

**JOIN THE  
XCHANGE!**



**XCHANGE**  
Prenatal-to-Three Capacity-Building Hub  
POWERED BY THE BUILD INITIATIVE

**CONNECT WITH 3,400+ LEADERS  
ACROSS ALL 50 STATES**

**JOIN DISCUSSIONS ON POLICIES  
AND SYSTEMS IMPACTING  
PRENATAL-3 OUTCOMES**

**ACCESS RESOURCES AND  
EVENTS FOR PN-3 INITIATIVES**

**LEARN FROM PEERS AND  
EXPERTS ANYTIME, ANYWHERE!**

**[bit.ly/JoinPN3XChange](https://bit.ly/JoinPN3XChange)** 

# Early Educators' Voices: Why and How Did We Co-design Research That Translates to Systems Change?

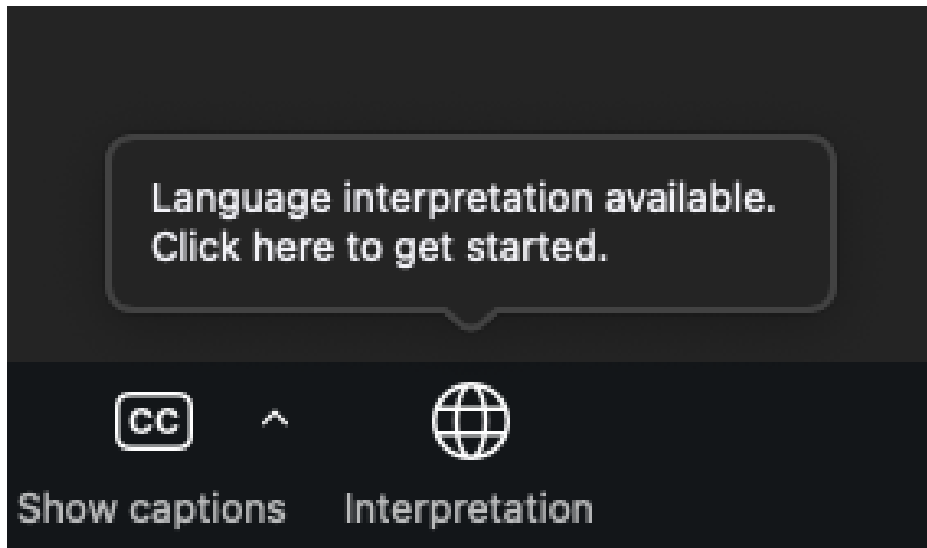
A Technical Assistance (TA) Opportunity for  
State Advocates

