



MARYLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities



The Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP), housed at the UMBC Shriver Center, Division of Professional Studies, is a workforce initiative designed to accelerate diverse, cross-sector leadership in early childhood. A research-based graduate-level leadership program, MECLP is dedicated to cultivating and supporting leaders capable of significantly improving school readiness and related outcomes for early learners, particularly for children who may be at risk of not reaching their full potential.

Leadership in Early Care and Education Matters

MECLP is needed now more than ever. Our ability to realize the goals of the **Blueprint for Maryland's Future** depends on a strong start for all children. But the COVID-19 pandemic destabilized early care and education in all settings – childcare, Head Start, PreK – and in the delivery of services by local government. Too many children do not have access to the quality care they need to be school ready, and too many parents are not able to return to the labor force due to a shortage of early care and education seats. Further, programs cannot find staff with the appropriate training and degrees who are satisfied with the low wages. The relationship between the early care and education system and the economy has never been more evident.

"The success of the Blueprint depends in large part on what happens in the early childhood years. That's why Pillar One is so important. MECLP is developing cohorts of knowledgeable and passionate leaders who will help us achieve equitable, quality learning opportunities for all Maryland children." ~ Rachel Hise, Executive Director of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Accountability and Implementation Board.

MECLP trains the next generation of early childhood leaders to drive compelling, sustainable change across systems, policies, and practices so that all children can have the high-quality early care and education experiences they need for school success. MECLP plays a special role in supporting the **Blueprint** by focusing on the leaders who will implement education reform across the state.

Unique Partnership with UMass Boston

MECLP is the first satellite of Early Education Leaders, an Institute at University of Massachusetts Boston. Dr. Anne Douglass, founder of Early Education Leaders and faculty for MECLP, describes the relationship as a powerful cross-institutional partnership. Together, the two universities are collaborating to innovate in the early childhood workforce space and create equitable leadership pathways for early educators.

MECLP is an essential investment in early childhood. It cultivates leaders from the field who are trained, equipped, and emboldened to bring about change at all levels - with families, systems, policy, and among elected officials...the MECLP fellows are some of the most inspiring leaders and educators I've encountered anywhere ~ Dr. Anne Douglass

Preparing Maryland's Future Early Childhood Leaders

UMBC Endorsement in Early Childhood Leadership. Since 2019, MECLP has been accepting 18 leadership fellows annually who represent a variety of early childhood classrooms, programs, settings, organizations, and associated fields that comprise Maryland's early childhood system. They participate in a four-semester, cohort-based, six-credit pathway leading to an Endorsement in Early Childhood Leadership. This includes: Leading for Change in Early Childhood (which includes a capstone project); and Public Policy and Advocacy in Early Childhood (which includes examination of federal and state policy). Across these courses, MECLP fellows gain a deeper understanding of themselves as leaders and their role in driving systems-level change to achieve equity and justice.

Capstone Projects. Fellows draw on their coursework and lived experience to design change projects that include a logic model, action steps, and success measurement. These impactful capstone projects showcase the positive changes fellows have made in early childhood education. Examples include:

- Carolina Reyes, who advocated for the successful passage of HB1441, creating a career ladder for childcare providers and ensuring access to college coursework in their native language.
- Tiffany Jones, who raised the profile of her family childcare program, becoming a pre-k expansion site. She also serves as the Maryland state representative and policy fellow for the National Association for Family Childcare (NAFCC).
- Iyanna Nelson, who reimaged family engagement in schools, ensuring that families are recognized as essential partners in their children's education.

UMBC Certificate in Early Childhood Leadership (2026). MECLP fellows who have completed the Endorsement in Early Childhood Leadership may have the opportunity to enroll in an additional six-credit pathway to receive a Certificate in Early Childhood Leadership.

Community of Practice. Fellows are invited to join a vibrant Community of Practice, which includes spring and fall webinars highlighting select capstone projects, reinforced by state and national experts engaged in aligned work; Leadership in Action Conversations with early childhood leaders across the state; Lean-In Conversations; mini-courses delving into complex topics and their applications to ECE ecosystems; and the Annual Leadership Forum. The Leadership Forum is a day-long event where fellows present their capstone projects to a diverse group of participants from practice, research, government, and philanthropy, sparking discussions on equitable approaches to field challenges.

Coaching. A robust early childhood specific coaching program informed by national models gives fellows one-on-one support once they finish their coursework to help them achieve individual, personal, and career goals, and strengthen Maryland's leadership capacity in the early care and education sector.

Continuous Program Evaluation. With a focus on continuous improvement and commitment to excellence, MECLP conducts regular evaluations of its programs and initiatives.

“MECLP is developing cohorts of knowledgeable and passionate leaders who will help us achieve equitable, quality learning opportunities for all Maryland children. This is important for the children, and it is important for realizing the goals of the Blueprint. ~ Dr. Rolf Grafwallner, former Assistant State Superintendent for the Division of Early Child Development at the Maryland State Department of Education, MECLP Senior Policy Advisory, and consultant to the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Making a Difference

Since its inception, MECLP has enrolled six cohorts of students, fully funding their participation. An external evaluation found that the MECLP experience enhances leadership skills, giving fellows the confidence they need to engage in new roles and tackle persistent challenges in the field. Further, the program is significantly helping to diversify the field as it intentionally aims to enroll fellows who identify as leaders of color, multilingual, and under age 50 throughout the state. **Through its commitment to leadership development and diversity, MECLP is not only shaping the future of early childhood education in Maryland but also empowering a new generation of change agents—leaders equipped to drive meaningful, lasting change across the field.**

Testimonials

“MECLP gave me the confidence to apply for jobs at the state level where I could begin to enact change on a greater level. I went from leading one Judy Center to now heading the entire Judy Center Program for MSDE as the program manager and heading up one of the most important aspects of Pillar I in the Blueprint. ~ Kaymi Plank, Education Program Specialist, Division of Early Childhood, Maryland State Department of Education

MECLP helped me develop strong leadership and communication skills so that I can lead and empower others. Whether it is tied to having hard conversations or advocating for the Judy Center program, staff, and families, I now feel more confident as a leader within my organization and in the broader early education community. ~ Crystal Harris, Coordinator, Judy Center, Baltimore City Public Schools



BUILDING THE FUTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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