

NEVADA

ADSD

Aging & Disability Services Division

Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Annual
Conference; October 7-10, 2025 Oregon
Convention Center Portland, OR

Sarah Horsman
Health Program Manager 3

Division of Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)



DEC Vision & Mission

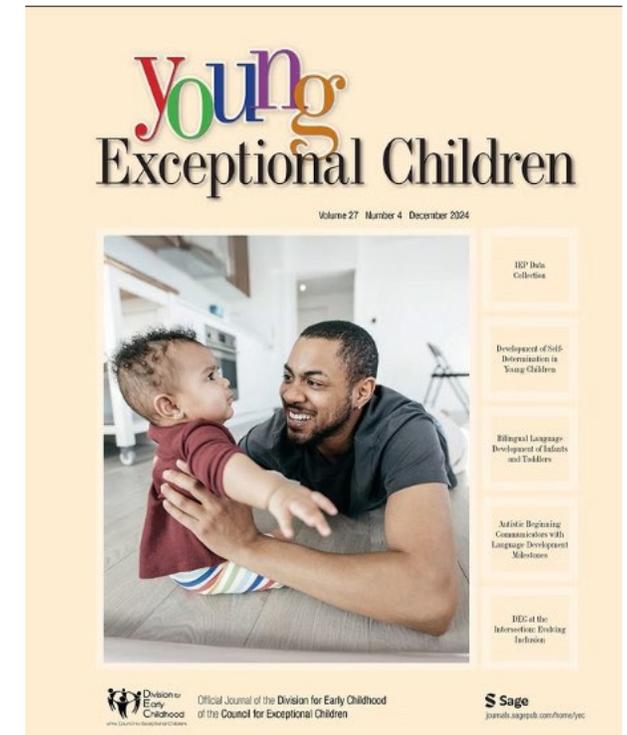
To cultivate a society where inclusion and belonging is a lived reality for young children and their families across a diverse diaspora that embraces, celebrates, and empowers them to be actively engaged in their communities.

It is the collective responsibility of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children to center the needs and realities of those who are most negatively impacted by systemic inequity. We advance and shape leadership, research, policy, and practice that supports, engages, and informs those who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children with or at risk for developmental delays and disabilities. DEC works to identify, interrogate, and dismantle systemic inequities so that young children and their families thrive.

[Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children](#)

DEC Publications

- Professional organization for ECSE and EI professionals
- Publishes the Journal of Early Intervention and Young Exceptional Children magazine
- Personnel standards, Position Statements, and White Papers on individual topics
- Made up on an executive board



Conference Format

Tuesday afternoon: Preconference sessions for extra charge, did not attend

Tuesday evening: Keynote speaker and Exhibit hall open

Wednesday all day: several sessions throughout the day for participants to choose from, lunch on your own, exhibit hall open (attended 6 sessions)

Thursday all day: several sessions throughout the day for participants to choose from, lunch on your own, exhibit hall open (attended 5 sessions)

Friday: several sessions throughout the day for participants to choose from, lunch on your own, exhibit hall closes in afternoon, participants begin traveling home (attended 3 sessions)

Individual sessions were 1 hr in length with 15 min between sessions for getting to next session, using restroom, networking, etc.