Thursday, August 14, 2025

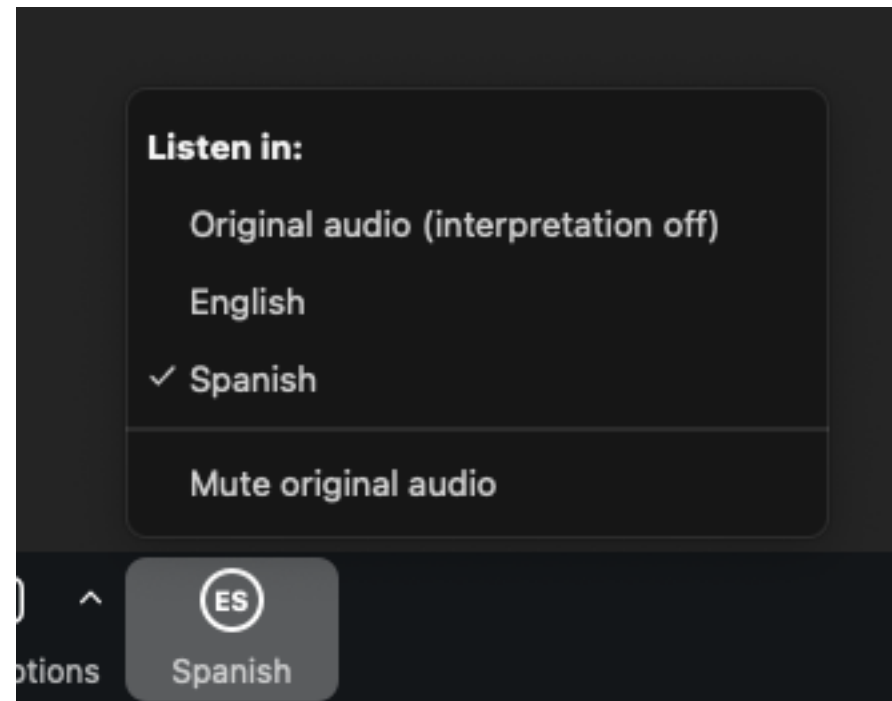


# Language Interpretation

Once the interpretation function is activated, click the globe icon at the bottom of your screen.



Then click Spanish to listen in that language. (To turn off interpretation, click "Original audio.")



# Presenters



**Toshiba Adams, PhD**  
College/University Professor  
Qualitative Researcher



**Lisa Garlie**  
Advancing Equity Steering  
Committee Member



**Ruth Schmidt**  
Executive Director, Wisconsin  
Early Childhood Association

# Early Educators' Voices: Why and How Did We Co-design Research That Translates to Systems Change?



Funded by



# Aims for Today's Presentation

- Introduce Collaborative Work in Wisconsin
- Overview/Results of Qualitative Research Study (2022)
- Introduce *Advancing Equity Steering Committee*
- Introduce Technical Assistance Opportunity / Q&A

**The WHAT?**



# Our Approach

Qualitative Research Design	Theoretical Framework	Recruitment	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Trustworthiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Storytelling Method</li><li>• Community-based Participatory Design</li><li>• Culturally Responsive Framework</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Critical Race Theory (CRT)</li><li>• Intersectionality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Marketing Flyer</li><li>• Social media</li><li>• Professional Listservs</li><li>• Snowball Method</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual Interviews (45)</li><li>• Second-round Interviews (20)</li><li>• Focus Groups (2)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Codes</li><li>• Emergent Themes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Member Checking</li></ul>



Group Center Executive Dir.

Tamara Johnson



Former Family CC Professional

Yimma Davila-Castro



Early Education Advocate

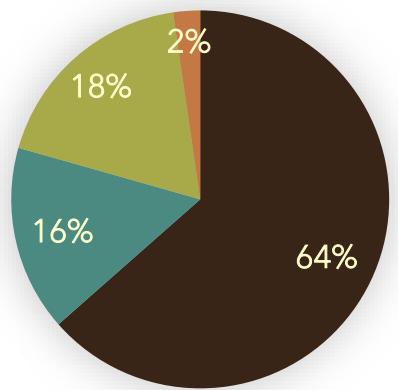
Sandie Thao

(Belansky, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2002)



