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Previously, Laitinen held senior roles as a policy advisor on higher education at both the U.S. Department of Education and the White House. She also served as the Senior Program Officer for Postsecondary Policy and Finance at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Laitinen is a product of public higher education, holding a master's degree in public policy from the University of California, Berkeley, a bachelor's degree from New College of Florida, and an associate degree from Miami-Dade Community College.