Tuesday Evening Keynote Speaker

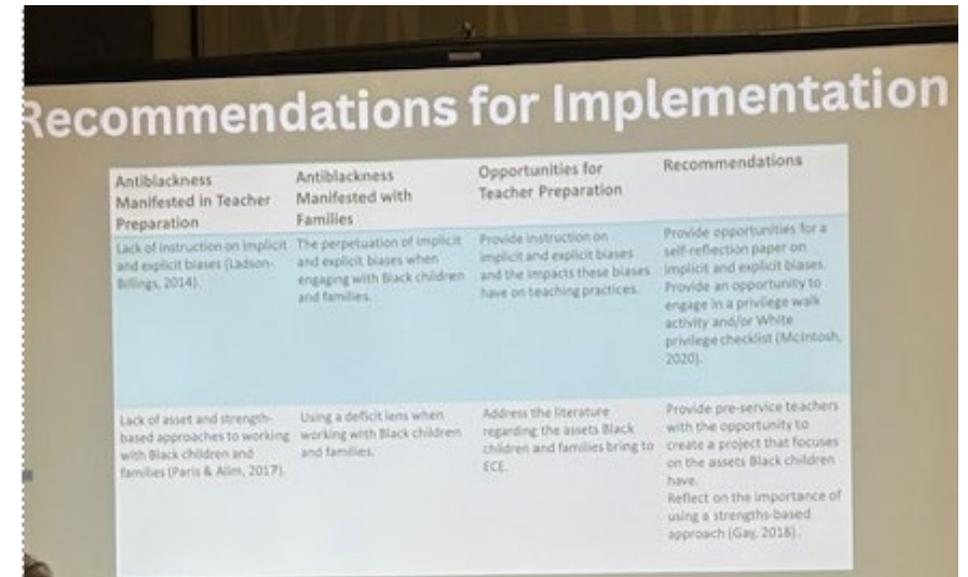
- Introduction to conference by DEC past and present board members (which includes Dr. Jenna Weglarz-Ward from UNLV; current ICC Chair)
- Keynote speaker: author and activist Karen Walrond
 - Published books: *The Lightmaker's Manifesto*, *Radiant Rebellion*, *In Defense of Dabbling: The Brilliance of Being a Total Amateur*
 - Key Points: Joy comes from intention, self-compassion is a non-negotiable, kindness is a power move
 - Definitions:
 - Ikigai – Japanese word for motivating force, sense of purpose, or reason for living
 - Activist – anyone led by their values, purposeful action, in the hope of making the world brighter for others
 - Intentional amateurism – returning to what you love even if you're bad at it; we run on cycles so we also need rest/recreation on cyclical regularity
 - Attributes of amateurism: curiosity, mindfulness, self-compassion, play, expansion of stretch/comfort zone, connection, wonder and awe

Session: Barriers to Family Engagement: Antiracism in Teacher Preparation

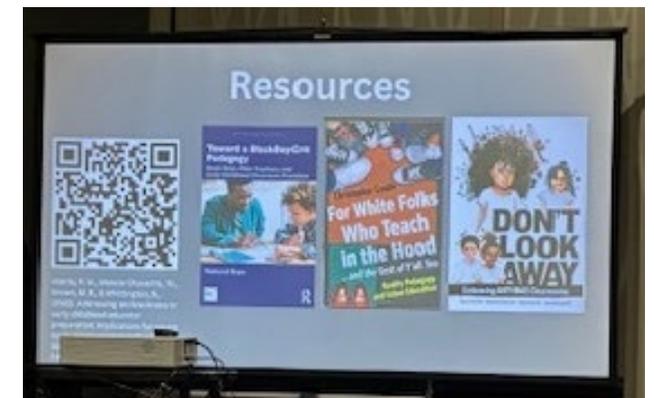
Pricella Morris, Assistant Professor UNLV

Monique Matute-Chavarria, Assistant Professor, New Mexico State University

- Exploring the historical experience of Black families in the education system, teacher input that leads to exclusionary output; Pre-k to prison pipeline due to over-discipline, teachers may perceive Black families from a deficit view; more field experience in culturally diverse communities is needed; education workforce is currently 80% White females
- How to dismantle anti-blackness: be intentional and implement culturally sustaining practices; model and practice flexibility and understanding, starts with relationships (would you speak of these students/families the same as if they were in the room?); explore BlackCrit (sources listed below) by seeking scholars or content by Black authors



Antiracism Manifested in Teacher Preparation	Antiracism Manifested with Families	Opportunities for Teacher Preparation	Recommendations
Lack of instruction on implicit and explicit biases (Ladson-Billings, 2014).	The perpetuation of implicit and explicit biases when engaging with Black children and families.	Provide instruction on implicit and explicit biases and the impacts these biases have on teaching practices.	Provide opportunities for a self-reflection paper on implicit and explicit biases. Provide an opportunity to engage in a privilege walk activity and/or White privilege checklist (McIntosh, 2020).
Lack of asset and strength-based approaches to working with Black children and families (Paris & Allen, 2017).	Using a deficit lens when working with Black children and families.	Address the literature regarding the assets Black children and families bring to ECE.	Provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to create a project that focuses on the assets Black children have. Reflect on the importance of using a strengths-based approach (Gay, 2018).