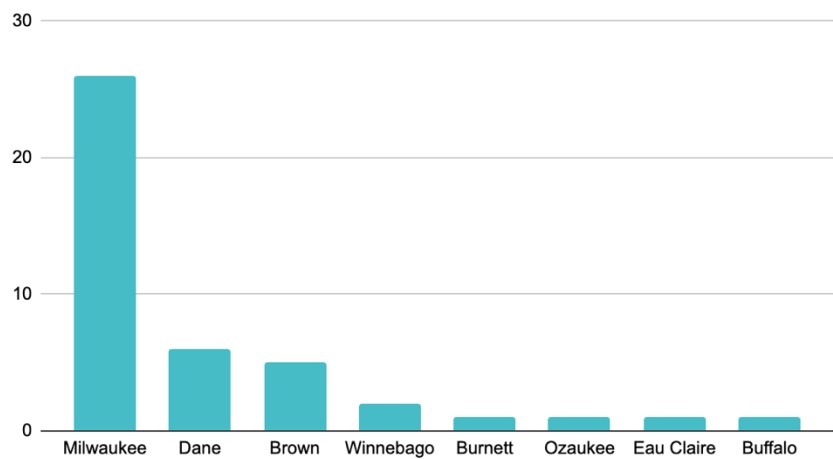
# Participant Data

Racial Identity

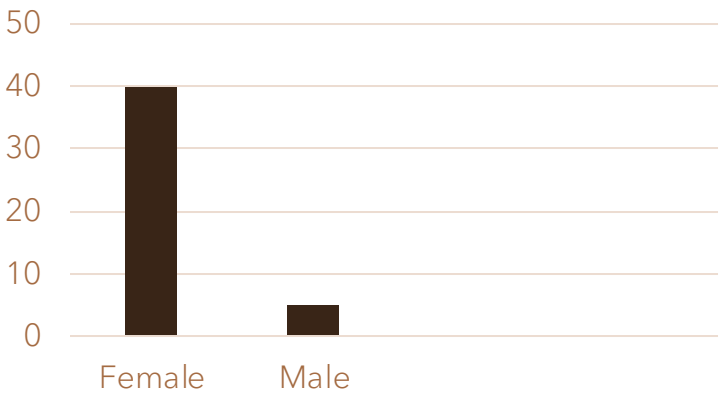


■ Black ■ Hispanic ■ Asian ■ Native American

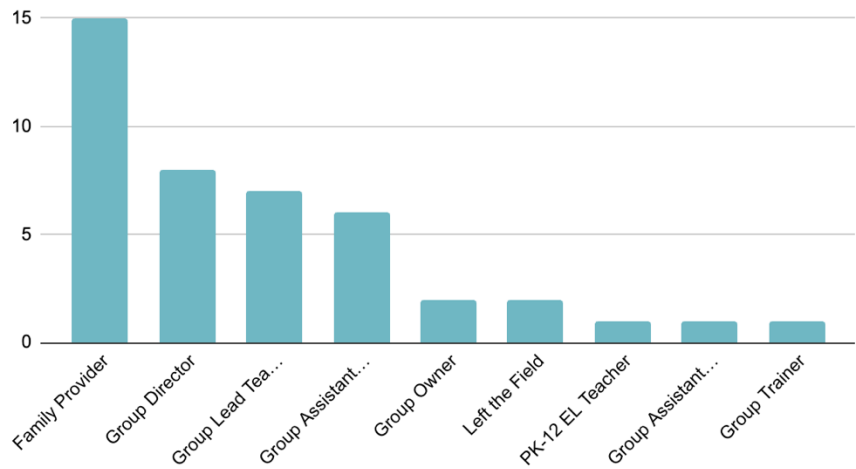
County



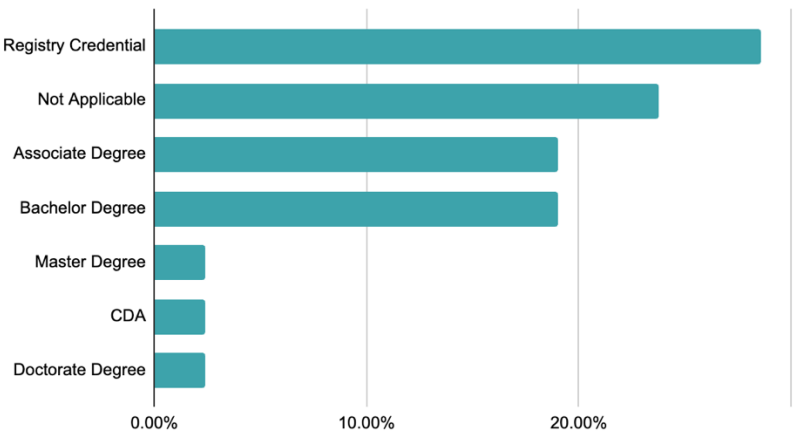
Gender Identity



Career Level



Education



## Key Research Findings - THEMES

"Living Paycheck to  
Paycheck"

"DCF is a Lot"

"Stuck at a Three  
Star"

"High Quality Work,  
High Quality  
People, Not High-  
Quality Pay"

"Mental Health  
Break"

"Seat at the Table"



