



New Haven Free Public Library Board of Directors

The Honorable Mayor, Toni N. Harp, *ex-officio*



An abiding commitment to social justice steers New Haven Mayor Toni Harp's career in public service. Her drive for inclusiveness, equality, and integrity is the byproduct of resonant, across-the-board life experiences.

Toni was raised in Salt Lake City, the youngest of six children. Both parents worked to support the household; Toni's tireless work ethic is a function of lessons learned from her parents.

In the 1960s, Toni moved to the south side of Chicago to attend Roosevelt University. After she earned a degree in English she began working for the American Society of Planning Officials, launching a lifelong interest in urban planning and how cities work. From there, Toni was recruited to study at Yale's School of Architecture where she earned a Master's degree.

Toni's public service in elected office began first as a member of New Haven's Board of Aldermen, and then for 21 years as state Senator for Connecticut's 10th District. Toni is now the first woman ever to serve as Mayor of New Haven; she is presently serving her third term.

Throughout her distinguished career, Toni's policy priorities have never changed:

- Full access to affordable healthcare, regardless of ethnic, cultural, or economic differences.
- A responsive and effective public safety network working hand-in-hand with an equitable criminal justice system.
- Maximizing opportunity for each individual student through public education, with particular emphasis on early childhood learning and development of reading skills.
- Job creation and economic development so city residents can enjoy the rewards and responsibilities of productive engagement, and so a vibrant city can provide necessary services without putting an excessive burden on taxpayers.

Toni Harp has lived in New Haven for more than 40 years and was the Homeless Service Director at the Cornell Scott Hill Health Center for more than 20 years. She is the proud mother of three grown and accomplished children—Djana, Jamil, and Matthew. In 2017, Matthew's wife Keisha joined the family, and in 2018 Matthew and Keisha welcomed a son, Wendell.

PRESIDENT



Shana N. Schneider is the Founder of Fitstyle by Shana and the Fitstyle Your Life™ approach to fitness. She is passionate about helping people live and enjoy their life to the fullest by helping them find time for fitness in their everyday life. As an entrepreneur and author, Shana is a sought-after workshop and walk leader and has been featured in national and regional magazines, websites and fitness blogs.

Prior to starting her own company, Shana held several roles in the Yale University administration, including Deputy Director of the Yale Entrepreneurial Institute, Director of Communications & Economic Development for the Office of New Haven & State Affairs, and Director of Communications for the Office of International Affairs. She was also a Senior Program Manager at Technolutions.

She is an AFAA certified group fitness instructor and holds a B.A. from Yale University. She is the proud co-founder of a 10+ year old women's book club and can often be found walking her errands and listening to an audio book or podcast in her adopted hometown of New Haven.

VICE PRESIDENT



Dolores Garcia-Blocker, Ed.D., is the Director of College & Career Pathways for New Haven Public Schools and has more than 25 successful years in public education in urban and suburban settings with administrative experience at the elementary school, middle school, secondary school, and central office levels. Dr. Garcia-Blocker came to New Haven as Principal of the Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School in 2004 with previous experience in Irvington and Brooklyn, New York.

A leader with demonstrated success in inspiring and empowering others to advance the goals of the school district, Dr. Garcia-Blocker is the recipient of numerous honors and awards including the New England Counselors of Color Bridging Access to College Leadership Award, the National Council of Negro Women, Inc. Outstanding Educator Award and Yale University's Seton Elm Ivy Award. Dr. Garcia-Blocker has an Ed.D in Educational Administration from Teachers College, Columbia University, an M.S. in Health/Fitness Management, and a B.A. in Spanish from Spelman College. She participated in George Washington University's Teacher Certification Program in ESL and most recently in the University of Connecticut, Neag School of Education, Executive Leadership Program.

BOARD MEMBERS



Nancy Ahern is a native New Havener and longtime resident of Westville. With a deep appreciation for preserving New Haven history, she has served on the boards of the New Haven Preservation Trust (which had a role in saving the Ives Library), New Haven Colony Historical Society, and Fort Nathan Hale Restoration Projects. She is an active member of the First Church of Christ in New Haven (Center Church on-the-Green), which dates to the city's founding in 1638.

A graduate of Smith College, Nancy had planned to be a librarian. Instead her career path led her into journalism, working first for *The Denver Post* and then on to the copy desk of the *New Haven Register*, lastly as assistant managing editor.

Nancy has been a politician, serving on the New Haven Board of Aldermen for 12 years, six of them as minority leader. She has previously served on the New Haven Free Public Library Board of Directors, and is currently on the New Haven Republican Town Committee. For 15 years she has worked for a legislative committee during the General Assembly's regular session.



Lauren Anderson is an Associate Professor of Education at Connecticut College, where she landed after years teaching elementary school, coaching new teachers in city schools, and working at UCLA, Northwestern, and the University of Southern California. Lauren's college courses focus on the history and politics of education in the US, and also about the more practical aspects of being an excellent teacher in and for these times. Her scholarship is situated at the intersections of education policy, teacher education, and K-12 school and classroom practice.