Session: Responding to Personnel Shortages in EI/ECSE

Paula Grubbs, TA Specialist, UNC Chapel Hill

Ted Burke, ECTA Consultant, Hawaii

- Presenters shared slides here: [DEC 2025 Responding to Personnel Shortages in EI and ECSE](#)
- Shortages are a local issue felt by families the most and research is limited in this area even though more professionals have left the workforce in the last five years than ever before; identified as key priority by most states
- Utilize OSEP's Attract/Prepare/Retain framework
- When systems act in silos, there are unintended consequences on each system (ex: Hawaii gave a 10K signing bonus to educators who fill special edu vacancies in schools, resulted in lower vacancies but workforce left EI to go to school system)
- ECTA search tool on strategies other states have used to share ideas: [ECTA Center: State Recruitment and Retention Strategies Search](#)

Session: Supporting Wellbeing and Reducing Burnout Among EI Service Coordinators

Kristopher Yeager, Assistant Professor California State University, Channel Islands

Elizabeth Beavers, Program Chair, University of Houston-Clear Lake

Dana Childress, Assistant Professor, Old Dominion

Beverley Argus-Calvo, Professor, University of Texas at El Paso

Recommendations for Early Intervention Leaders



Infant and toddler development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring everything back to the child Celebrate "major milestones" and "small wins"
Family-centered practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasize family understanding and empowerment Recognize partnership building takes time and effort
Leadership/teaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge service coordinators as leaders Facilitate communication and caring among teams
Coordination of services/transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize people over numbers Solicit staff recommendations for efficiency
Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for professional advancement Model self-care and organizational strategies

METHODS: Participants

40 Service Coordinators...



Characteristic	Percentage
Sex	97% Female 3% Male
Race/ethnicity	52% White 40% Hispanic 5% Black 3% Asian
Education	73% Bachelors 27% Master's
Experience	55% with five or fewer years 45% with six or more years
Roles	35% held leadership/administrative role
Burnt-out?	52.5% agree/strongly agree



...Across 20 EI Programs in Texas

METHODS: Interviews



Interview Structure	Interview Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoom Interviewer Pairs Semi-Structured 43.3 minutes Transcribed Verbatim Member Check 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Background and Typical Workday Energy and Exhaustion Success and Failure Optimism and Cynicism Role of Turnover and Shortages Recommendations



Factors Associated with Service Coordinator Burnout

Exhaustion	Failure	Detachment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure to meet deadlines while serving children and families Draining interactions with families and colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of time, training, or staffing to complete complex job duties Lack of support and recognition from colleagues or supervisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling set up to fail, devalued, or disrespected Emphasis on productivity over program mission



Factors Associated with Service Coordinator Well-Being

Energy	Success	Involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rewarding interactions with infants and toddlers Collaborative partnerships with families and colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional advancement from training and support Recognition from families and colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep bonds with children, families, and colleagues Mission-driven program culture and leadership

RESULTS: What were our Main findings?



Session: Understanding the Full Cost of Serving Young Children in EI and ECSE

Abby McCartney, Senior Director, Afton Partners [Afton Partners](#)

Theresa Hawley, Executive Director, Center for Early Learning Funding Equity at Northern Illinois University Chicago

- Presenters shared slides and reports here: [Presentation, IL Cost Model Report](#) and [Full Cost Model](#)
- Cost model was developed as a flexible tool that states/local programs can use based on real data, various assumptions/circumstances – should reflect actual practice not theory/expectation
- Creates transparency about gap between funding and costs
- Illinois pays providers on fee-for-service model, so for one hour of billable services there were two additional hours of work on average (billing, travel, documentation prep, etc); 36% of working time was billable
- Illinois used this cost model to bring to legislature and provide rate increases – not enough funding provided to cover gap in cost projected by this model, but incremental increases because of this model
- Similar cost model used for Wyoming center-based EI/ECSE services
- ***My takeaway: validated billable time we're seeing in NEIS and can be used as a reference for changing cost payment model***

Session: Creating With, Not For: Strategies for Meaningful Co-Creation Partnerships

Sanaa Sharrieff, Community Partnership Engagement, US Dept of Health & Human Services

Sherri Britt Williams, Director and Senior TA Specialist, UNC Chapel Hill

Sonia Sabater, ECTA

- [ECTA Center: Leadership](#) REAL Framework; Relevance Mapping, Engagement Levels, Adaptive Modalities, Looping Feedback and Iteration
- [ECTA Center: REAL Framework Practice Profile](#)
- *My takeaway: I shared this during ICC Strategic Planning and suggest it is considered during meetings with stakeholders, when developing workgroups, any creation activity*