# **Advancing Equity Steering Committee**



## Role

Dissect research findings

Develop policy recommendations

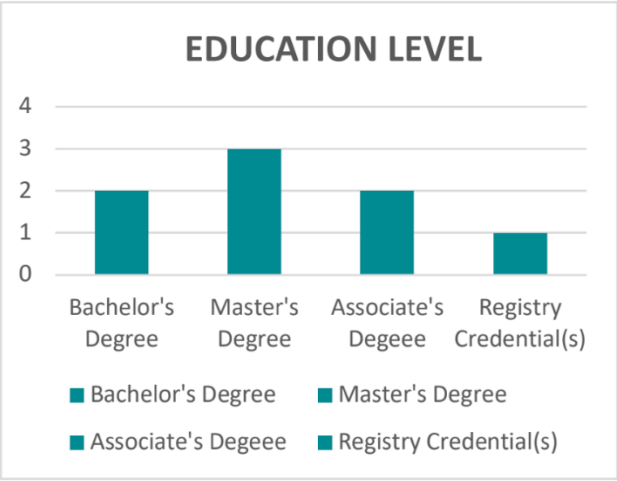
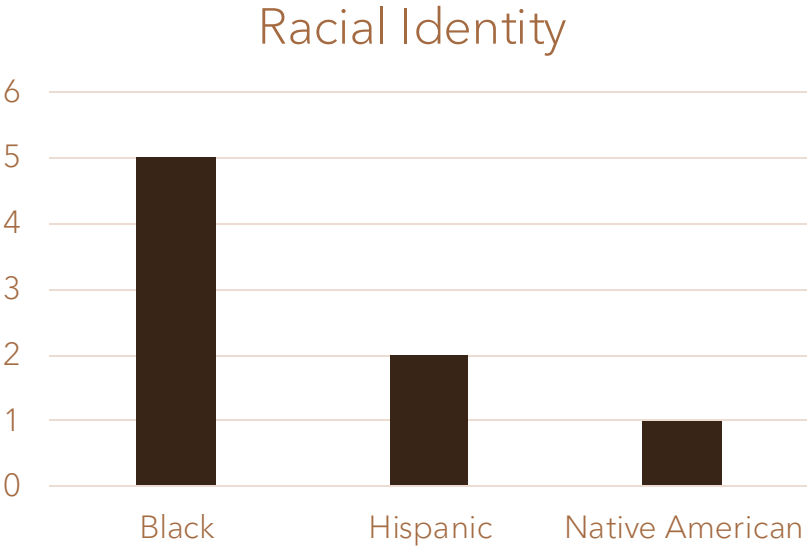
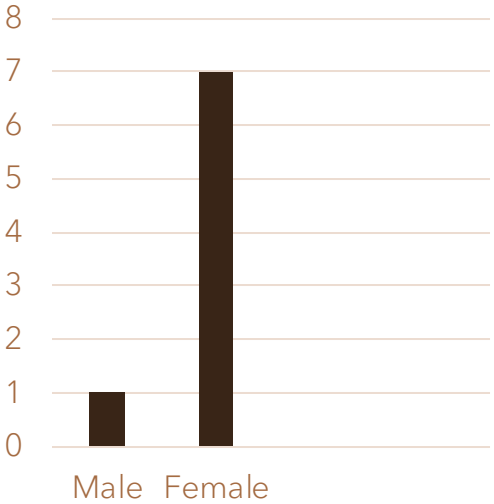
Present recommendations to Wisconsin's leaders, including legislatures

## Mission

Center the voices, experiences and intellectual capital of Black and Brown educators in WI

Help promote public policy that reflects the dignity, expertise and well-being of WI's early educators

# Committee's Composition



**YEARS IN THE FIELD**

Collectively, committee members have served between 8-30 years in the field.

