

A young child with dark hair and a joyful expression is the central figure. They are wearing a white long-sleeved shirt that is splattered with green paint. Their hands, also covered in green paint, are raised in front of them, palms facing outwards. The background is a simple indoor setting with a wooden structure and a dark wall.

LSU

Early Childhood  
Education Institute

EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION INSTITUTE  
ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

All of the LSU Early Childhood Education Institute's (ECEI) initiatives this year have been rooted in our strategic plan and mission to advance early childhood education through research, dissemination of best practices, and advocacy—with a particular emphasis on the birth-to-three population. Our work is aligned with LSU's vision for national prominence and is centered on research excellence, workforce development, meaningful community engagement, and public policy impact.

## RESEARCH

Our 44 member team of ECEI researchers continued to generate impactful, peer-reviewed scholarship focused on the birth-to-three population. This year, ECEI members published 83 academic studies, which included 13 graduate students, and presented at 156 national and international conferences, covering diverse topics such as attention regulation, obesity, and social-emotional development. These efforts are part of our broader aim to inform practice and policy through interdisciplinary and translational research.

To support scholarly excellence, we launched the ECEI Research Impact Award to recognize high-impact publications and create a bridge to prestigious national awards. Our grant activity also reflects our growing research

capacity: in 2024, ECEI members submitted 27 external grant proposals totaling \$3.2 million, were awarded 6 grants totaling \$855,700, and have 12 grants pending totaling over \$1.7 million. These milestones align with our strategic goal to strengthen LSU's national research standing and increase federal research funding.

## PRACTICE DISSEMINATION

ECEI's commitment to making research actionable was demonstrated through an increase in practitioner-focused engagement. This year, ECEI researchers and team members delivered presentations at 31 regional, state, and local conferences, ensuring that high-quality, evidence-based practices reach early childhood educators, community leaders, and service providers across Louisiana.

We also launched the ECE Research-to-Practice Pipeline, an initiative that pairs graduate students with faculty mentors to translate research into practical tools and strategies. Students in the program create social media content, conference presentations, and practitioner articles to extend the reach of their research. A key outcome of this initiative is Spark!, a digital practice journal scheduled to launch in Summer 2025 that will feature accessible, practitioner-centered content authored by members of the ECEI community.

## TEACHER PREPARATION

In alignment with our strategic focus on workforce development, the ECEI continued to expand opportunities for individuals entering and advancing in the early childhood field. With funding from the Louisiana Board of Regents, we launched a dual-enrollment Early

Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC) pilot in Iberville and Washington Parishes, achieving a 92% completion rate among participating high school students. The post-secondary ECAC program maintained a 71% completion rate, and we remain committed to supporting ECAC completers and re-engaging former participants who have not yet finished.

ECEI also spearheaded a Workforce Application for a Registered Apprenticeship for Birth-to-Age 4, unlocking new scholarship funding opportunities for those entering the field. In addition, we submitted a request to add the Industry-Based Certificate (IBC) for Humanities: Day Care Worker to the State-focus list, a step that would allow more high schools to offer ECAC-aligned coursework and build stackable credentials from high school through graduate study.

## ADVOCACY

ECEI's advocacy efforts are deeply connected to our statewide partnerships and national affiliations. Through our leadership role in the Louisiana Association for the Education of Young Children (LA-AEYC), we helped coordinate professional development events across five regions and played a central role in planning the 2024 NAEYC Professional Learning Institute in New Orleans, including hosting a Louisiana Night to showcase local practitioners and programs.

We sustained active collaborations with policy and advocacy organizations such as the Louisiana Board of Regents, Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, and the Child Care Association of Louisiana, among others. These partnerships are critical to our goals of aligning policy with evidence, promoting investment in early care and education, and amplifying the voice of the early childhood workforce across Louisiana.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Guided by the ECEI Strategic Plan (2025–2030), we are focused on building internal infrastructure to support national prominence. This includes expanding faculty recognition programs, growing graduate student involvement, increasing interdisciplinary collaborations, and enhancing our presence in national leadership and editorial roles. Through these efforts, the ECEI will continue to elevate research, improve workforce capacity, and advocate for the youngest citizens of Louisiana and beyond.

