

WELCOME TO THE

# THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA INSTITUTE for EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## *3rd Annual Early Childhood Summit*

APRIL 3RD, 4TH, 5TH, 2025

Rooted in Community,  
Connected in Purpose:  
Growing Through Stories



**THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA**  
**INSTITUTE for EARLY**  
**CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**  
RESEARCH • DEMONSTRATION • OUTREACH

Dear Summit Attendees,

Welcome to the Third Annual Early Childhood Summit. On behalf of the University of Montana's Institute for Early Childhood Education, I am honored to welcome you to this year's gathering. Whether you're joining us as a community leader, educator, family partner, policymaker, or advocate, your presence speaks to a shared commitment: cultivating a strong and connected early childhood system that uplifts every child and family in Montana.

Our 2025 theme—Rooted in Community, Connected in Purpose: Growing Through Stories—celebrates the powerful ways our individual and collective narratives shape who we are and how we serve. Stories anchor us. They illuminate the roots of our communities and reflect the deep care, resilience, and wisdom of those working every day to support young children. Stories also help us grow. They challenge assumptions, inspire innovation, and guide us toward more just and joyful futures.

Throughout this Summit, I invite you to listen deeply, share generously, and reflect often. Each conversation, session, and connection offers a chance to strengthen our collective purpose and to learn from the lived experiences that ground our work.

Thank you for being here. Your voice, your work, and your story matter—and together, we are growing something powerful.

Warmly,



Allison Wilson, PhD  
Associate Professor and Director  
Institute for Early Childhood Education  
Phyllis J. Washington College of Education



# DR. ROBERTA GOLINKOFF

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND WORKSHOP HOST

Dr. Roberta Golinkoff, Ph.D., Cornell University, is the Unidel H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Education at the University of Delaware. A member of the Departments of Psychological and Brain Sciences and Linguistics and Cognitive Science, she directs the Child's Play, Learning, and Development laboratory.



Dr. Golinkoff is known for her research on language development, the benefits of playful learning, the effects of media on children, and early spatial development. To identify children with language issues between 3 and 6 years of age when remediation is most effective, she created the QUILS: Quick Interactive Language Screener (in English and for Spanish-English bilinguals).

She lectures all over the world and is passionate about the dissemination of educational and developmental science for the betterment of children and families' lives. Golinkoff spends much effort informing the public about educational and developmental science through numerous blogs for many outlets including the Brookings Institution and the "Child and Family Blog." She co-founded the Learning Sciences Exchange (Jacobs Foundation), a program to unite scientists, journalists, policymakers, entertainment experts, and social entrepreneurs to share the science of early learning with the public. She serves on the boards of organizations such as Jumpstart and was an associate editor of *Child Development*.

Her latest project, Playful Learning Landscapes, brings physical installations to communities to engender the kind of caregiver-child interaction that promotes child well-being.

SCAN ME

<https://roberta-golinkoff.com/>



# POSTER DISPLAYS

THURSDAY APRIL 3RD

## RESEARCH

1. *A Mixed Methods Study of Montana Elementary Public School Administrators' Knowledge of a P-3 Frameworks and Developmentally Appropriate Practice*; Anna Puryear, Doctoral Fellow, UM Institute for Early Childhood Education
2. *Embedding an Early Numeracy Intervention in Project-Based Pre-Kindergarten and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms: Impacts on Children's Early Math Outcomes*; Eilis O'Herlihy, Doctoral Fellow, Anna Puryear, Doctoral Fellow, and Allison Wilson, PhD
3. *Uplifting Teacher Agency by Implementing Curriculum Change Through an Improvement Science Approach*; Allison Wilson, PhD and Anna Puryear, Doctoral Fellow
4. *Using Statistical Models to Assess Likert-Scale Data Related to Museum Programming for Young Children*; Natasha Gesker, Dr. Smidha Shetty, Dr. Kalli Decker, Taylor Young and Sophia Rodriguez, Montana State University (MSU)
5. *The Role of Museum-Based Early Learning: Caregivers' Perspectives and Experiences*; Taylor Young, Dr. Kalli Decker, Natasha Gesker and Sophia Rodriguez, MSU

