



MINNESOTA
COMMUNITY EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION



Fall Conference

From Nest to Network

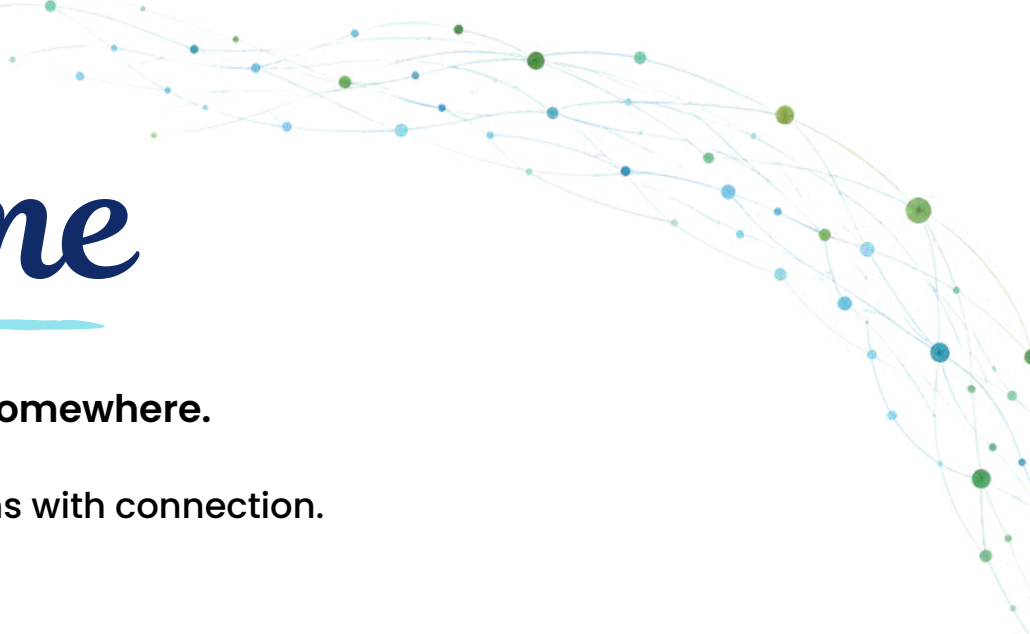
Where Community Takes Flight

OCTOBER 21-23, 2026

Mayo Civic Center, Rochester, MN



 That's
Community Ed!



Welcome

Every connection begins somewhere.

Community Education begins with connection.

A conversation.

Ideas shared.

Fresh perspectives.

Learning that lasts a lifetime.

A place where everyone belongs.

On their own, these moments may seem small. Together, they grow into something far greater. They become opportunities to inspire learning, strengthen communities, and reach far beyond where they began.

This year's theme, *From Nest to Network*, celebrates how communities grow through learning and connection. A nest is where we begin—a place of belonging, encouragement, and possibility. A network is what we build together through collaboration, shared knowledge, and meaningful relationships. The journey from nest to network reminds us that while our work starts in local communities, its impact reaches far beyond them.

Whether you're preparing for the conference, reflecting on what you've learned afterward, or simply revisiting these pages for inspiration, we hope this year's conference inspires new ideas, meaningful learning, lasting relationships, and fresh possibilities for the communities you serve.

Welcome to the 2026 MCEA Fall Conference. Thank you for the work you do each day to strengthen communities across Minnesota and beyond!

**Because when we learn together, connect with purpose,
and support one another, that's where community takes flight.**

Conference Information



DATE

October 21-23, 2026



LOCATION

Mayo Civic Center
30 Civic Center Dr SE
Rochester, MN 55904



INFO & REGISTRATION

Visit: mn-mcea.org/event/2026-mcea-fall-conference

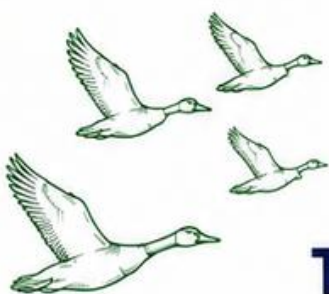


QUESTIONS

Email: jkuklok@mn-mcea.org
Call: 651-257-0752

Scan to
register today!





Thank You

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The 2026 MCEA Fall Conference is made possible through the generous support of our sponsors. Thank you for helping create meaningful learning experiences, valuable connections, and memorable moments for Community Education professionals across Minnesota.

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Conference Overview



WEDNESDAY

OCTOBER 21

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM
11:00 AM – 11:15 AM
11:15 AM – 12:15 PM
12:15 AM – 12:30 PM
12:30 PM – 1:30 PM
1:30 PM – 2:30 PM
2:30 PM – 2:45 PM
2:45 PM – 3:45 PM
3:45 PM – 4:00 PM
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM
5:30 PM – 8:00 PM

Registration, Breakfast, and Welcome (9:45 AM)
Keynote: Dr. Vera Ndumbe
Break/Transition
Session 1
Break/Transition
Lunch
Session 2
Break/Transition
Session 3
Break/Transition
Session 4
Conference Evening Social Event – Sponsored by: **Enovie**

THURSDAY

OCTOBER 22

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM
9:00 AM – 10:00 AM
10:00 AM – 10:15 AM
10:15 AM – 11:15 AM
11:15 AM – 11:45 AM
11:45 AM – 1:15 PM
1:15 PM – 1:30 PM
1:30 PM – 2:30 PM
2:30 PM – 2:45 PM
2:45 PM – 3:45 PM
4:00 PM – 4:30 PM
4:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Breakfast, Registration, and Welcome (8:45 AM)
Keynote: Dr. Lori Carrell
Break/Transition
Session 5
Vendor Visits
Comm Ed of Excellence Awards Luncheon
Break/Transition
Session 6
Break/Transition
Session 7
Vendor Prize Giveaway/Silent Auction Basket Pickup – Main Ballroom
Conference Evening Social Event – Sponsored by **Arux**

FRIDAY

OCTOBER 23

8:00 AM – 8:45 AM
8:45 AM – 9:45 AM
9:45 AM – 10:00 AM
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM
11:00 AM – 11:15 AM
11:15 AM – 12:15 PM
12:15 PM – 1:00 PM
1:15 PM – 2:15 PM
2:15 PM

Light Breakfast, Registration, and Welcome
Program Area/Networking Time/Regional Updates
Break/Transition
Keynote: Brandon Hendrickson
Break/Transition
Session 8
Lunch
Session 9
Thank You For Coming – Safe Travels Home!



Wednesday Keynote

Ballroom (2nd Floor) | 10:00–11:00 am

Dr. Vera Ndumbe

From Nest to Network:

***Growing Strong and Thriving Communities
Through Individual Growth, Meaningful Connection,
Leadership Courage, and Collective Mindset***



Every thriving community begins as a nest—a place of safety, comfort, and individual identity. Growth, however, requires the courage to stretch beyond familiar boundaries. It calls for personal bravery, a willingness to collaborate, and the openness to step into uncomfortable spaces that expand one’s professional equity.

This session invites educational professionals and community partners to honor their individual roots while intentionally expanding their network landscape. Participants will explore how to build and sustain infrastructures that foster belonging, self-worth, and long-term community growth.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the “nest to network” framework as a model for personal, organizational, and community development.
- Identify the strengths and limitations of remaining in the “nest” phase.
- Apply practical strategies for personal and professional growth, long-term partnerships, and meaningful engagement.
- Strengthen their ability to build and maintain relationships within their community.
- Develop skills for leading self before leading others.
- Build infrastructure supporting sustainable connection, accountability, and shared purpose.

About the Speaker

Dr. Vera Ndumbe is an organizational development consultant dedicated to developing talent and strengthening leadership and teamwork. Her passion began while advancing from a direct care worker to a senior leadership role in long-term care, where she discovered the power of helping individuals and teams grow. She is committed to building cross-disciplinary partnerships and promoting quality, responsibility, and continuous growth in both personal and professional development.

Across Minnesota, Dr. Ndumbe champions equitable approaches to advocacy, regulatory compliance, and intergenerational workforce strategies. Known for her engaging presentations, she combines thought-provoking examples with practical approaches that inspire reflection and leave audiences with meaningful, lasting insights.



Explore the wide variety of breakout sessions available throughout this year's conference.

Every session is an opportunity to discover new ideas, connect with colleagues, and bring fresh inspiration back to your community.

The following pages include a brief overview of each breakout session at the 2026 MCEA Fall Conference. For additional presenter information, room locations, and the latest schedule updates, please refer to the **Sched conference app**. All registered attendees will receive access to Sched in September.

Please note that session times, locations, and other conference details are subject to change. Sched will always reflect the most current conference information.



LEARN

Discover new ideas, practical strategies, and innovative approaches you can bring back to your community.



CONNECT

Meet colleagues from across Minnesota, exchange ideas, and expand your professional network.



GROW

Challenge your thinking, build new skills, and explore fresh perspectives.



TAKE FLIGHT

Leave inspired, energized, and ready to turn new connections into meaningful impact.



Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 1

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

We're Creating a new "NCEA" – a National Community Ed. ARCHIVE!

Kim Ratz, Retired Community Educator, Speaker, Trainer, Troubadour, Coach, Self-employed

The history of Community Ed. was almost lost in landfill -- until an ad-hoc group of community educators started creating a Community Ed Archive to document/preserve the history and accomplishments of Community Ed. Learn how we're collecting materials from around the country, including here in MN where Community Ed is still strong, so we can share our proud story with leaders today and future generations.