Session: Examining Frequency in Early Intervention

M'Lisa Shelden, PT, Ph.D., Chair & Program Director Dept. of Physical Therapy Wichita State University

Jen James, PT, Ph.D., Assistant Teaching Professor, Wichita State University

- Why do we have to talk about dosage? Why does it feel overly subjective rather than formulaic?
- Are we providing what the child and family need or what we have available?
- How often are we referring to other services or back to the primary service provider? Is family coaching model or primary service model tied to frequency we are recommending?
- How do we determine the frequency of visits, length, breadth, delivery method, etc.?
- Exploring what happens in between visits and what caregiver follow through/practice is
- Researchers used the Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) and Natural Learning Environmental Practice (NLEP) to assess habit forming and measure practice of intervention between visits by caregivers

Session: Examining Frequencies in EI cont'd

- Tailor 'in between visits' support plans to family needs, values and priorities
- Adjust frequencies to meet family needs rather than our clinical opinions of what results in progress- consider 'bursts of service' then pulling back, looping in primary service provider and keeping family coaching at the forefront of intervention/curriculum design
- Adapt to caregiver progress
- What are your thoughts, experiences, successes, individual findings on frequency and caregiver follow through/practice?

Session: Sustaining Pyramid Model Implementation – Equity and Family Coaching

Erin Barton, Director of Research and Development, Pyramid Model Consortium

Overview of the Pyramid Model and Part C



- Tier 1: Universal promotion for all families (all infants and toddlers and their caregivers)
- Tier 2: Secondary prevention to address the needs of infants and toddlers at risk for social emotional challenges (including support for their caregivers)
- Tier 3: Intensive or tertiary intervention for infants and toddlers with persistent behavior challenges (including support for their caregivers)

Five Primary Principles for Using the Pyramid Model in Part C

Support practitioners in building collaborative partnerships with all families (and caregivers).

Use family coaching strategies to meet the needs of all caregivers.

Provide families and caregivers with knowledge and skills related to responsive caregiving and nurturing, responsive relationships.

Build families' and caregivers' confidence and competence in supporting their child's social emotional development.

Provide families and caregivers with tools and strategies that address and focus on the prevention of challenging behavior.

What are the Practices?



Equity-informed Fidelity

- Doing the right things well—with awareness, responsiveness, and partnership.
- Implementation fidelity must reflect how **families and practitioners experience the system**, not only whether practices are in place.

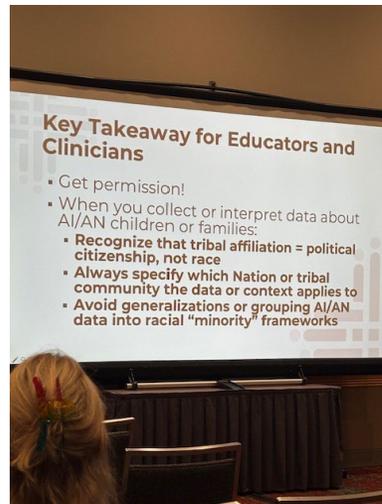
Session: Indigenous Data Sovereignty in EI Research

Joshua Allison-Burbank, Assistant Scientist/SLP, Johns Hopkins University, Albuquerque, NM

Jessica Meese, Research Coordinator, SLP, Johns Hopkins University, Albuquerque, NM

Lauren Cycyk, Associate Professor, University of Oregon

- EI supports children with developmental delays yet American Indian and Alaskan Native communities face inequities in service access and data governance. Discussion and literature on centering Tribal authority and Indigenous-led data practices



Session: Partnering with EI Families for Change: Advocacy in Action

Zareen Kamal, Policy Specialist, Start Early (Illinois EI) & Parent

Peter Eatherton, Staff Attorney, Equip for Equality

Stephanie Jimenez, Illinois Families for Early Intervention

- Presenters laid out legislative and administrative system improvements proposed to IL state legislature, including provider rate increases, bills that require hospitals to provide written info about EI to an children in the NICU, initiate a 30 day timeline, policy change to allow electronic filing of state complaints and due process
- What are system improvements Nevada is facing that our families can help advocate for change?