Cynthia F. DiCarlo  
Executive Director



## LUTRILL & PEARL PAYNE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

LSU offers undergraduate and graduate programs in Early Childhood Education (ECE) as well as Teacher Alternative Certification in B-K and PK-3. The ECE programs at LSU are recognized by NAEYC and are designed with the organization's professional preparation standards in mind. By the time you finish your LSU ECE degree, you will have accrued experience across birth through 3rd grade, including working with children with exceptionalities.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LABORATORY PRESCHOOL

The LSU Early Childhood Education Laboratory Preschool is a research and model demonstration program that provides our students with relevant, hands-on experiences early in their academic program while modeling high-quality service to young children. The premise we instill in every future teacher boils down to this: we work daily to foster a lifelong love for learning in young children.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTE

In collaboration with both the LSU Early Childhood Education academic programs and the LSU Early Childhood Education Laboratory Preschool, the LSU Early Childhood Education Institute promotes recommended practices through discovery, curricula, programs, and strategic partnerships to provide an evidence-based focus on developing recommended practices in early childhood care and education for Louisiana and the nation. The ECEI links LSU's expertise in early childhood education with the critical need for a highly educated early childhood workforce of researchers and advocates to advance the profession of early care and education.

## LOUISIANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

The Louisiana Association for the Education of Young Children is a professional membership organization under the auspices of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Both the national organization and the state affiliate work to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, from birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. Together, we work to achieve a collective vision: that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD ANCILLARY CERTIFICATE

The Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate is a professional credential issued by the Louisiana Department of Education for teachers currently working in early learning centers. We are happy to provide this certification program for no cost through the ECAC Scholarship Program. All new lead teachers working in Type III licensed child care centers are required to have the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC) as a minimum credential.