I Need An Adult...Wait, That's Me: The Reality of Imposter Syndrome

Ashley Fabian Kimmell, Executive Director of Strategic Growth and Partnerships, Fernbrook Family Center

Emerging leaders often experience imposter syndrome, even when highly capable. While it can encourage growth, it may also have negative impacts if unrecognized. This training explores how imposter syndrome appears in leadership, including cultural influences, and ways to address it.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify common signs and symptoms of imposter syndrome.
- Examine how cultural identity and lived experiences influence the development and experience of imposter syndrome.
- Explore strategies to proactively address imposter syndrome in oneself and support others.

Early Childhood Program Budgeting: From Aid to Accountability

Mike Brown, Early Learning, DCYF

Darcy Rodriguez, ECFE Program Specialist, DCYF

Shoua Mou, Program and Collaboration Specialist, DCYF/Early Learning Services

Whether one is a new or experienced administrator/coordinator, in a small or large district, the budgeting process in early childhood education programs can be challenging. This session will cover some basics, like calculating aid and following statutory requirements, as well as more complex topics, like braiding funds, managing reserve accounts, and ensuring accountability for both program performance and compliance.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 1

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Non-FAPE IEP Accommodations in After-School Programs

Nicole Mueller, Assistant Director of Special Education for Secondary Schools, Rochester Public Schools

Nate Schriever, Community Education Youth Manager, Rochester Public Schools

Melissa Stenke, Director of Systemwide Special Education Services, Rochester Public Schools

This session helps after-school program staff understand accommodations that support student participation in enrichment, recreation, and child care programs. Participants will learn the distinction between FAPE-related accommodations and those needed for equitable access in non-academic settings, along with practical strategies, decision-making tools, and resources that promote inclusion, safety, participation, and compliance.

How are the Successful Learner and Unifying Mixed Delivery Coaching Frameworks Supporting State and Local Connections, Collaboration, and Comprehensive Integration?

June Reineke, Program and Collaboration Specialist, DCYF

Cha T Yang, Mixed Delivery Coaching Network Lead, DCYF

Jeanne Dickhausen, Head Start Collaboration Director, DCYF

Hear how community feedback is shaping the Early Childhood Coaching Framework as it aligns and supports the tenets of the Successful Learner Equation. This session will overview Minnesota initiatives and opportunities to increase professional knowledge individually and collectively as a community. Resources will be shared and key contacts will be given to support local mixed delivery efforts.

Please note: The conference schedule, session times, location, and details may change due to unforeseen circumstances. Updates will be provided as needed.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 1

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

High Impact, Low Stress Marketing

Mischelle Squire, Strategic Communications & Marketing Specialist, Squire Communication Solutions

Move from reactive marketing to strategic community reach without burning out your team. This practical workshop introduces a sustainable 4-Phase Flight Plan to optimize your communication workflow. Learn how to align with district leadership, implement time-saving digital tools, and clear language barriers to ensure your programs are accessible to every family.

Key Takeaways:

- Build a "Low-Stress" Toolstack: Practice a 1-day monthly content-batching workflow using tools like Smore, Peachjar, and Canva to reduce repetitive work and eliminate staff burnout.
- Remove Communication Barriers: Learn to use free digital accessibility tools like the Hemingway Editor to audit catalog and simplify complex language for busy or language-learning families.
- Align with District Goals: Take home a practical "Messaging Matrix" template to easily translate.
- Community Education successes into the strategic outcomes district leadership values most.

Feeding Confidence: Shifting the Narrative on Food, Bodies, and Youth Well-Being

Anna Oldenburg, Population Health Specialist, Olmsted County Public Health

Katie Hackman, Population Health Specialist, Olmsted County Public Health

Eating disorders and body dissatisfaction continue to rise among youth. Adults play a critical role in reducing this risk through supportive language, inclusive environments, and intentional teaching practices. This session explores curricula options that center youth well-being while promoting inclusive messaging on body diversity and "tuned-in" eating. We will discuss strategies that help educators shift school culture toward belonging, body acceptance, and respect.

Key Takeaways:

- Practical tools, classroom strategies, and free curriculum resources.
- Approaches for integrating inclusive health education that is sensitive to race, culture, income, and food access.
- A deeper understanding of how to reshape messaging around food, weight, and health to better support youth mental health.

Community Connections: Helping Students Navigate the Road to the College Classroom

Leslie Haack, Program Manager, Adult Education Pathways at Hawthorne

Jeff Lepper, English Faculty, Rochester Community and Technical College

Moving from ABE to the college classroom can be intimidating for many students, so a lot of them don't even give it a shot. Jeff Lepper and Leslie Haack will explain how they helped build a bridge for students coming through ABE to transition and be successful in the college classroom. With over a decade of data and anecdotes, they want to share how they were able to adopt a different teaching model.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 1

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Wheels Up Wednesday: Bridging the Gap for Our 55+ Neighbors

Cullen Bahn, Director of Community Education & Recreation, Jordan Public Schools

Jordan Public Schools' Community Education and Recreation department launched "Wheels Up Wednesday" 3 years ago to meet the consistent transportation needs of community members ages 55 and older. This free weekly transportation program helps residents stay active, independent, and engaged. Each Wednesday, seniors enjoy opportunities to run errands, attend appointments, and spend time with friends—while forming new connections and rediscovering old ones along the way. The program has quickly become a bright spot in the community, fostering friendship, laughter, and a renewed sense of togetherness among its riders.

Gathering Support, Not Just Funds: Why Relationships Redefine Community Engagement

John Double, Director of Community Education, Albert Lea Area Schools

Not a professional fundraiser? Perfect – neither is John. But after 30+ years of “gathering support” for programs, projects, and people, he’s learned that successful fundraising has far less to do with titles and everything to do with relationships.

Through humor, real-life stories, and interactive elements, this session reframes fundraising as community-building with a purpose. Participants will explore why personal connections still outperform digital tactics and walk away with practical strategies they can immediately use to build trust, align with donor passions, and grow sustainable support.



FEATURED SESSION



Self-Leadership

Dr. Vera Ndumbe

This session focuses on shaping thinking and actions toward intentional goals (Bryant & Kazan, 2012). Through two interactive 30-minute segments, participants will explore how the core principles of self-leadership; self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation strengthen leadership foundations and build stronger networks. Group discussion and everyday examples will highlight how intentional behaviors and emotions help build a strong “nest.”



2026 Fall Conference

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Impact



Charitable
Purpose

Stop by and connect with familiar faces at

MCEA 2026

ROCHESTER, MN

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 2

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

Strengthening School Age Care: An Interactive Introduction to Minnesota's SAC Accreditation Program

Devin Hanson, Program Specialist, Ignite Afterschool

Christa Perkins, Owner & Principal Consultant, CP Consulting

Discover how I-SAC Accreditation can strengthen your school age care program through coaching sessions, quality benchmarks, continuous improvement, and intentional organizational practices. This interactive session introduces the accreditation process and provides a guided look at the Quality Navigator tool, helping participants understand the resources, expectations, and benefits of engaging in the I-SAC journey.

Lessons from One Immigrant's Experience: Success is All About Mindset

Mustafa Sharif, Director, Rochester International Youth Organization

I began my first afterschool program while still in high school, and I continue that work now many years later. Why? Because the development of successful students and families is directly connected to mindset. I'm a believer in the American Dream, and I try to teach my students and their parents to approach all challenges with a growth mindset. It's not about what happens to you; it's about what you bring to the situation in knowledge, skills, and attitude. Partners and supporters are willing to help, and you just have to keep trying. I hope my story gives you hope and motivation.

Supports and Strategies for Working with Neurodiversity in the Educational Setting

Maja Katusic, Developmental Behavioral Pediatrician, Mayo Clinic

Annie Redlin, Registered Nurse, Mayo Clinic

Kelly Rentfrow, Clinical Social Worker, Mayo Clinic

The presentation will focus on building understanding of neurodivergence and how to better support neurodiverse individuals across ages (early childhood through adulthood). Topics being covered include adapting programs to meet diverse needs, supporting social communication differences, understanding sensory differences, and offering practical tools for basic behavior management strategies, transition supports, and sensory toolkits.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 2

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

Beyond the Language Barrier: Masterful Collaboration with Professional Interpreters

Miguel Benjamin, Coordinator of Interpretation Services, Rochester Public Schools

Language access is a cornerstone of community equity. This session provides a practical roadmap for collaborating with professional interpreters and accessing translation services. By understanding our District's Language Access Plan and mastering the "how-to" of service requests, you will learn to remove barriers and build stronger, more inclusive connections with the multilingual families you serve.

Early Childhood Screening: Using local data and partnerships to reach all families

Margo Chresand, Early Childhood Screening Specialist, DCYF

This session builds data literacy around Early Childhood Screening for Community Education and Screening leaders, using local demographics to improve access, expand partnerships, and reach unscreened children. Interactive activities explore screening data, discuss partnership strategies, and share storytelling approaches for communicating about early learning with district leadership.

Poetry Out Loud

Lisa Higgs, Poetry Out Loud co-coach, Rochester Community Education

Mandy Ruggeri, Poetry Out Loud co-coach, Rochester Community Education

Poetry Out Loud is a national poetry recitation competition funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. High school students (grades 9-12) memorize and recite great poetry, preparing 2-3 poems from the Poetry Out Loud anthology to perform at competition. Winners can move on to regional, state and national competitions. Poetry Out Loud provides students with a unique outlet to develop their voice in a supportive environment.