Equip for Equality



- Protection & Advocacy Organization for Illinois – Federally-Mandated: Every State Has One!
- Private/independent non-profit organization founded in 1985
- Statewide – 5 offices, 69 staff, 39 attorneys
- Special Education Clinic – 14 attorneys and legal fellows
- **Free legal help** for individuals with disabilities of all ages –
 - ✓ Self-advocacy advice and resources
 - ✓ Legal representation
 - ✓ Investigation and monitoring
 - ✓ Class action litigation
 - ✓ Trainings / Outreach

Special Ed Helpline:
1-866-KIDS-046
(1-866-543-7046)
EEFproj@equipforquality.org

Illinois Families for Early Intervention



Born out of Advocacy
It began in 2024 with a petition started by EI parents to the Governor for more EI funding – gathered over 2,700 signatures.

From petition to action
After the petition, six of us wanted to do more. December 2024, we launched Illinois Families for Early Intervention on social media to connect EI families and raise awareness of the EI crisis and families' rights.

Since then, we have grown our following, started a coalition of Families and allies committed to strengthening EI.

Our Focus

1. **Advocacy** – sustainable funding & policy
2. **Awareness & Education** – highlighting EI's importance and ensuring families know their rights and resources.
3. **Community & Support** – building networks & sharing resources.
4. **Family Voice** – EI shaped by families

Started by families, for families. This summer, we became a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit.

Illinois Families for Early Intervention
849 followers • 121 following

Anyone who cares about infants and toddlers with disabilities and delays can join this page!

Familias de Illinois para la Intervención Temprana: Esta página es para quienes apoyan a bebés y niños pequeños con discapacidades y retrasos. Siguenos!

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Our Impact

Petitions

- Launched a new petition to the Governor requesting more EI funding for Fiscal Year 2027. **Sign the new family-led petition! Scan the QR code:**



EI Family Circles

- Monthly virtual spaces for families.
- Guest Speakers: legislator, policy experts, attorney, children's hospital, community resources.
- Conversations on family rights, timelines, and how to submit complaints.

Elevating Families' Stories

- Family Voices Online - Facebook Lives with families sharing their EI stories, helping grow our coalition.

Building Partnerships

- We have ongoing meeting with the Bureau of Early Intervention Chief & staff to share family voices and concerns and hear state updates.
- Building alliances with organizations supporting EI families to strengthen advocacy and impact.

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Finding Community

Advocacy can feel like unknown territory, but finding community has made me a stronger advocate. There is power in my story and in the stories of others – and I encourage every family to find that community in their own state.

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AI for EI: Practical Strategies for Program Leaders

Cecilia Leger, Program Officer, EI/ECSE Programs, Johns Hopkins Univ Center for Tech in Educ

Mathieu Doucet, Chief Science Officer, Band Gap

- Overview of different types of AI, how other states are using in a compliant format; State of Nevada uses Microsoft Copilot, a text-based AI tool

AI understands by calculating, not by comprehending

Generative AI doesn't actually *understand* words like humans do — it **turns language into math**.

- Every word or piece of a word is represented as a **number** (a *token*).
- Those numbers are mapped in **multi-dimensional space**, where words with similar meanings are close together.
- The model looks at these numbers and predicts **what number (token)** should come next, based on billions of examples it has seen before.

Caveats

- Never enter personally identifiable information (PII) or confidential family details into publicly available AI tools.
- Always double-check product output — AI can sound confident but still be wrong.
- Treat AI output as a draft, not a decision. Human review is non-negotiable, especially in family-facing materials.
- Verify the sources. If you're using a RAG or uploaded documents, confirm it's pulling from the correct version.
- Watch for bias. AI may reflect bias in its training data or phrasing and review for cultural and linguistic sensitivity.
- Keep the human in the loop. Use AI to assist, not replace, professional judgment or family collaboration.
- Use private or institution-approved tools for any data linked to families, staff, or children.

Prompt Engineering: Coaching Your AI Intern

Consider this example from a marketing company:

Bad Prompt	→	"Analyze this dataset"
↓		
Good Prompt	→	"Analyze sales trends in this CSV"
↓		
Excellent Prompt	→	"You're a data scientist analyzing our quarterly sales data. Identify key revenue patterns, create visualizations, and highlight anomalies. Focus on customer segments and regional variations."



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Honoring the dignity of
every Nevadan.

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