Beyond the classroom, Lauren strives to support grassroots' efforts aimed at protecting public education from privatization and advancing educational justice. Prior to her current role, she served as an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education and as a Post Doctoral Fellow at the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University. Lauren holds a B.A. in Political Science from Yale University, an M.S.Ed. in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from Bank Street College, and a Ph.D. in Education from the University of California, Los Angeles.

She loves working on literacy initiatives with youth, elders and everyone in between. When she's not at work, you can usually find Lauren reading novels, eating spicy vegetarian food, dancing, hiking, or doing just about anything else outdoors.



Abie Lane Benitez, Ph.D., is Director of English Learners for the New Haven Public Schools. She earned a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Puerto Rico, a Master's in Education at University of Pittsburgh, an advanced degree in Counseling at Fairfield University and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Benitez's passion is to create opportunities for teachers to develop skills that will facilitate increased student ownership of the learning process. She believes that art and culture are stimulating ways to engage the brain while increasing learner's capacity in other academic areas. In addition, historically she has been placed in positions to allow access to the

mainstream curriculum for linguistically diverse students.

In collaboration with staff and parents, Dr. Benitez built a community of learners where students can grow their capacity to learn in a safe environment and their families are partners with educators in facilitating this experience. In 2002, the American Educational Research Association awarded her the Best Bilingual Education Dissertation Award. The same year, the government of Puerto Rico named Dr. Benitez Illustrious Woman of Puerto Rico. In addition to other awards, she is the recipient of the Elm-Ivy Award given by Yale University and the City of New Haven.



Sheila Jewell currently works at the U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Milford, Connecticut where she has been for the last 50 years, studying shellfish and working towards restoring the scallop population. This is just one of her passions. Ms. Jewell volunteers regularly, from helping seniors to visiting schools and encouraging African American women in particular to pursue careers in the sciences.

Dr. Jewell attended Xavier University for her Bachelor of Science degree, University of Connecticut for her masters, and University of Massachusetts for her Ph.D. She is committed through her teaching to pass along her love of learning and curiosity to younger prospective scientists.

Dr. Jewell is proud of her research and to have been in a Blacks in Science calendar, and a science textbook, as well as in the people section of Ebony Magazine. She received the National Technical Association A.T. Weathers Technical Achievement Award in 2012, was highlighted with other pioneering women scientists in the 2018 exhibit, entitled "Ladies First", prepared by the Yale Peabody Museum youth group, EVOLUTIONS, and has received numerous other awards for her community and scholarly work.



Claudia Merson is the Director of Public School Partnerships for Yale University. She has expressed her passionate concern for young people and their education through innovative programming, skillful coalition building, and strategic visioning for long-term sustainability. Claudia's on-point administrative style ensures that logistics never impede true creative process.

Claudia has established a broad array of sustainable programs and partnerships between Yale University and the New Haven Public Schools. She convened and co-chaired the first university-wide K-12 science outreach advisory committee that resulted in the creation of Pathways to Science, Yale's coordinated data-driven STEM outreach initiative. This coordinated infrastructure creates an environment for high-impact outreach programming by making it easier and less costly for members of the University community to participate, a critical feature which has supported the sustained growth of both the total number of programs and number of Yale faculty involved in these programs. More importantly, Pathways supports a trajectory of increasingly rigorous STEM experiences for thousands of pre-college public school students and allows for more seamless transitions across critical educational junctures.

Claudia came to Yale with twenty-one years of experience as a teacher, librarian, program and curriculum developer and has worked in schools in Manhattan, Bangladesh and Switzerland. She received a B.A. from Georgia State University and an M.Ed. from Harvard University.



The **Honorable Jeanette Morrison** is the current Alder of Ward 22 representing the Dixwell and Yale communities in New Haven. Her role as local representative is a natural extension of all of her personal and professional experiences which have all related to her passion to bring families together and provide opportunities for children.

A life-long New Havener, born and raised in Newhallville, she is a proud alumna of Hillhouse High School. She was Ms. Hillhouse and captain of the cheerleading Team. After Hillhouse, she took her talents to the historically black college Morgan State University where she received the Alice W. Parham Outstanding Service Award. She then moved on to do higher educational work at Boston University and Southern Connecticut State University in human services, social work and business respectively.

Upon entering the workforce, she served as a social worker at Yale New Haven Hospital and for the State of Connecticut. She taught as a professor at Central Connecticut State University and Gateway Community College, and a teacher/facilitator for the Parent Leadership Training Institute.

Beyond being an elected official, she has held roles in National Association of Black Social Workers, the Elm City Young Adult Club of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and the New Haven Board of Alders Black and Hispanic Caucus. She currently serves as the Aldermanic representative to the New Haven Free Public Library's Board of Directors.

All of which she fits in while being the proud mother of her daughter Jaydah and her son Jordan.