In this session, we will share our advice on how to start and run your own local chapter of Poetry Out Loud. We will discuss options for structuring a course, including activities that engage students in collaborative creative expression. Participants will also practice performance techniques that have helped our own students advance to the state competition.

Your Story, Your Impact: Bringing Community Education to Life

Kristi Meyers, Coordinator of Adult Enrichment and CS Communications, ISD 191

Allison Jordan, Community Education Supervisor, ISD 191

Learn how to transform data, participant experiences, and program outcomes into a compelling impact report. This session will provide practical strategies for highlighting successes, demonstrating value, and telling the story of Community Education in ways that engage stakeholders, strengthen advocacy efforts, and celebrate your impact.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 2

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

Leading for the Future: How to Lead, Serve, and Build Flatter, More Humane Organizations

Stephen Keeler, Director of Community Education, Fridley Public Schools

Courtney Green, Senior Programs Coordinator, Fridley Public Schools

This 60-minute session invites Community Education leaders to examine how hierarchy, power, and decision-making shape organizational culture. Through reflection, discussion, and practical tools, participants will explore ways to build flatter, more humane systems rooted in shared leadership, psychological safety, meaningful participation, and community-informed decision-making.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify how hierarchy, power hoarding, urgency, and defensiveness can limit trust, participation, and organizational health.
- Practice a simple systems-mapping reflection to identify one area where decision-making can become more participatory.
- Leave with reflection tools and follow-up resources for building flatter, more humane Community Education systems.



FEATURED SESSION



The Ripple Effect: Building Stronger Communities Through Connection, Kindness, and Leadership

Cindy Rowe, Founder, Cindy Rowe, LLC

Community education is built on connection. In this inspiring and practical session, Cindy Rowe explores how small acts of kindness, intentional leadership, and meaningful relationships create a ripple effect that strengthens teams, engages communities, and expands impact. Participants will discover how everyday interactions shape culture, build trust, and foster lasting connections from nest to network.



2026 Fall Conference

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 2

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

Bus Tour Basics

Lori Murphy, Coordinator, Bloomington Public Schools

Robert Halberg, Adult Services Coordinator, Hastings Public Schools

Amanda Shadoin, Adult Enrichment and Sports Camps Coordinator, ISD 196

Katherine Bodger, Coordinator – Trips, Tours & Special Events, Minneapolis Community Education

Bus tours are a fun and unique way to build community among your participants. That being said, planning and executing a successful bus tour is no small task. Join CE coordinators as they share top tips from ideation, program development, spreadsheet planning strategies, and communications through trip execution. You will leave with tools and connections to begin exploring your adult and senior enrichment bus tour journey!

Key Takeaways:

- Checklist for Managing a Successful Bus Tour
- Spreadsheet Financial Organization Tips
- Collaborate and Connect with Peers across the State

The Neighbor Effect: Building Community Belonging Through Digital Platforms

Becky Montpetit, Owner, Rochester Local

Your digital platform can do more than announce programs – it can make people feel at home. This session explores the Neighbor Effect and gives community educators practical tools to build belonging, keep people curious, and turn online engagement into real community connection.

BIPOC Community Education Connections: A Third Space

Darrell Young, Director of Community Education, Bloomington Public Schools

Your digital platform can do more than announce programs – it can make people feel at home. This session will provide BIPOC Community Education professionals with a welcoming third space to connect, build relationships, and engage in meaningful conversation with colleagues from across the field. The time will focus on networking, sharing experiences, and creating opportunities for participants to leave feeling refreshed, connected, and supported.

READY TO TAKE OFF?

Click Here to Register Today



2026 Fall Conference



Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 3

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM

Twin Cities PBS Viewers Like Us Club: Building Community Through Media

Kalia Vue, General Audience Engagement Specialist, Twin Cities PBS

Learn how the Viewers Like Us Club, a free program from Twin Cities PBS, uses PBS documentaries and series to spark conversation and strengthen community connections. This session will share implementation ideas, facilitation strategies, and real-world examples to help participants launch a media-based discussion program in their own community setting.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify ways to use media-based discussion programs to build community engagement and dialogue.
- Explore practical strategies for launching and facilitating a Viewers Like Us Club.
- Leave with adaptable digital resources to pilot a club in your own organization or community.

Best Practices for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Belonging (DEIAB) in Community Education

Tiffany Weeks, School-Age-Care Supervisor, Anoka-Hennepin Adventures Plus

Join the MCEA Equity Committee to explore our new DEIAB Best Practices Guide for Community Education. In this interactive session, we will introduce the guide's core frameworks, share actionable strategies for your programs, and facilitate collaborative feedback discussions to shape the continued development of this guide.

Key Takeaways:

- Effectively navigate the guide as a resource for improving DEIAB in their own CE departments.
- Provide meaningful feedback to help refine MCEA's Best Practices Guide.
- Identify at least two practices from the new guide to apply within their own community education programs

POURing the Foundation for Accessible Communication: ADA Digital Compliance

Michelle Glynn, Communications Coordinator, District 196 Community Education

Digital accessibility is more than compliance — it's about creating communication that everyone can access and understand. This session introduces the POUR principles of accessibility and provides a practical overview of WCAG, Section 508 and ADA requirements. Participants will learn simple, actionable strategies for creating more inclusive digital content and communication materials.

Key Takeaways:

- Understand the basics of WCAG, Section 508 and ADA digital accessibility requirements
- Learn how the POUR framework applies to websites, documents and digital communications
- Leave with practical first steps and tools to begin improving accessibility immediately

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 3

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM

From Struggle to Success: A Framework for Student Behavioral Support

Brynne Crockett, Program Inclusion Coordinator, Robbinsdale Adventure Club

Melissa Laatsch, Program Director, Robbinsdale Adventure Club

This session provides participants with a practical, step by step process for supporting students who experience behavioral challenges. Attendees will learn how to use behavior tracking tools to identify patterns, gather meaningful data and better understand the factors contributing to student behavior. We will explore how to develop individualized success plans, implement targeted interventions, monitor progress and collaborate effectively with staff and families. The session emphasizes proactive, relationship based strategies that help students build skills, strengthen engagement and work towards success during programming.

"Avoiding Power Struggles" – Managing behavior through connection and empathy

David Sabotta, Clinical Training Specialist, Fernbrook Family Center

Sarah Trom, Director of Special Operations, Fernbrook Family Center

All behavior is purposeful, meaningful, and communicative. In this hour, we will provide insight into the unmet needs which drive behavior while offering solutions for responding to disruptive or destructive behavior. Key Takeaways: Share your calm. Focus on underlying need.

Community Voices, Shared Solutions: A Collaborative Path to Substance Use Education

Gayle Olsen, Professor Emerita, Winona State University and President, Board of Directors, Community Pathways to Family Health and Recovery

Benjamin Lai, Assistant Professor & Consultant of Family Medicine; Chair of Mayo Clinic's Opioid Stewardship Program, Mayo Clinic

Abby Tricker, Lead Population Health Specialist, Olmsted County Public Health Services

This session outlines the development, implementation, and community impact of a multidisciplinary education series on substance use and addiction. Presenters will share planning strategies, session themes, participant feedback, and lessons learned, highlighting how strong cross-sector collaboration and community engagement can strengthen understanding, support, and local response to substance use challenges.

Key Takeaways:

- Understand how to build and coordinate a multidisciplinary team for community education.
- Learn effective strategies for engaging community members and promoting evidence-based resources like naloxone.
- Identify practical lessons and evaluation insights to inform future substance use-related programming.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 3

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM

Designing Affordable and Impactful Older Adult Programs: Inspiration, Solutions, and Collaborative Ideas

Erin Matteson, Community Education Coordinator, Mounds View Public Schools

In 2023, Mounds View Public Schools Community Education expanded its older adult programming in partnership with the City of New Brighton. This session shares successful offerings like day trips, bingo & breakfast, and award-winning senior lunches. Learn how low-barrier programs can reduce social isolation, improve well-being, and strengthen community ties. The second half features a collaborative workshop to help you brainstorm ways to grow older adult programs in your own community, regardless of budget. Topics include partnership strategies, marketing, funding sources, and more.

Key Takeaways:

- Build strong partnerships with cities, businesses, and organizations
- Explore sponsorship ideas to support meals, entertainment, and giveaways
- Leave with proven formats and new ideas to adapt in your community

2028 Early Childhood Licensure: Statewide Updates, Deliverables, and Field Q&A

Mike Brown, Early Learning, DCYF

Kelly Kazeck, Early Childhood Workforce Collaboration Specialist, DCYF

December Lynch, Early Learning Services Supervisor, DCYF

As Minnesota prepares for the 2028 Early Childhood Licensure requirement, consistent and coordinated guidance is essential. This session shares statewide updates from the early childhood teacher licensure survey, STAR reporting improvements, and current licensure resources designed to support district and charter programs. Presenters will also provide time for Q&A, helping participants connect statewide efforts with their local program needs.

Key Takeaways:

- Describe key statewide updates and supports related to the 2028 licensure requirement.
- Locate current guidance, reporting tools, and available technical assistance.
- Discuss questions and local implications with state partners.