1



TEACHER  
PREPARATION

2



RESEARCH

3



DISSEMINATION OF  
RECOMMENDED  
PRACTICES

4



ADVOCACY

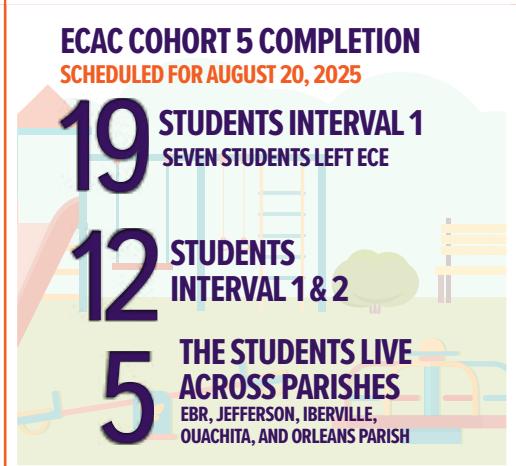
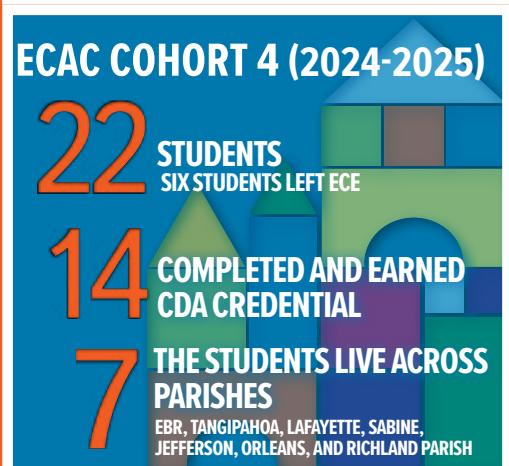
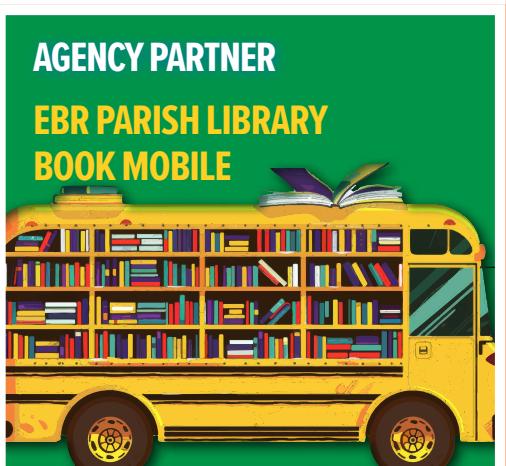
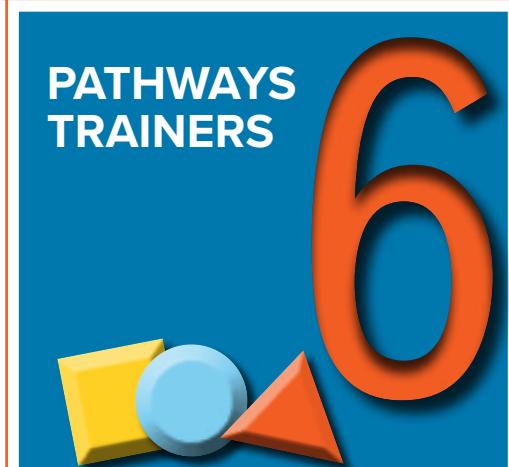
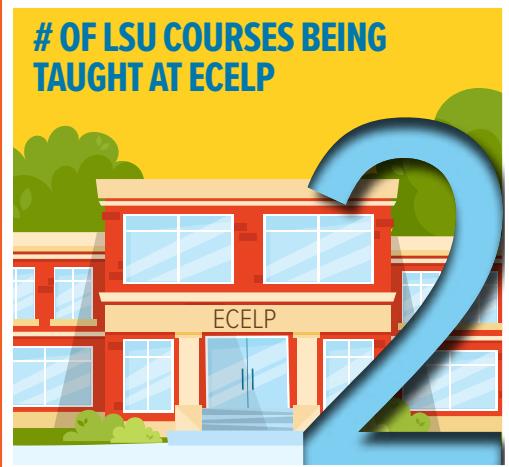
To prepare teacher candidates for the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC), initial certification and Alternative Certification Birth-to-K and PK-3 Teacher Certification, and graduate education. This includes our newly-created high school Dual Enrollment ECAC and the creation of a pipeline from the high school ECAC through graduate school.

To provide an evidence-based focus on developing recommended practices in early childhood care and education for Louisiana and the nation by promoting discovery, curricula, programs, and strategic partnerships, including funding support.

To enable the early childhood workforce to implement recommended practices for caring and educating young children. This includes the implementation of our Research-to-Practice pipelines series which works with graduate students on translating ECEI researcher projects into practice presentations and practitioner articles.

To speak up on behalf of young children, their families, and those working in early care and education for effective social policies that support the early years.

# BY THE NUMBERS





## ECEI YEAR IN REVIEW

### Empowering Motor Skills Through Collaborative Research: Dr. Nick Fears' Partnership with Pennington Biomedical

In a dynamic collaboration between ECEI members, **Dr. Nicholas Fears**, LSU and **Dr. Amanda Staiano**, Pennington Biomedical Research Center, are conducting groundbreaking research focused on motor skill development in children with autism. Working closely with a team of interdisciplinary scholars, the project examines how movement challenges are connected to broader developmental domains such as communication and social interaction.

This partnership not only bridges institutions but also supports the development of future scholars—graduate students are actively engaged in the research process, gaining hands-on experience in data collection, analysis, and application. This work exemplifies ECEI's mission to improve outcomes for young children through research-to-practice integration, leveraging science to inform early intervention strategies that support the holistic development of Louisiana's youngest learners.