## DEMONSTRATION

1. *Bozeman Reads Early Learning Center: Celebrating Literacy Through Collaboration*; Megan Roth, Bozeman Reads, and Christine Lux, PhD, Montana State University
2. *Fostering Collaboration Across Buildings*; Melissa Lynn, MCPS
3. *Melting Science Stereotypes with the Help of a Snowy Day*; David C. Owens, University of Montana and Regina P. McCurdy, Georgia Southern University
4. *Empowering Educators through Culturally Relevant Early Childhood Education: The Blackfeet Community College CDA Model*; Terra Brauhn and Blackfeet Community College Early Childhood Students
5. *Montana Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation Pilot in Child Care & Early Education Settings*; Amanda Eby, Account Manager, IECMH and Amber Rogers, RN, BSN, MSN, Senior Account Manager, Mountain Pacific
6. *Literacy in Motion: Growing Readers Through Story Walks*; Dr. Kate Brayko

Poster displays celebrate the recent work of UM ECE Institute faculty, student, and community catalysts through research, model demonstration, and community outreach.



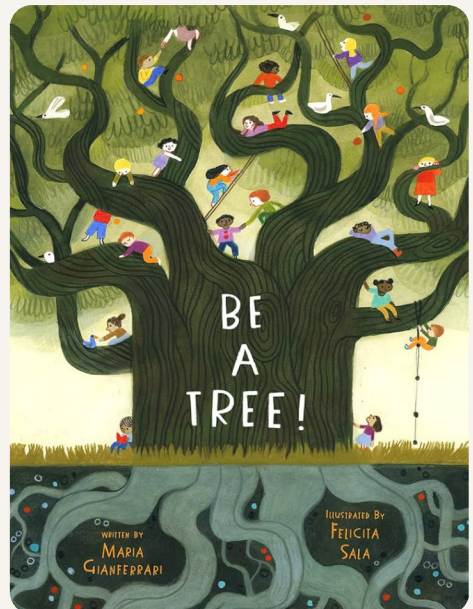
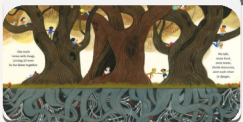
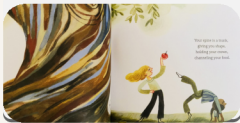
# POSTER DISPLAYS

THURSDAY APRIL 3RD

## OUTREACH

1. Montana Community Schools Coalition: Partnering for Student Success and Stronger Communities; *Montana Community Schools Coalition*
2. Certified CDA Pre-Apprenticeship; Rhiannon Shook, Department of Labor and Industry and Early Childhood Services Bureau, Early Childhood Project, [Childcaretraining.org](http://Childcaretraining.org)
3. Teaching Joy: A Nationwide Initiative to Nurture Playful Learning and Family Engagement; Joy Robertson, Teacher of Joy LLC
4. The Power of Reading with ROW; Lauren Markovich, ED, Reading Opens Your World
5. Head Start Early Intervention Roadshow: Reflections on an "Unconference" Approach to Community Engagement; Mark Douglass, DPHHS-ECFSD, Lucy Beltz, OPI, Jean Schroeder, Montana Empowerment Center
6. Missoula County Public School Jumpstart 2024; Doug Rossberg, MCPS
7. Collaboration, Communication, and Advocacy: Community Perspectives about Early Childhood Education; Presented on behalf of the Montana Early Learning Alliance
8. Igniting Joy Through the Arts: A Vision for Empowering Teachers, Engaging Learners, and Transforming Schools; Sienna Solberg, SPARK! Arts Ignite Learning

For a spark of inspiration rooted in our summit theme, don't miss the Be a Tree! Story Walk. Stroll through the pages and let the story inspire you to branch out and build new connections.



# 2025 AWARD WINNERS

THURSDAY APRIL 3RD

## RESEARCH

EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### Xanna Burg

Xanna Berg leads KIDS COUNT in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota, turning data into action on behalf of children and families. With a background in public health and a Master of Public Health in Epidemiology, Xanna's work spans research, evaluation, and policy. She partners across sectors to translate complex data into meaningful insights that shape better outcomes for young children.

