

## **Henrietta Zalkind to Retire After More Than Three Decades of Transformational Leadership at Down East Partnership for Children**

After more than 30 years of visionary leadership, Henrietta Zalkind, Executive Director of the Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC), has announced her retirement at the end of 2026. Zalkind has served in this role since the organization's founding in 1993 and has been instrumental in shaping DEPC into a nationally recognized leader in early childhood education and family support.

Henrietta's leadership has always been about people, ensuring children and families feel seen, supported, and connected to real opportunity," said Dr. Trent Mohrbutter, DEPC's Board Chairman. "For more than 30 years, she built not just programs, but trust across this community. We are deeply grateful for her steadfast leadership, her unwavering commitment to children, and her friendship. She leaves this partnership in great shape, and now our work is to carry that legacy forward."

From the very beginning, Zalkind helped build DEPC with a clear and unwavering mission: to ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy, supported, and ready to succeed in school and in life. Under her leadership, the organization has expanded its reach and impact across Nash and Edgecombe counties, diversifying funding streams, strengthening community partnerships, and developing innovative programs that serve children from birth through age eight.

One of Zalkind's most enduring contributions has been the creation of a strong network of resources including the creation of the partnership's Family Resource Center, transforming the former YWCA building in downtown Rocky Mount into a vibrant hub for families. Today, DEPC offers playgroups, classes, and support services that meet families where they are, including specialized programming for children with special needs.

Zalkind's philosophy that DEPC's work is "for every child" has guided a deeply collaborative approach, bringing together families, educators, businesses, faith leaders, and community partners to create lasting change. Her commitment to equity has helped bridge divides of race, class, culture, gender, and geography, making DEPC a model for community-driven impact.

Before coming to Rocky Mount, Zalkind built a career rooted in advocacy and service. Originally from Philadelphia, she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and a Juris Doctor from Northeastern School of Law in Boston. She went on to work as an attorney with Legal Services in Rhode Island, Vermont, and North Carolina, specializing in education law and representing low-income students and families to help them access the opportunities they deserved.

Her decades of service have not gone unrecognized. Zalkind was recently awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, North Carolina's highest civilian honor, in recognition of her lifetime of community leadership and impact. The award reflects not only her professional achievements, but also the deep respect she has earned across the state.

Reflecting on the honor, Zalkind emphasized the collective effort behind DEPC's success. "We have worked diligently to support families and children and have seen many positive changes over the past 30 years," she said. "It has taken all of us, our board, staff, families, and partners, to make this happen. Change happens when we work together."

As DEPC looks toward the future, the organization remains committed to building on the strong foundation Zalkind has established. While challenges such as shifts in federal funding and the ongoing child care crisis continue to impact families, DEPC is poised to meet those challenges with resilience, innovation, and community support.

The DEPC Board of Directors will begin a comprehensive search for the organization's next Executive Director. Additional details about the transition and search process will be shared on the DEPC website in the coming months.