# Methods

## Meetings (monthly)

- to review research findings and design policy recommendations
- to offer support to one another in a safe and healing space
- to build advocacy and leadership skills

## Presentations

- Local, state and national conferences

## Policy Recommendations

- Department of Children & Families: ratios, diversity in staff, culturally responsive trainings, Young Star criteria
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Association: diversity in staff, expanding understanding of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program,

## Building advocacy and leadership skills

- workshops/trainings: legislative structure, how a bill is enacted, advocacy & “telling our stories”, crafting letters to legislatures
- JFC hearings
- WECA's Advocacy Day, met with state legislatures to advocate for WI's ECE system and a state investment

## Follow-up with State Leaders - 2025

- update on policy recommendations

## Compensation

- attending monthly meetings
- additional planning meetings
- attending conferences (all expenses paid)

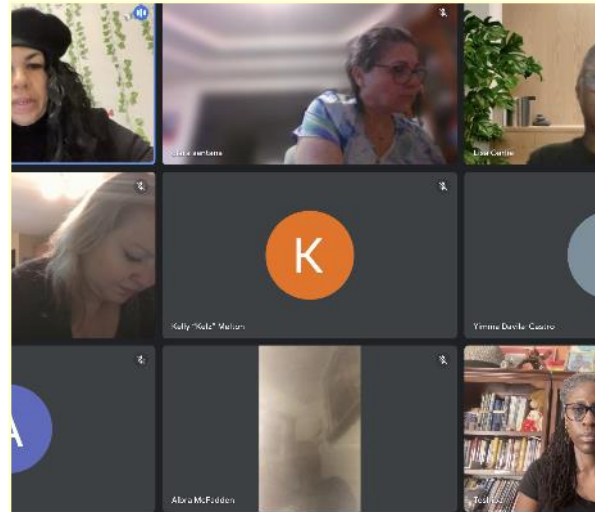
## Language Support

- Spanish translation and support available during each meeting, presentation and community event.

*This is a safe place for me. It's one of the few places I can go and honestly feel like I can say what needs to be said [about the ECE workforce] without fear of being reprimanded or punished for my words.*



THE LEGISLATURE



ADVOCACY



LEADERSHIP





NAEYC Policy Forum, Washington

CO-PRESENTATION



NAEYC PLI, New Orleans

CO-PRESENTATION



DCF Leaders, Milwaukee, WI

CO-PRESENTATION



WECA Board Meeting

CO-PRESENTATION



**SANKOFA**  
Consulting and Training

# “Seat at the Table”



Joined WECA's Board of Directors

“SEAT AT THE TABLE”



Joined WECA's Board of Directors

“SEAT AT THE TABLE”



Presenting to WECA's Board

“SEAT AT THE TABLE”





**SANKOFA**  
Consulting and Training

# Community Presence/Camaraderie



BCDI Gala - 2024

COMMUNITY PRESENCE



BCDI Gala - 2025

COMMUNITY PRESENCE

Gov. Evers List. Session



Gov. Evers List. Session



Meeting w/Legislatures



Speaking at Advocacy Day Rally



JCF Session



Writing Letters to Legislatures

Date \_\_\_\_\_

The Honorable (Legislator Name)  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

Dear The Honorable/Senator/Representative (Legislator Last Name),

**Paragraph 1-2:** Introduce yourself! Tell your Pitt story here. Questions you might want to address include:  
Why did you choose Pitt?  
What has that experience meant to you?  
How has it prepared you for life after college?  
For alumni, how has your Pitt education and experience benefited you?

**Paragraph 2-3:** State the importance of legislative support for increased funding for Pitt and other state-related universities. As applicable, share additional personal reasons that this support is important to you.

**Paragraph 4:** End on a clear, strong note that you are asking your legislator to support the release of state funds and future adequate and predictable funding for the University of Pittsburgh and public higher education and to urge their party's leadership to do the same. Remind them that supporting Pitt and the state related-universities keeps our best and brightest in Pennsylvania and promotes economic development. Encourage them to make it a top priority.

Don't forget... Thank them for their support/attention to the matter!