## MODEL DEMONSTRATION

EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### Kristin Dahl Horejsi

Kristin Dahl Horejsi, Director of the Learning and Belonging (LAB) School at the University of Montana, has spent over 30 years advancing high-quality early childhood education. A UM alum and a leader in inclusive, play-based learning, Kristin has mentored countless pre-service teachers across Montana. Her work continues to shape the field through intentional practice, innovation, and deep commitment to children and families.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### Tori Sproles

Tori Sproles is a long-time early childhood leader in Montana, now serving as the Early Learning Director at Greater Gallatin United Way. With over a decade of outreach and advocacy experience, including her impactful leadership at Child Care Connections, Tori champions partnerships, policy, and programs that strengthen child care access and support families across Gallatin, Park, Madison, and Meagher counties. Her work continues to build a stronger early learning system for Montana's youngest children.



# 2025 AWARD WINNERS

THURSDAY APRIL 3RD

## HEALTHY START AWARD

EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

### **Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies: The Montana Coalition**

Since the 1980s, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies has been a trusted voice for Montana's youngest children and their families. With a focus on perinatal health, safety, and family well-being, HMHB uplifts vital resources and partnerships that support strong starts in life. From safe sleep to prenatal care to the innovative LIFTS resource finder, HMHB's work reflects deep collaboration, care, and commitment to early childhood across the state.

### ***Accepting on Behalf of the Team:***

*Stephanie Morton, MSW, Executive Director; Hollin Buck, Program Manager; and Chelsea Bellon, Native American Initiatives Program Manager*



**HMHB-MT**

## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD



### **Kelly Rosenleaf**

For over three decades, Kelly Rosenleaf led Child Care Resources with strategic vision, passion, and a deep commitment to quality child care. She ensured child care was represented in civic and policy conversations, launched Montana's first statewide online training platform for providers, and mentored countless professionals. Her leadership helped shape the early childhood system both locally and statewide.

### **Colette Getten**

As the founding Director of the Early Learning Center and Early Childhood Coordinator in Great Falls, Colette Getten has dedicated her career to building inclusive, joyful, and high-quality early learning experiences. Over the past 14 years, her leadership has shaped one of Montana's most successful Transitional Kindergarten models—preparing over 120 children each year for kindergarten and setting a powerful example for the state.



**PJW College of Education, ALI Auditorium**

# UM Institute for Early Childhood Education

## Growing Together: A Look Back and a Vision Forward

Join us Friday morning as we reflect on the milestones of the UM Institute for Early Childhood Education and share exciting new tools designed to support and inspire the early childhood field across Montana. This session will spotlight the launch of our new website, [ECEMontana.org](https://ECEMontana.org), a central hub for connection, collaboration, and professional learning. Explore two new resources during this unveiling:



## Reflect and Connect Learning Library

This bite-sized professional development series offers early childhood education teams flexible tools for meaningful growth. Each module includes a short article, reflection and goal-setting tools, and is aligned with NAEYC's professional standards. Filter by audience or topic and revisit often—new content is added regularly.

# Virtual Classroom Walkthrough Tool

Take a guided tour through real-world classroom spaces designed to support young learners. This tool offers insight into effective layouts, interactive learning zones, and inspiring setups to help educators and leaders optimize their own environments.



# FRIDAY APRIL 4TH

PJW College of Education, ALI Auditorium

## Raising Our Voices: Advocating for Early Childhood Education in *Make A Circle*

*Make A Circle* is a documentary that highlights the struggles and advocacy of early childhood educators working to transform how society values early education. The film follows three key figures: a union leader fighting for immigrant childcare workers; a provider supporting low-income families; and a preschool director striving to uplift her staff despite financial constraints. Through heartfelt storytelling, the documentary showcases the joys, challenges, and activism of these educators. After the screening, participants will engage in a discussion that localizes the themes of the film in order to reflect on solutions to strengthen and support the profession.

Scan for Supplemental Resources  
and Discussion Guide





# FRIDAY APRIL 4TH

PJW College of Education ALI Auditorium

## Montana Voices in Early Childhood: Connecting Local Stories to *Make A Circle*

Building on themes of *Make A Circle*, this follow up session brings together key stakeholders and organizations from across Montana to spotlight the stories of local early childhood educators, advocates and community leaders.