Please note: The conference schedule, session times, location, and details may change due to unforeseen circumstances. Updates will be provided as needed.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 3

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM

Self-Care and Mindfulness

Deborah Saari, Employer Education Coordinator, NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

A one-hour session on how to build a toolkit for better self-care and how to recognize when to use those tools. So often, self-care and mindfulness take a back seat in life, but for individuals living with a mental illness or poor mental health, these practices are necessary. Learn new techniques to help improve your self-care routine and receive some new resources to try out.

Demystifying Executive Presence for All Professionals – PART 1

Sheila Neidert, Owner, SGN Professional Training

Executive Presence for All focuses on the role presence plays in communicating competence and creating trust. It provides specific strategies for crafting a more confident and effective presence to meet the expectations of seniors, direct reports, peers, and customers/families.

Please see part 2 in session 4

Enovie Game Break

Erin Sweet, Software Implementation and Training Specialist

Michele Kirby

Game Break is back with more high-flying fun! Join us for a session of connection and collaboration as you compete for bragging rights—and prizes, of course! You'll leave with engaging ideas you can use to help your next meeting or event soar to new heights. Win or lose, you're guaranteed to have a fantastic time!

Key Takeaways:

- Connect with other Community Education professionals in an energetic and engaging atmosphere.
- Leave with adaptable game ideas that can be incorporated into any meeting or event.



The MCEA Conference is an incredible balance of professional development and networking, allowing our departments to come together, share ideas, and really foster a sense of community while learning how to support others and market our programming effectively.

– **Office Assistant/Facilities**
Fall Conference 2025

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 4

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Getting UnSTUCK: from Problem to Possibility

Megan Hartman, Youth Programs Supervisor, Stillwater Community Education

Learn a simple, powerful method for getting “unstuck” in work or life through Solution Circles. In this collaborative session, participants follow a guided process to share challenges, spark rapid ideas, explore possibilities, and identify realistic next steps. Experience the impact of collective creativity, supportive accountability, and renewed momentum!

Key Takeaways:

- Practice a step-by-step facilitation method for helping yourself or others move from feeling stuck to identifying immediate, achievable actions.
- Experience the impact of group creativity and positive accountability, gaining new insights and practical strategies for real-world challenges.

From Moments to Movements: Unlocking the Storytelling Superstars on Your Staff

John Casper, Communications Coordinator, Winona Area Public Schools

There are great things happening in your programs, your events and your buildings every day — you just need a simple and easy way to capture and share them. Learn how the idea of “Positive Gossip” can empower your staff to recognize and share everyday moments that reflect the impact of your programs. You will come away with simple, practical strategies to turn those moments into authentic stories for social media, newsletters and beyond. Discover how a culture of shared storytelling can strengthen connections, build trust and amplify the value of your work across your community.

Community Care as Resistance: Healing, Grounding, and Solidarity in Difficult Times

Dr. Leonardo E. Candelario-Perez, Licensed Clinical Psychologist, Castor MN

Stephen Keeler, Director of Community Education, Fridley Public Schools

Community Care as Resistance offers a trauma-informed space for grounding, reflection, and practical coping during times of war, authoritarianism, immigration trauma, and dehumanization. Participants will explore community care, solidarity, and accountability while practicing strategies that support healing without re-centering whiteness or placing additional burden on marginalized communities.

Key Takeaways:

- Practice trauma-informed grounding and coping strategies for difficult social and political moments.
- Explore how Community Education can function as public care infrastructure.
- Identify ways to support healing, solidarity, and accountability without re-centering whiteness.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 4

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Mastering Meta for Schools

Katelyn Zacher, Community Ed Director/Marketing & Communications, Hawley Public Schools

Learn how to make social media management easier, more organized, and more effective using Business Suite and practical Facebook strategies. This session is designed for busy educators and school staff looking for realistic tools, scheduling tips, content ideas, and insights to help simplify posting, increase engagement, and build stronger community connections online.

Key Takeaways:

- Learn how to use Meta Business Suite to schedule and organize social media posts in advance.
- Understand Facebook insights, reach, engagement, & analytics to better guide future content.
- Walk away with practical post ideas, time-saving tricks, and tools to help manage your page with more confidence and less stress.

Behavioral-Based Interviewing for Community Ed Hiring

Adam Rosen, CEO and Founder, Radar Talent Solutions

Behavioral-based interviewing asks candidates to describe how they have handled real past situations, rather than how they think they would respond to a hypothetical one. Walk away with a five-step framework for building a behavioral-based interview, a worksheet for translating program values into traits, questions, and a scoring rubric, and a debrief protocol that supports defensible hire decisions.

Key Takeaways:

- The five-step framework for building a behavioral-based interview from any community ed job description
- A worksheet that translates program values into traits, traits into questions, and questions into a scoring rubric
- A debrief protocol that turns interview notes into a defensible hire/no-hire decision

MN Presenters Network (MPN) and How to Utilize Your School's Fine Arts Theater

Marie Reszel, CE Program Coordinator, Albany Area Community Education

Annmarie Lacher, Director of Community Education & Communications, Brainerd Public Schools

Shantel Dow, Past President & Executive & Artistic Director, Sheldon Theatre

Curious how to make the most of your district's Fine Arts Theater? Whether you're just getting started or looking to grow your series, this session covers strategies for presenting performances, generating revenue through rentals, and partnering with statewide networks. Learn how to get started, connect with the Minnesota Presenters Network (MPN), navigate artist negotiations, and explore block booking, hospitality and funding strategies.

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 4

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Beyond the GED Study Hall: Transforming Learning in Correctional Education

Stacy Everding, Coordinator, Southwest Adult Basic Education, South

Lisa Woll, ABE Teacher, Southwest Adult Basic Education, South

Discover how a correctional education program evolved from a traditional GED study hall into an engaging, supportive learning environment. This session will share practical strategies for increasing student motivation, participation, and success. Explore approaches that help build connections with a diverse and sometimes challenging student population. While focused on incarcerated learners, the ideas and strategies presented can be applied in a variety of adult education and classroom settings.

Teaching Strategies GOLD®: Tools and Tips for Community Education Leaders

Nate Schleicher, Business Development Manager, Minnesota, Teaching Strategies

Dr. Jen Sturgen, Minnesota, Teaching Strategies

Teaching Strategies® GOLD® is a comprehensive, observation-based assessment system used by early childhood education programs throughout Minnesota. This session offers an overview of the Teaching Strategies GOLD® assessment system and explores how data can be used to strengthen implementation and improve outcomes for children. Participants will explore strategies for using GOLD® data to inform planning, strengthen instructional practices, and drive continuous program improvement. Through hands-on exploration of reports and data tools, leaders will learn how to make informed decisions that enhance teaching quality, support checkpoint completion, strengthen family engagement, and improve child outcomes.

Key Takeaways:

- Strategies for using GOLD® assessment data to inform planning, plan professional development, and improve instructional practices
- Questions to ask teachers and leaders explore program and classroom level GOLD data
- Tips to strengthen the collection, analysis, and use of assessment data to improve child outcomes

Early Childhood Screening To Go!

Rochester Public Schools Staff

Could your program benefit from a mobile outreach vehicle? Rochester has a van that they have used for mobile Early Childhood Screenings, as well as at outreach events for promoting all Early Childhood Family Services programming. Come learn about the van and how we utilize it for early childhood screening and more!

Wednesday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 4

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Demystifying Executive Presence for All Professionals – PART 2

Sheila Neidert, Owner, SGN Professional Training

Executive Presence for All focuses on the role presence plays in communicating competence and creating trust. It provides specific strategies for crafting a more confident and effective presence to meet the expectations of seniors, direct reports, peers, and customers/families.

Note: this is part 2 in the presentation series

Everyone Wins, When We're All on the Same Team! Nurturing family and community support for every student through Nested Civic Infrastructure

Jackie Blagsvedt, Family and Community Engagement Policy and Program Consultant, MDE

Julie Ruzek, Executive Director, Cradle 2 Career

Rochester Community Education, Cradle2Career, and public-school sites implement the Full-Service Community School strategy to strengthen communities. Rochester's carefully nested strategic partnerships center children, families, and cultural communities by strengthening civic infrastructure and building new tables, stages, and even kitchens where everyone is essential to creating a Rochester where every student, family, and individual can thrive where they live.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify reliable funding sources to increase resources and opportunities for everyone in your school-community
- Explore Minnesota's Family and Community Engagement model to support schools
- Gather tangible examples of community-connected classroom learning, and out-of-school-time learning opportunities



The MCEA conference helped me connect with other Community Education folks and inspired me with new ideas and tools to enhance my work back in my home district. As someone newer to the field of Community Education, this conference was an important milestone on my professional development journey!

– **Communications Coordinator**
Fall Conference 2025

WEDNESDAY SOCIAL EVENT

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR AN EVENING OF
CONNECTION, CONVERSATION, AND GOOD TIMES!

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WEDNESDAY,
OCTOBER 21, 2026



5:30 – 8PM

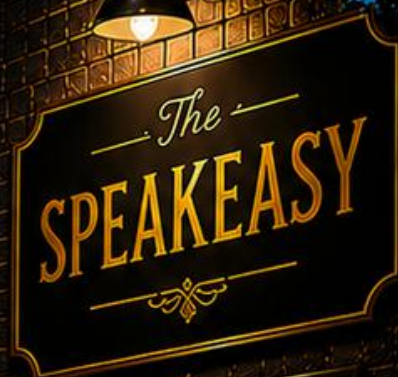


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MORE DETAILS
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Three days of learning, networking, and inspiration
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Thursday Keynote

Ballroom (2nd Floor) | 9:00–10:00 am

Chancellor Lori Carrell

Communicate for a Change:

Leading Innovative Educational Transformation



The University of Minnesota Rochester (UMR) is one of only a handful of public universities to open—truly from scratch—in this century. Since launching in 2009, UMR has broken the mold of what it means to be a vibrant public university, serving a diverse student population while achieving exceptional outcomes through innovation, collaboration, and a student-centered approach.

