



Annemarie Valdez is the President of First Steps Kent, an independent nonprofit leading a community-wide effort to build a comprehensive early childhood system in Kent County, Michigan. Annemarie brings more than 20 years of experience as an advocate for children and families, including a focus on innovative funding strategies, a successful millage campaign, and next-generation leadership. Annemarie came to First Steps Kent from Illinois, where she led a statewide infant mortality prevention organization as CEO. With prior experience at Child's Hope, housed in UM-Dearborn's School of Education and the Youth Development Commission in Detroit. She has worked extensively on infant mortality prevention, early childhood program innovation such as the national program, Jumpstart and has served on dozens of community advisory councils and boards. Annemarie has been named twice to the Grand Rapids 200, which recognizes the most powerful business leaders in West Michigan and was awarded one of Grand Rapids' Most Influential Women in 2020 by the Grand Rapids Business Journal.