### Session Host



Grace Decker

Montana Advocates for Children

### Session Host



Tori Sproles

Greater Gallatin United Way

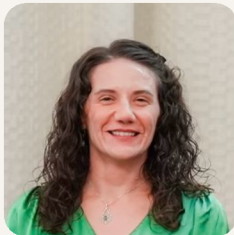
### Spotlight Story



Ashley Pena-Larsen

Rocky Head Start Director,  
Montana Head Start  
Association Chair

### Spotlight Story



BriAnne Moline

Professional Development Specialist  
National Association for  
Family Child Care

### Spotlight Story



Sophia Helmer

Owner, Director, Lead Teacher  
The Magic Forest Childcare and  
Preschool



# FRIDAY APRIL 4TH

PJW College of Education ALI Auditorium

12:45 - 2:00 PM

## **Strengthening the Montana Early Learning Standards: Advancing Quality and Impact**

*In this interactive session, participants will engage with the ongoing efforts to refine and enhance the Montana Early Learning Standards, ensuring they remain developmentally appropriate, align with national benchmarks and are supported by practical resources and professional learning opportunities. Presenters will offer insights into the collaborative partnerships guiding this work.*

**Session Host**



Jill Christensen  
DPHHS Early Childhood Services  
Bureau Chief

***A special thank you to the MELS Leadership Team:*** Deanna Mydland, Dr. Allison Wilson, Dr. Christine Lux, Terri Barclay, and Deb Huestis

***Additionally, we are grateful for our Federal TA partners:*** Holly Wilcher and Michelle Golus

2:10 - 4:00 PM

**Session Host**



Dr. Rob Watson  
Executive Director  
School Administrators of Montana

## **Spotlight on HB352 Implementation: Stories from Montana Communities**

*It's been a dynamic year across Montana as school districts have implemented HB352 early literacy classrooms statewide. Join us as five community teams share their experiences—spotlighting powerful partnerships, diverse implementation strategies, and efforts to strengthen alignment from PreK through Grade 3. Highlights include survey findings, practical tools, and lessons learned along the way.*

***A special thank you to Spotlight Story Teams:*** Caitlin Jensen with Zero to Five Montana, Barbara Frank & Melissa Lynn with Missoula County Public Schools, Jackie Ronning & Kimberly Evans with The Office of Public Instruction, Colette Getten with Great Falls Public Schools, Anna Puryear with the UM Institute for Early Childhood Education, and Megan Roth & Christine Lux with Bozeman Reads.

**FRIDAY APRIL 4TH**  
PJW COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ALI AUDITORIUM



**EXPANDING POSSIBILITIES**

# ECPBL25

**11:00 AM - 12:45 PM**

**Early Childhood Project Based Learning:  
Pre-Conference Gathering**

**1:00 - 1:35 PM**

**Early Childhood PBL Conference:  
Welcome and Conversation Cafe**

**Breakout Sessions: 1:50 - 3:30 PM**

**Developmentally Appropriate Assessment Practices for Early Childhood PBL**  
Presented by: [Amanda Clark](#)

**Introduction to Project Planning in Early Childhood** Presented by: [Sara Lev](#)

**Reflection, Feedback, and Revision: Taking an Active Role in the Learning Process**  
Presented by: [Erin Starkey](#)

**Breakout Sessions: 3:30 - 5:00 PM**

**Coaching Corner: Bring Your Project to Life with Personalized ECPBL Coaching**  
Presented by: [Erin Starkey](#)

**Introduction to Project Planning in Early Childhood** Presented by: [Sara Lev](#)

**Purposeful Literacy Instruction: Leveraging Early Literacy Structures Within the Context of a Project** Presented by: [Amanda Clark](#)

**5:15 - 6:15 PM**

**Film Screening -- Reflecting on Anti-Bias  
Education in Action: The Early Years**



# SATURDAY APRIL 5TH

PJW COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ALI AUDITORIUM

## Breakout Sessions: 8:15 - 10:00 AM

**Developmentally Appropriate Assessment Practices for Early Childhood PBL**

Presented by: Amanda Clark

**Embedding SEL and Anti-Bias Education into PBL** Presented by: Sara Lev

**Playful Learning by Design: Guided Play as a Foundation for Project Based Learning**

Presented by Allison Wilson and Kristin Dahl Horejsi

**Reflection, Feedback, and Revision: Taking an Active Role in the Learning Process**

Presented by: Erin Starkey

**10 AM** LAB Tour (Group A)  
Roundtable Discussions (Group B)

**11 AM** LAB Tour (Group B)  
Roundtable Discussions (Group A)

**12:45 PM** Classroom Tour Debrief (Panel and Q and A)

## Breakout Sessions: 1:30 - 3:00 PM

**Coaching Corner: Bring Your Project to Life with Personalized ECPBL Coaching**

Presented by: Erin Starkey

**Embedding SEL and Anti-Bias Education into PBL** Presented by: Sara Lev

**Playful Learning by Design: Guided Play as a Foundation for Project Based Learning**

Presented by Allison Wilson and Kristin Dahl Horejsi

**Purposeful Literacy Instruction: Leveraging Early Literacy Structures Within the Context of a Project** Presented by: Amanda Clark

