves as **Finance Procurement Liaison for the Illinois Tollway**, where she leads agency-wide vendor management, contract governance, and policy development initiatives. Jocelyn holds an MBA with honors from DePaul University's Kellstadt Graduate School of Business and a Bachelor of Science in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

As a **parent of two children under the age of five and a resident of Bartlett**, Jocelyn is passionate about ensuring families have access to the resources they need to help children thrive. **She brings both professional expertise and personal experience navigating early childhood resources, along with a strong commitment to community impact and high-quality early learning opportunities.**

Jocelyn looks forward to contributing her financial, operational, and family-centered perspective to EPEL's mission of supporting young children and their families.



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