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Day Without Childcare



ADVOCACY/  
LEADERSHIP



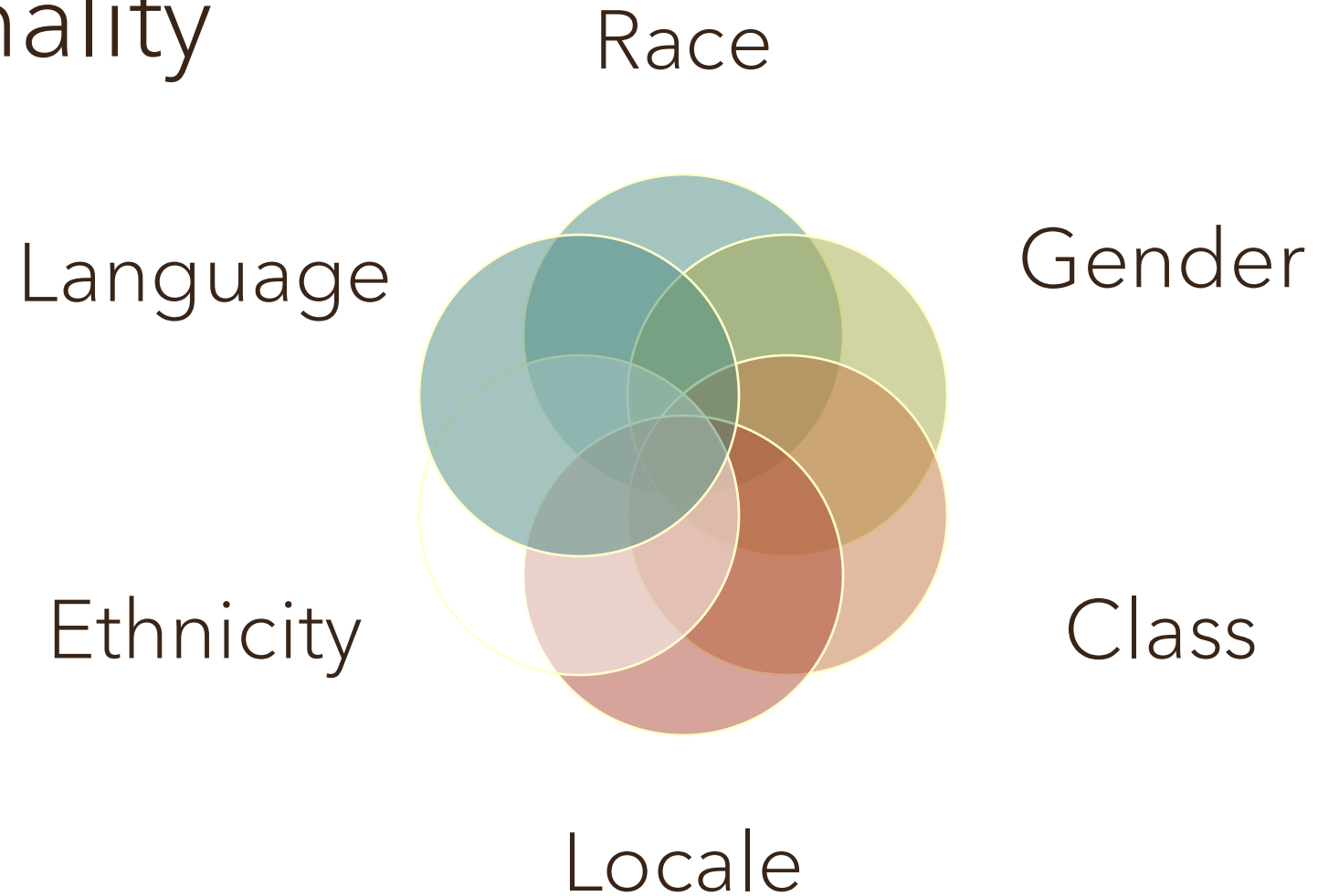




**The WHY?**



# Theory of Intersectionality



(Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000)