**3:15 PM**

**Project Share and Closing Session**

Sara Lev Amanda Clark Erin Starkey

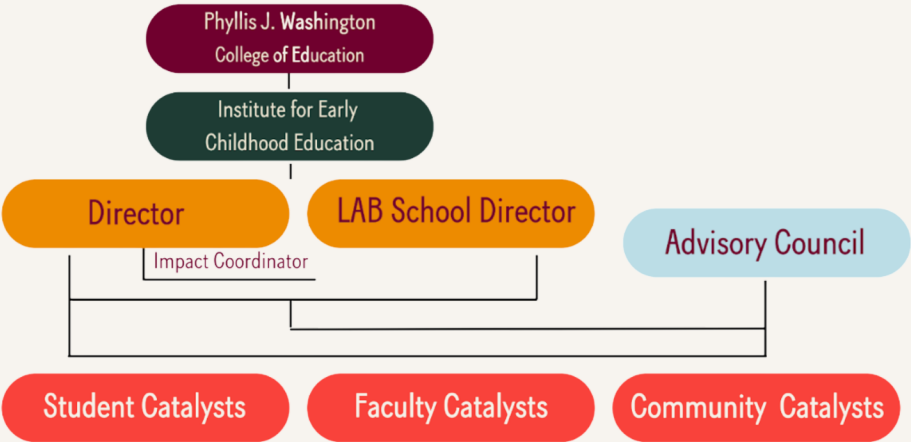
Our Mission of Research, Demonstration, and Community Outreach

Anchored in the values and core beliefs put forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the goal of advancing a diverse, dynamic, early childhood profession and support for all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children and their families, the University of Montana Institute for Early Childhood Education:

- fosters collaboration among University faculty with a common interest and commitment to research with early childhood populations
- models demonstration of research-based, high-quality practices through the Learning and Belonging (LAB) School and community school partnerships
- promotes research to practice across degree programs, local classrooms, informal learning spaces, and community settings
- engages in productive, collaborative relationships with local, state, and regional stakeholders

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

INSTITUTE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



**Catalysts:** Student, Faculty, and Community members who are an extension of the Advisory Council and include diverse, interdisciplinary content experts with overlapping interests in promoting positive outcomes for young children (birth-age eight) and their families through model demonstration, cutting-edge research, and community outreach.

# Meet our team!



Dr. Allison Wilson  
Director & Associate Professor



Kristin Dahl Horejsi, MEd  
Director, LAB School



Anny Brown,  
Impact Coordinator

**Advisory Council Members:** Support the overall well-being and strategic direction of the Institute for Early Childhood Education and is a direct link between the goals of the Institute and opportunities for impact. The Advisory Council represents early childhood stakeholders within our community so that the Institute may remain responsive to the priorities and needs of young children and families in Montana and our greater region.



Dr. Christine Lux  
Associate Professor, MSU



Grace Decker  
Montana Advocates for Children



Karen Allen  
Retired MCPS Leadership



Caitlin Jensen  
Executive Director  
Zero to Five Montana



Barbara Frank  
MCPS Director of Academic &  
Community Services



Marie Judisch  
OPI Senior Manager of  
Teaching and Learning



Madi Campbell  
ECP Professional Development  
Coordinator

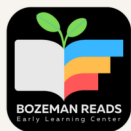


Dr. Rob Watson  
Executive Director  
School Administrators of Montana



Sally Tilleman  
Early Education Manager  
MT Early Childhood  
Services Bureau

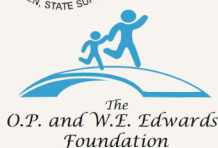
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FOUNDATION



Special thanks to Anny Brown, Impact Coordinator, and Anna Puryear, Doctoral Fellow at the UM Institute for Early Childhood Education, for their outstanding support and coordination in helping to bring our 3rd Annual Summit to life.



And now,  
look around you—  
you are not alone.  
You are one of many trees.

Be a Tree!

Written by Maria Gianferrari

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