### Amplifying Literacy Through the Arts: Dr. Sulentic Dowell's Residency Futhers ECEI's Vision

**Dr. Margaret Mary Sulentic Dowell's** participation in the Roundhouse Foundation Residency exemplifies the LSU Early Childhood Education Institute's mission to advance equitable, evidence-based, and interdisciplinary approaches to early childhood education. Her project—centered on storytelling, literacy, and the arts—reflects ECEI's vision of fostering creative, research-informed practices that support the learning and development of Louisiana's youngest children. By developing innovative resources for early childhood educators through this residency, Dr. Sulentic Dowell strengthens the Institute's commitment to educator preparation and to research-to-practice pathways that elevate equity and excellence across diverse communities.

In addition, the LSU Writing Project held a New Orleans Writing Retreat in late May, 2025. Several faculty who serve on the ECEI Advisory Board attended. During the four days, faculty focused on manuscripts focused on issues pertaining to early childhood.

### Brunson Honored with Prestigious ILA Maryann Manning Special Service Award

**Dr. Michelle Fazio-Brunson**, professor of education at Northwestern State University and long-time advocate for early childhood literacy, has been named the 2025 recipient of the International Literacy Association's Maryann Manning Special Service Award. This prestigious honor recognizes individuals who have demonstrated a lifelong commitment to literacy through distinguished service, advocacy, and educational leadership. Dr. Fazio-Brunson's work spans decades of impact across Louisiana and beyond, supporting literacy development in diverse early learning communities, mentoring future educators, and contributing meaningfully to the mission of the International Literacy Association.

## Expanding Access to Child Development Knowledge: Dr. Julie Schneider's Open-Access Initiative

**Dr. Julie Schneider** is advancing the mission of the LSU ECEI by expanding equitable access to high-quality educator preparation. In alignment with ECEI's commitment to bridging research and practice, Dr. Schneider is developing Arraya Learning—a free, open-access digital platform offering courses and talks on core concepts of child development. Designed to support both pre-service and in-service educators, the content aligns with Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) and aims to strengthen early childhood practice across diverse settings. A PK-3 focused series is currently in development and expected to launch within the next six months, reflecting ECEI's vision of empowering the early childhood workforce through innovative, accessible professional learning.

## Advancing Leadership and Equity in Early Childhood: Dr. Elizabeth Beavers' National Impact

**Dr. Elizabeth Beavers** exemplifies the LSU Early Childhood Education Institute's (ECEI) mission to advance high-quality early care and education through research-to-practice initiatives. In partnership with colleagues from Illinois and New York, Dr. Beavers co-led a national three-part webinar series for the Division for Early Childhood (DEC), focusing on leadership in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE). This work promotes capacity building and leadership among current and future early childhood professionals.

In addition, Dr. Beavers played a key role in securing a Moody Foundation grant to strengthen educator preparation programs, particularly for first-generation college students. As highlighted in the Moody Foundation press release, the initiative supports aspiring educators equipped to meet the diverse needs of young children across communities. Her efforts reflect the ECEI's vision of preparing a diverse, expert early childhood workforce grounded in equity and inclusion.

## Responsive Professional Development Empowers Early Childhood Educators in New Orleans

The LSU ECEI led a dynamic professional development session for 130 early childhood educators from the Archdiocese of Greater New Orleans. Facilitated by **Dr. Cynthia DiCarlo**, ECEI Trainer Corinthian Henley, Assistant Director Laura Sweet\*, and **ECEI Graduate Fellows** Katherine Dyson and Melissa Johnson, the training addressed topics identified by participants through a pre-session questionnaire. Using the Station Rotation Model, educators engaged in four targeted sessions focused on student engagement, positive guidance, building a positive classroom, and maximizing learning time. Grounded in research-based strategies, the training reflected ECEI's commitment to responsive, high-quality professional development and the dissemination of innovative practices that support young children from birth to age four.

## ECEI Members Selected for Harvard Early Education Policy Institute

Members of the LSU ECEI attended the Zaentz Initiative's Action Planning for Effective Early Education Systems and Policy institute at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, as members of the Pointe Coupee Children's Coalition team. Representing Louisiana, the team included **Pheriche Perkins**, **Dr. Michelle DeMeulenaere**, **Candace Webber** and **Dr. Cynthia DiCarlo**. Their participation will support collaborative efforts to address the state's critical shortage of high-quality care for infants and toddlers, with a focus on developing policy strategies to improve access for underserved communities.

