

Erikson Institute

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Erikson Institute Mourns Passing of Co-Founder Barbara Taylor Bowman

Legendary Early Childhood Educator and Advocate Impacted Generations

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS—November 5, 2024

Barbara Taylor Bowman, a pioneering force in early childhood education and co-founder of Erikson Institute, passed away on November 4, 2024, at the age of 96. Her death marks the loss of an extraordinary woman whose life and work shaped generations of educators, leaders and advocates dedicated to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive. The entire Erikson community—students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees and donors—grieves the passing of a visionary whose commitment to educational equity and social justice transformed the lives of countless children and families.

Barbara’s work was never just about education; it was about profound societal transformation. She was an unwavering champion for the rights of all children, advocating for systems of support that would allow children from disinvested communities to succeed and reach their full potential. Her leadership, her compassion, and her unshakeable belief in the inherent worth and potential of every child made her a beloved mentor, teacher, and colleague. Her influence is felt not just within the walls of Erikson, but across the entire field of early childhood education.

“Barbara Taylor Bowman was a true visionary,” said Erikson President Mariana Souto-Manning. “Her legacy is one of transformation, not only of Erikson but of the entire early childhood education landscape. She didn’t just shape an institution—she helped shape the very foundation of the field. Barbara’s commitment to justice, equity, and the well-being of all children will continue to animate our mission, inspire our work, and guide the field for generations to come.”

Born on the South Side of Chicago, Barbara’s early life was shaped by a segregated society, but also by the values of community and service instilled by her parents. These values would define her work and inspire her lifelong dedication to educational equity. After graduating from Sarah Lawrence College in

1950, she became a preschool teacher, which sparked a passion for early childhood education that would guide her career. Barbara went on to earn her master's degree in education from the University of Chicago in 1952, and by then, her commitment to making a difference for children had already taken root.

In 1966, Barbara co-founded Erikson Institute with Maria Piers, Lorraine Wallach and Irving Harris in response to the growing need for specialized training for teachers of children from under-resourced communities. Their vision was to create an institution that would equip educators with the skills and knowledge to give all children an equal opportunity to succeed. As the longest serving of the founders, Barbara shaped Erikson's direction and legacy, not just as an academic leader, but as a mentor, teacher and friend. The tradition of giving each Erikson graduate a yellow rose, which began in her own garden during graduation ceremonies, continues to this day as a symbol of her care, commitment, and high standards.

In her personal life, Barbara was a loving mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Together with her beloved husband, James E. Bowman, MD, she raised their daughter Valerie Jarrett in the values of service that shaped their own lives. Barbara's granddaughter Laura Jarrett, the mother of two young children, carries forth her family's commitment through her influential work as a television anchor.

Barbara Taylor Bowman leaves behind a legacy that will continue to inspire and guide the field of early childhood education. Her contributions will forever be woven into the fabric of Erikson and into the lives of the countless individuals whose work and lives she touched. As we mourn her loss, we also celebrate her remarkable life and the lasting impact she made in the world

For more information about Barbara Taylor Bowman and her contributions to early childhood education, please visit <https://www.erikson.edu/barbarabowmanmemorial/>.

Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and promotes leadership to serve the needs of children and families. We are a premier graduate school dedicated to child development. We provide direct services to our community's children and families. We are leaders in influencing early childhood policy. We work tirelessly every day so that all children can achieve optimal educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being. At Erikson Institute, we know that investing in the early years of children will last a lifetime. Learn more at www.erikson.edu

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