**The OUTCOMES...Thus Far...**

WECA	DCF	Committee (in general)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 steering committee affiliates now serve on the board of directors</li> <li>• Pre-licensors are diverse, including Black, Hispanic and Hmong individuals</li> <li>• Hosting information sessions for college/university leaders to inform them about the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship</li> <li>• Engages steering committee in advocacy activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensors are now required to have a background in early childhood education</li> <li>• Licensor positions are shared with the steering committee members on a regular basis, to gather a diverse pool of employees</li> <li>• Leadership has been actively listening to the concerns expressed by the steering committee, particularly around of race and poverty.</li> <li>• Invited steering committee members to attend several advisory sessions regarding YS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening of advocacy skills, speaking out against injustices related to the field <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local radio stations</li> <li>• Writing letters to legislatures</li> <li>• Inviting legislatures to steering committee meetings</li> <li>• Hosting on-site information sessions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- ✓ 2 articles in NAEYC Young Children Journal
- ✓ Blogs, posted on NAEYC's website
- ✓ Live webinar, tentatively scheduled for October 2025
- ✓ Hosting an information table at the NAEYC conference in November of 2025



## Voices of Practitioners

Voices of Practitioners: Teacher Research in Early Childhood Education is an online peer-reviewed journal in which teachers provide a critical perspective on their roles in children's development and learning.





# Forms of Technical Assistance

Trainings/workshops

1:1 Support

Webpage of Resources

Customized

Forms/Templates/Instructional  
Guides

Peer Learning Networks

Webinars (live or recorded)

**Funded by**





# SANKOFA

Consulting and Training

## ADVANCING EQUITY IN WISCONSIN'S EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE:

A Narrative Inquiry that Centers the  
Lived Experiences of Black and Brown  
Professionals in the Field

An Executive Summary  
by Dr. Toshiba Adams, Ph.D.

A study commissioned by  
**weca** Wisconsin Early  
Childhood Association  
An Affiliate of **naeyc**



## ADVANCING EQUITY STEERING COMMITTEE

### PROGRESS REPORT

2024/2025

PREPARED BY: TOSHIBA ADAMS, PHD

## HONORING THE VOICES OF HMONG EARLY EDUCATORS & CULTURAL CAREGIVERS IN WISCONSIN

An Executive Summary  
prepared by Dr. Toshiba Adams, Ph.D.



A study commissioned by **weca** Wisconsin Early  
Childhood Association

## RESEARCH STUDY SNAPSHOT HONORING THE VOICES OF HMONG EARLY EDUCATORS AND CULTURAL CAREGIVERS IN WISCONSIN

### OVERVIEW

In 2024, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) partnered with Dr. Toshiba Adams, Ph.D., and field researcher Sandie Thao to better understand the workforce experiences of early educators who identify as Hmong in Wisconsin – a population whose stories remain largely invisible in state workforce policy discussions, research narratives, and early education decision-making spaces (Broydoy, 2006). Study participants were recruited from January to December 2024. Hmong early educators shared their workforce stories, which illuminated the cultural knowledge they bring to their work and the ways that systemic inequities impact their well-being, professional advancement, and community leadership. By centering their voices, the research seeks to inform policies and practices that honor cultural caregiving, advance racial equity and strengthen early childhood systems.

### PARTICIPANT PROFILE

RACE: Hmong (9) and Hmong/African American (1)

AGE: 18-79 years

YEARS IN THE FIELD: 1-15 years

GENDER: All study participants identify as female

PRIMARY LANGUAGE: Lus Hmoob Dawb or White Hmong (8); Lus Hmoob

Ntsuab or Green Hmong (1) and Lus Aaskiv or English (1)

CAREGIVING ROLES: family child care-based educators (5); licensed group center

teacher (1); cultural caregivers (4)

### CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early educators of color bring distinct cultural knowledge, histories, and lived experiences to their work (Broydoy, 2006; Yosso, 2006), positioning them to critically examine workforce systems and offer informed recommendations for building equitable and culturally responsive early education policies and practices (Adams, 2023; London-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2006). Key aspects of Hmong cultural strength include strong familial and community bonds, interdependence among community members, and the preservation of spiritual and healing traditions through clan leaders and shamans (UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities, 2009). Despite this, the experiences of Hmong early educators – particularly women – remain largely invisible in early education workforce spaces (Broydoy, 2006).