## DiCarlo Receives National Recognition for Early Childhood Research

**Dr. Cynthia DiCarlo**, Executive Director of the LSU ECEI, has been named the 2024 Established Career Awardee by the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE) Foundation. She received this honor for her research project, Child Sustained Attention in One-Year-Olds, which builds on a multi-year study examining how different teaching conditions influence engagement in young children. The project aligns with ECEI's mission to advance research-based practices for children from birth to age three.

## Manic Monday Highlights Power of Early Education Through Business-Community Partnership

On The National Day Without Child Care, the LSU's ECEI hosted their alternative event: Manic Monday. The LSU Early Childhood Education Laboratory Preschool, welcomed Baton Rouge business leaders for a hands-on experience in early childhood classrooms. Designed to spotlight the critical importance of early learning, the event immersed participants in the daily work of early childhood educators through interactive lessons and play-based activities. A key community partner in this initiative was the Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAF), whose support helped connect local leaders with the realities of early education. Through events like Manic Monday, the ECEI continues to raise awareness about the need for investment in high-quality early care and education as a cornerstone of community and economic development.

## Capturing the Voices of Early Childhood Educators: Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner's Contributions to the Louisiana Oral History Project

**Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner** is advancing the ECEI's mission to elevate the early childhood workforce through her leadership on the Louisiana Early Childhood Teacher Oral History Project, which documents the lived experiences of early educators across the state. Through recorded interviews and narrative storytelling, the project captures the complexity, resilience, and dedication of those working with young children, while highlighting both historical and contemporary issues shaping early care and education in Louisiana. Dr. Baumgartner's related scholarship examines identity, power, and agency in early childhood settings, connecting research with the authentic experiences of educators. Her work not only preserves voices often excluded from academic literature but also informs policy and practice—supporting ECEI's vision of advancing the early childhood field through research-to-practice impact. To learn more, visit: [Louisiana Early Childhood Teacher Oral History Project](#)



## PRESENTATIONS



Presenting research and research-based practices focused on children from birth to age three directly advances the mission and vision of the LSU ECEI, which is dedicated to improving outcomes for young children through high-quality early care and education, professional development, and applied research. By disseminating innovative findings and effective practices at local, state, national, and international conferences, ECEI faculty and affiliates contribute to the field's knowledge base, foster collaboration among professionals, and elevate the visibility of the Institute's leadership in early childhood education. These presentations support the Institute's commitment to translating research into practice and building a highly skilled early childhood workforce.

### NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

ECEI members presented at 156 national and international conferences in the past year, advancing the mission of sharing innovative research in early childhood education. Presentation topics included teacher candidate preparation, leadership development, and collaborative approaches in teacher education. Faculty also explored the use

of oral history as a transformative learning tool in educator preparation. Other presentations addressed early childhood special education standards and practices, including equitable implementation and application of DEC Recommended Practices. Research on physical activity interventions and motor skill development was also highlighted, alongside studies on child language development in diverse contexts. Well-being and self-care for early childhood professionals emerged as a key area of focus, as did the influence of environmental and policy factors on children's health outcomes, such as obesity and food insecurity. Findings were shared at major conferences including the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators, Division for Early Childhood, Society of Behavioral Medicine, International Society of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, American Educational Research Association (AERA), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Oral History Association, International Conference on Infant Studies, International Society for Autism Research (INSAR), Cognitive Science Society, Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), International Motor Development Research Consortium, and the FLUX Congress.

### REGIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL PRESENTATIONS

ECEI members presented at over 31 regional, state, and local conferences in the past year, sharing research-based practices to support young children from birth to age three. Presentation topics included early literacy strategies, child behavior and development, and community engagement to support educators and families. Faculty also addressed caregiver-child interactions, particularly in language development during play, and examined the role of physical activity and play environments in child well-being. Additional presentations focused on practices for supporting smooth kindergarten transitions and strategies to strengthen the early childhood workforce. These topics were presented at conferences including the Southern Early Childhood Association, the Archdiocese of New Orleans Early Childhood Conference, Northwestern State University Research Day, the Louisiana Early Childhood Association, LSU Discovery Day, the Indiana Early Intervention Conference, the Indiana Transition to Kindergarten Summit, and Syracuse University Neuroscience Research Day.