While UMR's story is rooted in higher education, its lessons in leadership, strategic communication, and community partnerships offer valuable insights for anyone working to create meaningful change.

How is this all possible? Chancellor Lori J. Carrell will share the story of how citizen advocates, courageous early decisions, key principles, and strategic communication paved the way for this innovative campus to transform higher education—and how those same leadership principles can inspire innovation, collaboration, and lasting impact within the communities we serve.

About the Speaker

Dr. Lori Carrell has served as Chancellor of the University of Minnesota Rochester since 2018, following her earlier role as Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs. A nationally recognized leader in higher education innovation, she is known for advancing student success, inclusive learning environments, and transformational communication. Prior to joining the University of Minnesota, she led general education reform across the University of Wisconsin System and founded a research-based teaching and learning center as a distinguished professor of communication.

*An accomplished author and speaker, Dr. Carrell focuses on the power of human connection and communication to inspire change, including through her co-authored book, *Communicate for a Change: Revitalizing Conversations for Higher Education*. She also serves on statewide and national initiatives shaping the future of higher education and workforce development.*

Thursday Sessions



ALL-DAY ACCESS

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

*No appointment required • Stop by anytime between
8:00 AM–4:00 PM*

Arux Access: Get Answers and Help from the Team

Arux Customer Success and Development Teams

Have questions about Arux? Stop by throughout the day to connect with our Customer Success and Development teams for answers, guidance, and conversation.



Get Personalized Support

Whether you're new to the platform, exploring new features, or looking for help with reporting, integrations, workflows, or best practices, we're here to help. Bring your questions, ideas, and challenges, and we'll work through them together. If you have your laptop or device available, please bring that too!



Stop by Anytime

Stay for a quick chat or settle in for a deeper discussion. This is your opportunity to get personalized support, learn from our team, and make the most of your Arux experience.

No appointment needed. Just stop by whenever it works for you.



Bring Your Laptop

If you have your laptop or device available, please bring that too! We'll help you work through your questions.



2026 Fall Conference

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 5

10:15 AM – 11:15 AM

Program Area Breakout Sessions: Connect, Collaborate, and Grow

Join fellow Community Education professionals for an energizing opportunity to connect with others who share your program focus. These breakout sessions are designed to spark conversation, build relationships, and strengthen your work through peer-led, roundtable discussions. Whether you're looking for fresh ideas, solutions to common challenges, or simply a chance to build community with colleagues who get it, this is your space to collaborate, reflect, and recharge. Come ready to share, learn, and walk away with new perspectives—and new connections—that will inspire your work long after the conference ends.

Sessions will be held for each of the following program areas:

School Age Care – Suite 101 – Lower Level

Early Learning – Suite 102 – Lower Level

Youth Enrichment, Development, and Recreation – Suite 103 – Lower Level

Facilities & Aquatics – Suite 104 – Lower Level

Adult Basic Education – Suite 105 – Lower Level

Adults with Disabilities – Suite 106 – Lower Level

Marketing & Communications – Suite 107 – Lower Level

Adult Enrichment – Suite 108 – Lower Level

Large District – Community Ed Directors – Suite 109 – Lower Level

Small to Medium Sized District – Community Ed Directors – Suite 110 – Lower Level

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 6

1:30 – 2:30 PM

Classrooms to Care: Launching a Leased Family Childcare Within School Walls

Lynn Jenc, Director of Community Education, Alexandria Public Schools

Minnesota communities are facing unprecedented childcare shortages, and school districts are uniquely positioned to help bridge the gap. This session will provide a comprehensive, real-world roadmap for launching a leased family childcare model right inside your school walls. We will walk through the lifecycle of the initiative, including:

- Strategies to identify childcare gaps in your community and district.
- Navigating facility alterations, meeting licensing requirements, and managing liability.
- How to seek out high-quality providers and structure mutually beneficial leasing agreements.
- Honest takeaways, pitfalls to avoid, and best practices developed over years of implementation.

Whether you have empty classrooms or need a staff retention tool you will leave this session with actionable steps to jumpstart a successful in-school family childcare partnership.

Engage! Reimagining the Community Needs Assessment Process

Tamra Lennox, Community Education Director, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District

Marnita Schroedl, CEO & Founder, Marnita's Table

During this fast-paced, interactive peer-to-peer session, participants will learn about an innovative model for conducting community needs assessments. In Fall 2025, ISD 622 Community Education and Marnita's Table used Intentional Social Interaction (IZI) to reimagine programming. Outcomes include: identifying program strengths, uncovering participation barriers, and generating actionable solutions for addressing the current needs of a diversifying community.

Belonging by Design: Creating Inclusive Learning Spaces Where Everyone Can Thrive

Amrita Prakaashana, Founder, Coach, & Facilitator, Artria Consulting, LLC

Belonging is essential for engagement, learning, well-being, and community connection. This interactive workshop explores how unconscious bias can influence educational environments and provides practical strategies to recognize and interrupt bias. Through reflection, discussion, and real-world case studies, participants will gain actionable tools to foster inclusive learning spaces where all learners feel welcomed, valued, and connected.

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 6

1:30 – 2:30 PM

Art as a Tool for Connection

Laura Campbell, Youth and Adult Coordinator, Access Citywide, 55+, Minneapolis Public Schools

Helene Gautier, Youth and Adult Coordinator, 55+ Citywide, Minneapolis Community Education

Discover how we transformed a standard two-hour monthly art class into a thriving, high-demand community meet-up. This session breaks down our framework for bridging diverse communities, sparking a genuine joy for learning, and encouraging creative risk-taking. Learn how designing a low-stress environment can lower social barriers, foster creative confidence, and build a sustainable engine for genuine human connection.



FEATURED SESSION



Talk Nerdy To Me: Generative AI You'll Actually Use

Paula Skoviera, CEO, Princess Paula Consulting

Generative AI is changing how we work, communicate, plan, teach, promote programs, and serve our communities — and it is moving fast. But you do not need to be a tech expert to understand it, use it, or bring practical value back to your Community Education team. In this high-energy, practical session, Princess Paula brings her signature mix of humor, clarity, and real-world examples to help Community Education professionals better understand tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and other AI platforms. Whether you are building program descriptions, communicating with families, supporting instructors, planning events, creating marketing content, improving workflows, or simply trying to keep up with what AI means for education and community engagement, this session will give your ideas you can actually use.

Please note: The conference schedule, session times, location, and details may change due to unforeseen circumstances. Updates will be provided as needed.



2026 Fall Conference

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 6

1:30 – 2:30 PM

Beyond the Print Catalog: A Practical, Low-Cost Start in Digital Marketing

Tim Dalton, Community Education Director, Watertown-Mayer Public Schools

Jake Sturgis, Founder + CEO, Captivate Media + Consulting

Most community education programs still rely on their print catalog for course registrations, even as families they hope to reach have moved online. This session follows one district's shift to digital marketing, including its first Meta campaign, which had 55,000+ impressions and drove 600+ landing page views for about \$400, and offers a low-cost starting point that any program can run on its own.

Key takeaways:

- A realistic, low-cost first step for moving from a print-only approach to a digital-first one, with no marketing background or large budget required.
- A simple way to use the registration data they already collect to segment audiences and send families messages that match their stage of life.
- A practical approach for reaching new families who do not yet know community ed exists, including younger parents and households just outside the district.

A Decade Strong: Essential Practices for Sustaining Social-Emotional Learning and the Pyramid Model Framework at Pearson Early Learning Center

Steph Kaste, Occupational Therapist, Shakopee School District – Pearson Early Learning Center

Cortney Olson, School Psychologist, Shakopee School District – Pearson Early Learning Center

This session will provide an in-depth discussion of the essential components for sustaining social/emotional learning at the early childhood level. After a decade of Pyramid Model Implementation at Pearson Early Learning Center, the team has identified the following essential components for sustainability: strong social/emotional curriculum, consistent language, well-developed scope and sequence of social/emotional learning, community and family engagement activities, staff training and motivation, and a clear fundraising plan.

Key takeaways:

- Participants will gain an in-depth understanding of the essential components for sustaining social/emotional learning at the early childhood level (and what this looks like on a day-to-day basis).
- Participants will walk away with specific ideas that can be implemented in their own sites.

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 6

1:30 – 2:30 PM

Award-Winning Ideas in Action: 2025 MCEA Project Award Showcase

Sammy Wallace, Secondary and Adult Enrichment Coordinator, Mahtomedi Schools

Nori Ness, Communications & Engagement Coordinator, Mahtomedi Schools

Kristal Berg, Director, Proctor Hermantown Comm Ed

Cassie Riopelle, Director of Community Education and Engagement, Faribault Community Education

Kaitlyn Koehler, Youth Enrichment Coordinator, Proctor/Hermantown Comm Ed

Discover three innovative programs recognized as 2025 MCEA Project Award Winners and take home practical ideas you can implement in your own community. This session features:

- **Mahtomedi Schools** – Career, Internship & Volunteer Fair – Learn how to build meaningful partnerships with local businesses and community volunteers while connecting students to career exploration, internships, and volunteer opportunities.
- **Faribault Public Schools** – School Supplies for All – Explore how community partnerships and coordinated support can eliminate school supply lists, reduce financial barriers for families, and ensure every student begins the school year ready to learn.
- **Proctor Public Schools/Hermantown Community Schools** – DORA (Driving Opportunities with Recreational Activities) – Discover how a mobile recreation program can increase access, strengthen neighborhood connections, and provide high-impact, low-cost programming for children and families.