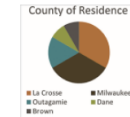
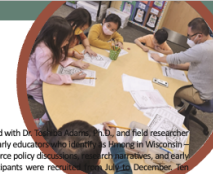
In Wisconsin, this exclusion is reflected in the limited availability of high-quality Hmong child care programs, the persistence of poverty-level wages, the lack of culturally responsive professional development and mental health supports and ongoing tensions between state licensing systems and Hmong cultural practices (Adams, 2023, 2025). It is further compounded by a failure to recognize the vital role of Hmong cultural caregivers – those who preserve the Hmong language, traditions, and identity through informal caregiving practices (Adams, 2025, forthcoming; Yahr, 2024).

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

Five core themes emerged from the qualitative interviews, including:

**"WE ARE HMONG, YOU KNOW?":** Early educators voiced a resistance to the dominance of Eurocentric curricular models that exclude or marginalize non-Western cultures, particularly describing tension between Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) curricula guidelines and Hmong values and histories.

**"IN THE HMONG COMMUNITY, WE'RE ALL RELATED":** Early educators discussed the important role of cultural caregiving, which often occurs outside of licensed systems due to a mistrust of child care licensing structures as well as a



## Qualitative Research Toolkit

Designing Equity-Centered, Community-Informed  
Qualitative Research in Early Education

PREPARED BY  
Toshiba Adams, PhD

**weca**  
Wisconsin Early  
Childhood Association



Funded by  
Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation

Toshiba Adams, PhD  
sankofaconsultingmke@gmail.com  
sankofaconsultingmke.com



# Thank You for Attending!

## Presenter Contact Information

- Toshiba Adams, Ph.D.  
[sankofaconsultingmke@gmail.com](mailto:sankofaconsultingmke@gmail.com)
- Lisa Garlie  
[lgarlie@yahoo.com](mailto:lgarlie@yahoo.com)
- Ruth Schmidt  
[ruschmidt@wisconsinearlychildhood.org](mailto:ruschmidt@wisconsinearlychildhood.org)



## COLLABORATION IN ACTION: WEBINAR 4

**August 21**  
**Advocacy Efforts: What Tools Are Needed to Drive Equitable Policy and Systems Change?**

Explore the range of tools and strategies that can empower advocates, organizations, and communities in driving equitable policy and systems change.

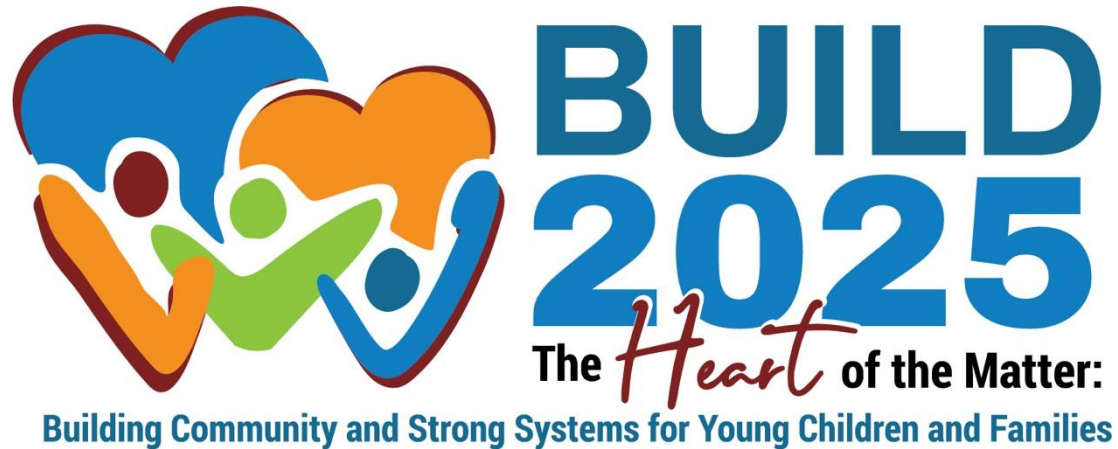


 **REGISTER NOW**

[BUILDInitiative.org/events](https://BUILDInitiative.org/events)



# BUILD25: Early Bird Registration Closing Soon!



REGISTER for BUILD25  
December 2-4, 2025  
Los Angeles, California

Early Bird Deadline: September 25