## STATE FACT SHEETS

LOUISIANA



Investing in high-quality early childhood education and educators, working in all settings, produces positive outcomes for children, families, and the economic future of our country.



NAEYC Affiliate

### GOAL: Access to High-Quality Early Learning

**554,807**

Number of children birth through 8<sup>(1)</sup>

**29%**

Percentage of children birth through 5 who live in families with incomes below the federal poverty line<sup>(2)</sup>

**69%**

Percentage of children with all available parents in the workforce<sup>(3)</sup>

### How Much Are Families Paying Annually for Child Care?

**\$7,724**

**\$6,906**

### Where Are Children Receiving Their Early Learning Experiences?

**17,400**

Number of children receiving child care assistance per month, on average<sup>(6)</sup>

**6.83%**

Percentage of eligible children receiving child care assistance per month, on average<sup>\*\* (7)</sup>

**21,006**

Number of children in Head Start and Early Head Start programs<sup>(9)</sup>

**18,911**

Number of children in state funded PreK programs<sup>(10)</sup>

**26**

Number of NAEYC accredited early learning programs<sup>(12)</sup>

**2,584**

Number of children served in NAEYC accredited early learning programs<sup>(13)</sup>

\*State data may vary.

\*\*This number includes children under 13 and those with disabilities ages 13-18. Percentages may vary based on state data for children under five, and infants and toddlers.

### Goal: Advancing the Early Childhood Education Profession

#### What Supports Are Provided for the ECE Workforce?

**20**

Number of institutions of higher education with ECE programs<sup>(1)</sup>

**8**

Number of IHEs with NAEYC accredited and/or recognized programs<sup>(2)</sup>

**1,575**

Number of licensed child care centers and family child care homes<sup>(3)</sup>



Does the state provide scholarships to support early childhood educators in earning credentials and degrees?<sup>(4)</sup>

#### How Much Are Early Childhood Educators Compensated?

**\$18,616**

Est. Annual Salary

**\$8.95**

Child Care Workers  
Hourly rate

\$15,080  
Federal Minimum Wage  
\$18,616  
Child Care Worker Salary<sup>(6)</sup>

\$57,158  
Elementary School Teacher Salary<sup>(7)</sup>

**53%**

Percentage of the child care workforce receives public benefits<sup>(8)</sup>

High-quality early childhood education depends on high-quality early childhood educators who ensure that children, supported by families, have the early experiences they need for a strong foundation.



#### What Kind of Federal Investment Supports Access to Child Care and Early Learning?

Head Start<sup>(9)</sup>

**\$188M**

Preschool Development Grants<sup>(12)</sup>

**\$11M**

CCDBG<sup>(10)</sup>

**\$135M**

TANF for Child Care<sup>(11)</sup>

**\$11M**

Programs including IDEA, CACFP, CHIP, SNAP, and Medicaid, as well as tax credits such as the Child Care and Dependent Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit, also provide critical investments to support the well-being of young children and their families.

\*2020 Federal Poverty Guideline for a family of four in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia is \$26,200 per year. The poverty guidelines are updated periodically in the Federal Register by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the authority of 42 U.S.C. 9902(2).

# THE IMPACT OF ONE GIFT



The generous gift of Diane and Henry Goyette will allow the early childhood education institute to focus on research and dissemination of early care and education recommended practices. As an educator, Diane understands the impact of the early years, particularly how a focus on social and emotional development can have a lasting impact on the life of a young child.