Whether you're looking to strengthen community partnerships, improve equitable access to programs and resources, or launch innovative initiatives in your district, this session will provide proven strategies from award-winning Community Education leaders.

Do You Speak Emergency? The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) in Community Education Environments

Dustin Vincent, Adjunct Instructor, I Love U Guys Foundation

Do you speak emergency? Communication and a common procedures can make all of the difference when seconds matter. The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) is the standard in K-12 schools. Learn how the SRP can change the way you prepare, react and communicate in various community education environments.



Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 7

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM

From Insights to Impact: Using Community Feedback to Strengthen Connection, Impact, and Growth

Deb McDermott-Johnson, Director of Community Education, Owatonna Public Schools

Daren Sievers, Project Manager, School Perceptions

How do you communicate the value that Community Education brings to your community as an essential part of the educational opportunities available to all learners? The answer starts with listening. Through purposeful survey work, Community Education leaders can gather meaningful feedback, organize community insights, and use the data to make strategic decisions that reflect local needs and priorities.

This session will explore how to measure what matters most to your community and transform feedback into actionable programming that supports your community's desire to learn, connect, and grow. Presenters will highlight a successful partnership between Owatonna Public Schools and School Perceptions that generated high-value community feedback, strengthened connections with stakeholders, and supported the continued growth of the Community Education program. Attendees will gain practical strategies for using survey data to demonstrate impact, guide decision-making, and build programs that reflect the voices of their communities.

Becoming a Community Education Director

Dr. Jim Johnson, Assistant Professor, Minnesota State University – Moorhead

Community Education plays a vital role in how a school system serves the people in their district. Quality community ed programs are a critical factor in how school districts are viewed by their constituents. By attending this session, you will learn the requirements for becoming eligible for your CE Director license, and the role you can play as a school district and community leader.

Managing and Supporting Staff During Uncertain and Unprecedented Times

Shannon Brown, CEO, Fernbrook Family Center

During this course, Shannon will share practical tools for finding balance between support and accountability in leadership. Leadership has evolved significantly, and many traditional approaches are no longer as effective in today's workplace or across multiple generations. Modern leaders must adapt, think creatively, and develop new skills to meet the needs of today's workforce. Staff retention is more important than ever, and employees want to feel valued, supported, and connected to mission-driven work. This requires leaders to effectively hold staff accountable, teach and develop their skills, and support them through both personal and professional challenges. Shannon will share strategies that have worked in her own leadership experience while encouraging attendees to critically evaluate their leadership style and consider whether it has evolved to meet the demands of today's world.

Participants will gain strategies to support staff, improve morale and retention, and develop techniques to increase emotional intelligence across teams.

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 7

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM

Equity in Action Lab: Tools for Belonging, Inclusion, and Public-Sector Change

Stephen Keeler, Director of Community Education, Fridley Public Schools

Lisa Rahn, Director of Community Education, Shakopee Public Schools

This interactive think tank invites Community Education professionals to generate bold, practical ideas for equity, inclusion, belonging, and public-sector change. Participants will help inform MCEA Equity Committee best-practices work while engaging in a trauma-informed space with clear guardrails for de-centering whiteness, avoiding performative allyship, and moving from values to action.

Key Takeaways:

- Generate practical equity best-practice ideas for Community Education systems and programs.
- Practice shared agreements that de-center whiteness and support accountable participation.
- Identify bold, actionable strategies for advancing equity, inclusion, and belonging in public-sector spaces.

Staff Voices, Stronger Schools: Practical Engagement Strategies That Work

Cori Sendle, Community Education Director, Centennial 12

Julie Baeb, Senior Consultant, TeamWorks

Sara Ison, Early Childhood Coordinator, Centennial Schools ISD 12

Raycheal Zamora, Student Services Coordinator Serving Birth-Grade 5, Centennial Schools ISD 12

This session will share a real-world case study from Centennial Public Schools, where staff turnover and low job satisfaction were threatening the stability of their early childhood programs. Through a facilitated engagement process, leaders uncovered root causes, gave staff multiple ways to be heard, and built alignment across administrators and principals.

During this session you will:

- Learn about engagement strategies based on multi-modal input, staff ownership, leadership team workshops, and principal partnerships
- Have time for interactive reflection to connect the lessons to your own community ed program, circumstances, and district

Build a Partnership with the Master Gardener Volunteer Program

Emily Whitcomb & Carol Wells, Master Gardener Volunteer, University of Minnesota Extension

The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program aims to share research-based horticulture knowledge to the public through projects with local partners and other community outreach opportunities. This presentation will discuss the statewide Master Gardener Volunteer Program, provide examples of community collaboration in Olmsted County such as free educational programming for adults and youth using the garden as an outdoor classroom, and inspire you to connect with Master Gardener Volunteers in your local area.

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 7

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) at Winona Area Public Schools

Lynnea Pfohl, Parent Educator, Winona Area Public Schools – ECFE

Mikayla Wolfe, Early Childhood Teacher – ECFE, Winona Area Public Schools – ECFE

Learn from us! In this session, Winona ECFE shares how we moved our early childhood programming from nest to network through intentional internal coordination, increased family engagement, exciting community collaborations, and meeting families where they're at. Through trial and error we filled empty seats, connected with new corners of our community, and learned a few lessons on what didn't work.

Key Takeaways:

- How we've enlarged the reach of our program by expanding our focus from birth to third grade.
- Several ways that we've partnered and collaborated with community organizations.
- How we have increased access to our programs through unique family engagement events.

Early Identification of Mental Health Concerns for Children Birth to 5

Theresa Spear, Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist, LMFT, Fernbrook Family Center

In this session, participants will gain understanding of the importance Early Childhood Mental Health. We will cover what typical development and how to identify mental health concerns. Based on concerns participants will gain insight into pathways to getting mental health services and what it will look like for families getting services.

Key Takeaways:

- Understand why Early Childhood Mental is important and what it looks like.
- Individuals will have an understanding of development and how and why it can go off track.
- Understand behaviors from the lens of development and when is behavior clinically significant to assess resources.
- Understand how resources work and the process of getting mental health services.

Smarter Systems, Stronger Programs.

Erin Sweet, Software Implementation and Training Specialist

Community Education leaders are constantly balancing registrations, staffing, facilities, communication, and community needs—all while being asked to do more with less.

Join a panel of Community Education professionals for an interactive discussion on improving workflows, reducing administrative burden, and building more efficient teams. Through peer conversations and practical activities, you'll explore common challenges, share successes, and discover ideas to make your day-to-day operations easier.

We'll close by sharing what we're working on, what's ahead, and how we're helping support the future of Community Education. It's new technology, built by familiar faces!

Thursday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 7

2:45 PM – 3:45 PM



FEATURED SESSION



Talk Nerdy To Me: Generative AI You'll Actually Use

Paula Skoviera, CEO, Princess Paula Consulting

Generative AI is changing how we work, communicate, plan, teach, promote programs, and serve our communities — and it is moving fast. But you do not need to be a tech expert to understand it, use it, or bring practical value back to your Community Education team. In this high-energy, practical session, Princess Paula brings her signature mix of humor, clarity, and real-world examples to help Community Education professionals better understand tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and other AI platforms. Whether you are building program descriptions, communicating with families, supporting instructors, planning events, creating marketing content, improving workflows, or simply trying to keep up with what AI means for education and community engagement, this session will give your ideas you can actually use. And if you have attended one of Paula's AI breakout sessions before, this session will include fresh updates, new tools, current examples, and additional ways to think about how AI can support your work in Community Education.

Building Dynamic Community Partnerships: How 125 LIVE & Rochester Community Education Are Expanding Lifelong Learning

Robin Hoelzle, Program Manager, 125 LIVE

Ken Baerg, Director of Operations, 125 LIVE

Explore how 125 LIVE and Rochester Community Education built an innovative partnership to create diverse, responsive programming that serves evolving community needs. Learn how collaboration has expanded offerings in arts, fitness, outreach, multi-generational experiences, and educational programming while strengthening community engagement and creating adaptable models for lifelong learning.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify strategies for building and sustaining successful community partnerships.
- Gain ideas for developing diverse programming that responds to changing participant interests and needs.





◆ MCEA THURSDAY SOCIAL EVENT ◆



CONNECT • UNWIND • CELEBRATE

Continue the conversation beyond the sessions. Hosted by Arux, enjoy **live music by LP and the 45's**, complimentary drinks, heavy appetizers, and relaxed networking at the **Rochester Art Center**. Weather permitting, gather outdoors around the fire and connect with colleagues from across Minnesota.

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Registration
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September

**LIVE
MUSIC**
LIVE MUSIC BY
LP AND THE 45'S



*Rochester
Art Center*



LIVE MUSIC
by LP and the 45's



COMPLIMENTARY DRINKS
cheers to a great day



HEAVY APPETIZERS
delicious bites included



**OUTDOOR FIRE &
RELAXED NETWORKING**
weather permitting



**THURSDAY
OCTOBER 22
2026**



**FROM
4:30 – 6:30 PM**



**MAYO CIVIC CENTER
ON-SITE**
30 Civic Center Drive SE
Rochester, MN

➤ Good conversations. Great connections. Lasting impact. See you there! ➤

Friday Keynote

Ballroom (2nd Floor) | 10:00–11:00 am

Brandon Hendrickson

What hidden thread runs through the most beloved parts of community education?