Diane's focus on social-emotional stress and resilience can impact early care and education teachers

and young children in developing resilience. With so much external pressure on academics, Diane's focus on social and emotional skills can impact the field in a major way. We jointly presented her work at the National Association for the Education of Young Children Professional Development Institute. We shared our pilot research on teachers using her 4 C's model. Our research demonstrates that this model captures something different and will contribute to the field.

Additionally, this gift paves the way for the ECEI to promote Birth-to-Three research and dissemination, and advocate for the field. It enables us to provide enriched educational experiences to our doctoral students and assist our teachers at our research and model demonstration site, the Early Childhood Education Laboratory Preschool (ECELP), in realizing their educational goals. The following illustrates how this gift is making an impact:

## TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

The LSU Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) is committed to expanding the reach and impact of early childhood research through a suite of innovative dissemination initiatives. From supporting graduate students in translating research into practical tools, to amplifying practitioner voices through the LAAEYC blog, to publishing peer-reviewed content in the SPARK! journal, these efforts collectively strengthen the bridge between scholarship and everyday practice in early childhood education.

## THE RESEARCH-TO- PRACTICE (R+P) PIPELINE SERIES

is yearlong initiative designed to support graduate students in translating their research into accessible, practitioner-focused content. Through monthly meetings, students engage in activities such as creating social media posts, podcasts, blogs, webinars, and conference presentations based on peer-reviewed research. The program also provides training in digital tools like Canva and Powtoon and offers structured opportunities for submission to practitioner conferences and journals.

Emphasizing peer accountability and iterative feedback, the R+P Pipeline builds students' skills in dissemination while strengthening the bridge between research and early childhood education practice.

## THE LOUISIANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN (LAAEYC) BLOG

(<http://www.laaeyc.org/blog>) serves as a statewide platform to elevate the voices of early childhood professionals, educators, and advocates by sharing evidence-based practices, personal experiences, and innovative ideas in early care and education. Under the leadership of Editor Dr. Michelle Fazio-Brunson, the blog invites contributions from

practitioners and higher education faculty, including graduate students seeking opportunities to disseminate their work and build their professional portfolios. Each post is reviewed using a research-informed rubric to ensure alignment with NAEYC's mission and values, fostering a professional dialogue that supports continuous learning and practice improvement across Louisiana's early childhood community.

The LSU Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) proudly launched

## SPARK! Innovations in Early Childhood Education

, an open-access, peer-reviewed journal designed to bridge research and practice within the field. As a **Research-to-Practice** journal, SPARK! features evidence-based articles, educator reflections, and recommended strategies aligned with CDA competencies—offering accessible, classroom-ready insights grounded in foundational theories and current research(<https://repository.lsu.edu/ecei/>). Published through the LSU Digital Commons, the journal supports the institute's mission to advance high-quality early childhood education by equipping practitioners with empirically informed tools and fostering statewide professional learning.

**GRADUATE FELLOWS**  
As part of our commitment to cultivating future leaders in early childhood education, the LSU Early Childhood Education Institute supports a dynamic community of Graduate Fellows. These students engage in research, advocacy, and dissemination initiatives that shape their professional trajectories and contribute to the field. Here's what some of our fellows shared about their experiences:

*I assure that ECEI provided me with the needed tools to succeed as a scholar and practitioner in early childhood education.*

*I need so much more improvements, but the way I have been supported through the process has helped me grow more confident in presenting my work.*

*LAAEYC—networked together at the NAEYC conference—allowed me to see how local efforts connect to national conversations.*

*I have presented different works at several outreach events, which helped me see how policy and practice connect on the ground.*

*[My time as an ECEI Graduate Fellow has] allowed me to continue my goals for research and build the skills necessary to advocate for best practices in early childhood education.*

# DIANE GOYETTE & JUDY GIBBS: A LEGACY OF GIVING AND A PARTNERSHIP INSPIRED BY ELEVATING EDUCATORS



Diane Goyette and Judy Gibbs, whose shared commitment to early childhood education led to a transformative joint investment in LSU's ECELP.

Diane Goyette's longstanding passion for early childhood education first connected her to LSU when she made an initial gift to support the newly launched Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI). That contribution reflected her lifelong commitment to elevating the field and supporting those who work with young children. "My lifelong goal has always been to work with young children and, later, with adults who work with young children," Goyette said. "I never dreamed I'd be able to make a financial contribution to the field, but eventually I realized I could make a lasting impact that would outlive me."

It was this same passion that later sparked her relationship with fellow alumna Judy Gibbs. When the two met—each driven by a desire to strengthen early childhood education—they quickly discovered a shared vision. Within minutes, their conversation evolved into a partnership where Goyette and Gibbs agreed to supporting the next critical step: investing in the Early Childhood Education Laboratory Preschool (ECELP), a nationally accredited model for high-quality early learning and teacher preparation on LSU's campus.

Together, their collaboration resulted in a joint \$1 million endowment for ECELP. Their investment strengthens support for the educators who guide young



children during their most formative years and enhances LSU's ability to prepare the state's early childhood workforce. Goyette and Gibbs' commitment continues to shape Louisiana's early childhood system and demonstrates the lasting power of investing in early childhood education and educators.



The ECEI strives to serve as a support to faculty who engage in birth-to-three research and initiatives, while also identifying meaningful learning opportunities for graduate students to ensure that they have the skills they need to tackle the challenges of the early childhood field. Below are some of the faculty and students who have engaged in collaborative work.



**MICHELLE  
DEMEULANEARE, PhD**  
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER  
FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING AND  
STUDENT SUCCESS,  
LA BOARD OF REGENTS

*The collaboration between the Louisiana Board of Regents and the ECEI has enabled doctoral-level support from Melanie Sandahl in the preparation of essential materials and reports critical to the Board's operations. In addition, Melanie is gaining invaluable insights into state government processes and policies while collaborating with diverse stakeholder groups.*



**PERICHE PERKINS**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
POINTE COUPÉE COALITION

*PCECC and ECEI have collaborated on teacher coaching, training, and CLASS supports. We appreciate the deep background in early childhood education provided by LSU's research to practice pipeline, as well as the expertise in adult education.*

## ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS

Early childhood educators from across the Archdiocese of New Orleans gathered for a dynamic, hands-on workshop led by the LSU Early Childhood Education Institute. With a focus on classroom management, student engagement, and making every moment a teachable one, the training equipped teachers of infants through Pre-K4 with practical strategies rooted in compassion, developmental best practices, and real classroom needs.

Participants praised the engaging, station-based format that allowed them to learn through movement and collaboration—mirroring the best practices they aim to implement with their students. Sessions focused on actionable strategies such as incorporating visuals and puppets into lessons, addressing challenging behaviors with empathy, fostering strong classroom routines, and proactively shaping the environment to support regulation and engagement. Teachers walked away with practical tools and a renewed commitment to creating nurturing, intentional, and responsive early learning spaces.

*Brianna Nelson, Associate Superintendent of Academic Formation & Accessibility, Archdiocese of New Orleans*



**MICHELLE F. BRUNSON,  
PHD**  
PROGRAM COORDINATOR,  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION,  
NORTHWESTERN STATE  
UNIVERSITY

*The ECEI has helped me with multiple projects that I am able to have the support of a doctoral student, Omar Vigo, to both lighten the load and also enrich the CV of this budding professional!! Definitely a win for us both! Editing the blog has helped me nurture my graduate students' professional writing skills as well as network with early childhood professionals across the state, opening the door for future collaborative projects.*



## PUBLICATIONS



Our small but mighty ECEI faculty (44 members) continue to lead innovative research and practice addressing the unique challenges in early care and education for our most vulnerable population—infants and toddlers. From family literacy and inclusive teaching strategies to developmental neuroscience and equitable access to early learning, our team is producing high-impact scholarship that informs policy, elevates practice, and improves outcomes for children from birth to age three. This year's publications span interdisciplinary collaborations, community-based initiatives, and student-driven projects that reflect our commitment to advancing the field and bridging the research-to-practice gap.

(ECEI members are **bolded**; student names are underlined; teachers' names are <sup>\*</sup>)

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