From toddler song circles to after-school enrichment, from adult classes to senior groups, the programs people love most all share the same secret feature: they run on the same deep code of human meaning — call it the “human OS.” But the ways we usually talk about education make this almost invisible, which is why these programs are often the first to be cut.

In this keynote, we’ll uncover what community education provides that schools too rarely do. And once we see this thread, we can gain a clear, scientific understanding of why these programs thrive... and how to help them thrive even more.

About the Speaker

Brandon is the founder of Science is WEIRD (scienceisWEIRD.com), a sprawling online science program built to help kids fall in love with reality from the atoms on up. He’s also the co-founder of Schools for Humans (schoolsforhumans.org), where he’s helping develop an approach to education that seeks to re-humanize and re-enchant academics. He holds a master’s in educational leadership and writes about education, technology, and what learning is for at The Lost Tools of Learning (losttools.org). He lives in Rochester with his wife, three kids, and a collection of old computer games.

Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 8

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Building Impactful Targeted Services Programs: Strategies for Student Success Beyond the School Day

Amanda Beckler, Youth Programs Coordinator, Faribault Public Schools

Targeted Services programs provide a powerful opportunity to support students' academic, social-emotional, and developmental growth outside of the traditional school day. In this session, participants will explore practical strategies for designing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality Targeted Services programming that engages students, families, schools, and community partners. Presenters will share successful approaches for identifying student needs, aligning programming with district goals, leveraging community resources, creating meaningful enrichment opportunities, and measuring program impact. Attendees will leave with actionable tools, examples, and ideas to strengthen their own programs and expand opportunities for student success beyond the classroom.

The Operational Edge

Tiffany Weeks, School-Age-Care Supervisor, Anoka-Hennepin Adventures Plus

Have you ever looked at your team's daily workflow and thought, "There has got to be a better, cleaner way to do this"? This training focuses on resolving systemic disorganization and fractured communication within large systems. It delivers practical strategies to centralize, organize, and streamline your department's electronic resources, consolidate and clarify internal communications, and automate repetitive administrative tasks to maximize organizational efficiency.

Key Takeaways:

- How to avoid data fragmentation by centralizing and simplifying files.
- How to reduce excessive emails and ensure consistency in communication.
- Ways to leverage technology to automate repetitive workflows.

Demystifying "Misbehavior" in Children and Youth

Haeli Gerardy, Family Engagement Specialist, Fernbrook Family Center

Managing "misbehavior" can be frustrating, exhausting, and confusing. In this talk participants will be introduced to a popular brain-body model to better understand and respond to behavior and how it is influenced by a complex array of factors including development, relational experiences, neurotype, stress and trauma, and more.

Key Takeaways:

- Kids do well when they can – it's usually a "can't" not a "won't"
- Kids learn most from what they experience within relationships – what they receive, witness, and experience. True cooperation comes from connection, not fear.
- How we respond to others sends a message. Repeated messages over time can have deep and lasting impacts that we didn't intend.



Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 8

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Equity 101: Equity and Inclusion Work in Community Education

Stephen Keeler, Director of Community Education, Fridley Public Schools

This 60-minute session invites Community Education leaders to examine how equity, inclusion, anti-racism, disability justice, gender-inclusive practice, and white supremacy culture show up in daily systems. Participants will reflect on access, belonging, dignity, safety, and practical ways to move equity work from values statements into everyday Community Education practice.

Key Takeaways:

- Build shared language around equity, inclusion, anti-racism, disability justice, gender-inclusive practice, intersectionality, and white supremacy culture.
- Reflect on how Community Education systems, including registration, fees, communication, staffing, facilities, and program design, shape access, belonging, dignity, and safety.
- Leave with reflection questions and practical next steps for moving equity work from stated values into daily leadership and operational practice.

Introducing N-CAPS: Non-Competitive Active Play Spaces

Owen Kilanowski, Kids Club Site Lead, Edina Community Education

Jane Tierney, Program Manager Edina Public Schools/Kids Club, Edina Community Education

Discover how a Non-Competitive Active Play Space (N-CAPS) can create inclusive, engaging opportunities for children to move, build confidence, and develop essential physical and social-emotional skills. Explore how active play supports child development, focus, learning, and emotional regulation while learning the key components of a successful N-CAPS program. Attendees will also gain practical strategies for staffing, supervision, reducing gym conflicts, and creating welcoming play environments for all children.

Safe After the Bell: Implementing Standard Response Protocols in OST

Tiffany Clifton, Director of Community Education, Orono Public Schools

Scott Lhotka, Director of Community Education and Services, Westonka Public Schools

Annette Sallman, Exec. Director of Community Education, Stillwater Area Public Schools, ISD 834

This interactive session explores applying the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) within Out-of-School Time (OST) environments. We will discuss how to adapt universal commands for challenges like variability in environments and logistical controls. We'll cover strategic foundations for site-specific plans, bridging the gap between school-day security and OST flexibility to ensure consistent safety.

Session Prerequisite: Participants should have a foundational understanding of Critical Response or Standard Response Protocol (SRP) through prior training or experience, or by attending "Do You Speak Emergency? The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) in Community Education Environments," presented by Dustin Vincent during Session 6.



Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 8

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Planting Seeds of Enthusiasm: Inspiring Middle School Students to Connect, Learn, and Grow

Ciara Muetze, Afterschool Club Instructor- Gardening & Beekeeping, Rochester Community Education

Phillip Hartman, Community Education Site Director, Rochester Public Schools

Through personal examples and experience, participants will learn how we engage students and retain participation in our yearlong Gardening, Landscaping, and Beekeeping programs. During this session, you will learn how presenters are able to recruit students to sign up, and how an instructor can operate these programs during peak and off-season times of the year.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify key factors that influence consistent engagement and participation among middle school students.
- Apply strategies that encourage student ownership, leadership, and investment in club activities along with building peer/staff relationships and an inclusive environment.
- Incorporate hands-on, inquiry-based, and experiential learning opportunities that spark curiosity and sustain interest.

Stop Starting from Scratch: A Canva Template Workshop

Emily Abel, VP of Marketing, Radar Talent Solutions

Reusable templates turn one-off design work into a system that scales with your program. Walk away with 1 to 2 Canva templates built live during the session, a repeatable approach for designing for reuse, and a reference for what to include in the most common template types community ed teams produce. Laptop required.

Key Takeaways:

- 1 to 2 finished Canva templates built live during the session, owned by the attendee in their own Canva account
- Repeatable framework for turning any one-off design into a reusable template
- Reference for recommended components of the most common community ed template types

Storytime Books and Beyond!

Ingrid Alvarez, Youth Services Librarian, Rochester Public Library

Jill Kobler, Library Associate, Rochester Public Library

This session will feature a visit to Rochester Public Library, including a tour of the Youth Services area, demonstration of storytelling/read aloud techniques (flannelboards, Kamishibai, shadow stories), and highlighting some of our favorite read alouds and how best to use them with a preschool audience. The purpose of this session is to broaden the attendees' knowledge of storytime techniques and the larger role it serves to our youngest community members.

This session will travel off-site.

Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 8

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Navigating the Discomfort: Mastering Difficult Conversations

Pam Webb, Program Coordinator, Adventures Plus

Stop avoiding tough talks to "keep the peace." This interactive workshop equips OST leaders with the mindset and practical frameworks needed to navigate high-stakes discussions with confidence. Learn to bypass internal blocks, utilize the SBI feedback model, and manage emotional triggers, transforming discomfort into productive dialogues that build trust and drive results for your program.

Participants will learn to recognize the internal blocks that distort their perception of conflict before a conversation even begins, practice the Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) framework to deliver feedback that focuses on neutral, observable facts rather than biased judgments, and gain practical scripts and techniques to remain calm and empathetic when responding to staff or parents who become defensive, cry, or yell.

Award-Winning Innovations: Building Stronger Communities Through Partnership and Workforce Development

Erica Bjerketvedt, Director of Early Learning & Community Education, North Branch Area Public Schools

Julie Morris, Inclusion Site Coordinator, Anoka-Hennepin Community Education

Explore two outstanding 2025 MCEA Project Award-winning initiatives that demonstrate how Community Education can lead innovative solutions to workforce challenges while strengthening support systems for children, families, and communities. This session features:

- **North Branch Area Public Schools – Childcare Champions Training Day** – Discover how Community Education partnered with county agencies, businesses, nonprofits, and higher education to address the local childcare shortage through professional development, provider support, and strategic community collaboration.
- **Anoka-Hennepin Community Education – Adventures Plus – SAC Social Work Hybrid Internship Program** – Learn how an innovative partnership between School Age Care and the district's social work department created paid hybrid internships that strengthen staffing, support youth social-emotional learning, and develop the next generation of school social workers.

These award-winning projects illustrate how Community Education can move beyond traditional programming to become a catalyst for workforce development, community partnerships, and sustainable solutions to today's most pressing challenges.



Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 8

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Child Development 101: Toddlers through Adolescents

Carley Hofer, Assistant Professor, Winona State University

Beth Larson, Assistant Professor, Winona State University

Explore the fascinating world of child development from infancy through adolescence in this engaging, beginner-friendly session! Participants will discover the unique characteristics of developmental stages while gaining practical strategies to adapt expectations, communication, behavior guidance, and support approaches. You will leave with a stronger understanding of how responsive adult interactions positively impact children's growth and success.

Key Takeaways:

- Demonstrate the ability to use positive, developmentally appropriate strategies to guide behavior and communicate with children.
- Identify how developmental delays or differences may affect behavior, communication, and learning, and select appropriate support strategies.

Space: The Final Frontier – Teaching Space Science to Your Community

Ben Joslin, Planetarium Director, Rochester Public Schools

Space exploration is advancing rapidly, and many people are curious and excited about it. In this session you'll discover some tools, tips, and resources you'll need to teach your own space lessons to students of all ages, in order to help motivate and prepare them for humanity's future in space. Plus, you'll get a take-home space lesson starter kit.

Please note: The conference schedule, session times, location, and details may change due to unforeseen circumstances. Updates will be provided as needed.

Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 9

1:15 PM – 2:15 PM

Creating (or Enhancing) your Program's Equity Plan

Jodi Abrahamson, Program Coordinator, Anoka-Hennepin Adventures Plus

Tiffany Weeks, School-Age-Care Supervisor, Anoka-Hennepin Adventures Plus

Come hear about the Anoka-Hennepin Adventures Plus school-age-care program's equity work. Whether you are just starting equity work or well on your way, this session will give you additional ideas for implementation.

Participants will learn how this school-age-care program:

- Formed their equity committees, created an equity commitment statement, engaged stakeholders, and created department-wide training.
- Built equity connections into all activities, dedicated budget resources, and secured grant funding for special projects.
- Examined demographics and adjusted staff recruitment strategies.

Updates to the Community Education Annual Report and How to Fill it Out

Karl Brown, Community Education Director, Mounds View Public Schools

Ann Riebel, Community Education Director, Winona Public Schools

Alex Wolter, Community Education Director, Willmar Public Schools

Roxy Olsen-Hurst, Assistant Director of Community Education, Proctor Public Schools

In this session, we will discuss changes and updates to the Community Education annual report that is due each November. We will also discuss common areas of data misrepresentation in the annual report and how to accurately fill it out.

MCEA Foundational Standards for School-Age Care Programs Guide

Angie Parker, Program Specialist, Minneapolis Public Schools

Jenn Bratvold, Program Coordinator, Minneapolis Public Schools

Shannon Gavrilov, Assistant Director of Community Education, Proctor Public Schools

The MCEA School Age Care Committee is excited to share our reviewed and updated Foundational Standards for School-Age Care Programs guide! This guide outlines the baseline for high quality school age care programs. At this session we will walk through the guide and how programs can benefit from this free resource.

Participants will learn key areas of quality care and have a tool perfect for building a solid foundation or taking their program to the next level.



Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 9

1:15 PM – 2:15 PM

Cultural Considerations: Building Relationships with ELL Families

Karen Cook, Teacher, Adult Literacy, Hawthorne Education Center, Rochester Public Schools

Are you planning events but unable to engage with all culturally diverse families? Explore the benefits of dual multilingual learners as well as strategies to build a connection. Specific focus on ELL Family Engagements, considerations on how to create a successful event, and how to apply cultural relevance to build a larger community.

Key Takeaways:

- Participants will see the benefits and challenges of translation services including an interactive activity using Google Translate.
- Practical considerations in planning events for the entire community through a cultural diversity equity lens.

You Can't Pour From Empty: Sustainable Wellbeing for Community Education Professionals

Amrita Prakaashana, Founder, Coach, & Facilitator, Artria Consulting, LLC

Community education professionals dedicate their time and energy to supporting others, often at the expense of their own wellbeing. This interactive session explores practical strategies for preventing overextension, building sustainable work practices, and fostering belonging. Participants will leave with greater clarity, actionable tools, and a personalized plan to support both personal wellbeing and community impact.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify personal and professional factors that contribute to overwhelm, energy depletion, and misalignment.
- Apply practical strategies for supporting sustainable wellbeing, including energy management, boundaries, and intentional decision-making.
- Develop one actionable step to strengthen both personal wellbeing and the sense of belonging within their programs and communities.

Aquatics Programming for Success

Silvia Ihme, Coordinator, Aquatics, Minneapolis Public Schools

How do you keep up with the demand for aquatics? With multiple age groups and user needs, it can take a lot to keep your program balanced. Dive into all the options to build a schedule that maximizes facility usage and revenue. Hear about innovative programs that expand access to life-saving skills, like incorporating swim lessons into full-day summer programs. Don't just tread water. Build your roster of instructors and lifeguards so you can keep expanding aquatics programs.



Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 9

1:15 PM – 2:15 PM

From "What Do I Do?" to "I've Got This!": Guiding Challenging Behavior

Lanette Hess, Inclusion Program Coordinator, Anoka-Hennepin, Community Education, Adventures Plus
Master the transition from "What Do I Do?" to "I've Got This!" when guiding challenging behavior. This session explores brain states to help you move from reaction to intentional response. Discover how composure, safety, and connection can transform behavior into success stories using practical tools.

Key Takeaways:

- Learn to identify the three brain states
- Practice shifting from judging to "noticing"
- Take away practical strategies to guide challenging behavior that help preserve relationships

Youth Voice and Leadership: Creating Space for Young People to Lead

Keem Anderson, Associate Director, Ignite Afterschool

This interactive session introduces Building Block #3 of the Believe It. Build It. framework: Youth Voice and Leadership.

Participants will explore practical strategies to embed youth voice into daily programming—beyond one-time events—by creating consistent, meaningful opportunities for youth to lead and make decisions. Through real-world examples, group discussion, and hands-on tools, participants will learn how to build a culture where young people are truly seen, heard, and empowered to lead.

Building Belonging Through Family Engagement: Lessons, Tools, and Strategies from Minnesota's Family Engagement Practices Project

Mi Yang, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) Specialist, DCYF

December Lynch, Early Learning Services Supervisor, DCYF

How can meaningful family engagement strengthen belonging for children and families? This session shares key lessons from Minnesota's Family Engagement Practices Project and introduces practical tools, resources, and strategies to help early childhood programs build trust, strengthen partnerships, elevate family voice, and support continuous improvement.

Participants will:

- Learn key themes and insights from families, educators, and leaders about effective family engagement.
- Explore practical tools and resources to support reflection, continuous improvement, and stronger family partnerships.
- Identify actionable strategies to strengthen belonging and family engagement in their own programs and communities.



Friday Sessions



BREAKOUT SESSION 9

1:15 PM – 2:15 PM

Pause. Notice. Connect. Forest Therapy Practices for Wellbeing and Community Education

Nicole Brudos Ferrara, Owner, Damselfly Forest Therapy

Experience forest therapy, an evidence-informed practice that supports wellbeing through sensory engagement and mindful attention. Participants will take part in a guided mini forest therapy walk and leave with practical nature-based strategies they can use personally or adapt for community education programs.

Key Takeaways:

- Describe how forest therapy supports wellbeing through sensory engagement and mindful attention.
- Practice simple nature-based techniques that can be used for personal wellbeing and stress regulation.
- Identify opportunities to incorporate nature-based experiences into community education programming.

How to Eat Your Way to Better Mental Health

Sara Kelly, Wellness Specialist, Olmsted County

Did you know that 90% of Americans aren't eating in a way that supports optimal mental well-being? In this presentation, you'll learn practical strategies for using nutrition to ease symptoms of stress and anxiety, and you'll have the chance to sample several foods known to promote better mental health.

There were many session options for staff from all program areas and all levels of community education—both new and seasoned found meaningful opportunities to learn and connect.

– **Community Education Director**
Fall Conference 2025



Lodging



Special conference rates are available at both Hotel Indigo and Hilton Garden Inn for attendees staying Tuesday, October 20 through Friday, October 23, 2026.

Hotel Indigo Rochester – Mayo Clinic Area

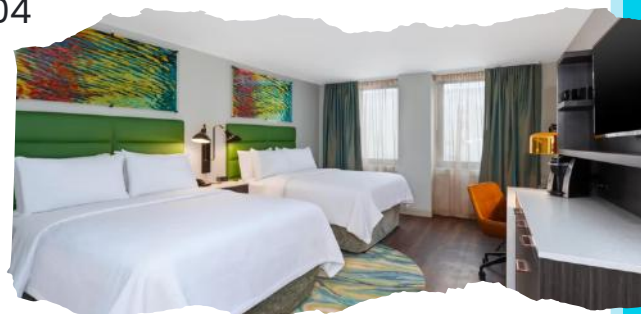
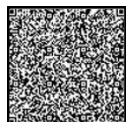
220 South Broadway Ave, Rochester, Minnesota 55904

You can book rooms the following ways:

Online: [Click here to book online](#)

Phone: Call the hotel at 507-252-8200, make a reservation in the 2026 MCEA block.

Scan QR Code:



Reservation Deadline

Hotel Indigo: September 29, 2026

Hilton Garden Inn Rochester Downtown

225 South Broadway, Rochester, Minnesota 55904

You can book rooms the following ways:

Online: [Click here to book online](#)

Phone: Call the hotel at 507-285-1234



Reservation Deadline

Hilton Garden: September 5, 2026

Visit: mn-mcea.org/event/2026-mcea-fall-conference





All conference sessions and events will take place at the Mayo Civic Center unless otherwise noted.

