



**BUILD 2025 National Conference**  
Pre-Conference Sessions

Tuesday, December 2, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

**REGISTRATION CLOSED**

**102. Better for Whom? The Heart of the Matter when Reassessing QIS in a Shifting Landscape**

Quality Improvement Systems (QIS), designed to elevate program quality, align early childhood initiatives, and support children, families, and the workforce, have become a cornerstone in early care and education systems building. As states and communities navigate increasingly constrained fiscal environments, how will QIS evolve to prioritize the people--program leaders, providers, classroom educators, and coaches--who make quality possible? In this interactive pre-conference session, we'll take a system-wide look at how QIS are centering the well-being and professional growth of the individuals who engage in continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts. Together, we'll explore key questions:

- What does it look like for QIS to actively support the well-being and professional growth of the CCEE workforce?
- What data are essential to guide this work—and how do we use these data to understand how QIS are driving change and impact?
- How are states tracking the effectiveness of QIS in strengthening the who behind quality improvement?

We invite you to bring your successes, challenges, insights, and boldest new ideas. This is a chance to share and learn alongside peers working to shape more responsive, equitable, and sustainable QIS. To deepen this conversation, we will host two video calls in Fall 2025 to connect with session participants and refine the Pre-Conference session content based on shared priorities and questions.

*Presenters: Sarah Daily, Child Trends; Debi Mathias, The BUILD Initiative; Stephanie Myers, California Early Education Division; Sarah Neville-Morgan, Jena Smith, Laura Wallace, and Nykia Washington, Maryland State Department of Education; Teri Talan, McCormick Institute for Early Childhood*

### **103. Dying to Give Birth: *Voices Driving Maternal Health System Change***

I endured three C-sections in the span of seven years. Each time, my body was pushed to its limits, stitched back together with courage and prayers that I'd live to hold my children again. I will tell my story today—alive, resilient, and unafraid—because my voice is loud, clear, and heard. But tragically, this is not the reality for too many Black women in America, whose voices are often dismissed until it is too late.

This session places at its core the lived maternal health experiences of those most affected by systemic racism, limited access to quality care, and the chronic exclusion of their voices from decision-making. Participants will hear firsthand stories that illuminate how inequities manifest in real lives, then engage in structured dialogues to analyze the root causes and community-specific barriers. Guided networking activities will help attendees identify and connect with nontraditional allies—such as community health workers, employers, schools, local businesses, and faith-based organizations—who can play a pivotal role in improving maternal health outcomes. The discussion will equip participants with strategies to intentionally bring these partners into the conversation, broadening the circle of influence and creating a more inclusive vision for maternal well-being, and flipping the script on who gets to shape maternal health solutions.

This isn't just a session - it's a shared space for building alliances and exploring solutions that could save lives.

*Presenters: Melissa Franklin, Growth Mindset Communications Consulting; Omotunde Sowole-West, The BUILD Initiative*

### **104. Disrupting Whiteness: Towards Anti-Racist Early Learning Systems**

White supremacy culture is deeply embedded in our pedagogy, policies, workforce structures, and assumptions. It often marginalizes Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latiné, and other children and families of color, and keeps us from creating an equitable early childhood system. This culture must be named, examined, and disrupted if we are to serve all children and families effectively.

Join us for a critical, action-oriented dialogue about how practitioners, leaders, and agencies can take steps to dismantle this “whiteness” in early childhood systems. Examine case studies and real-world examples from early childhood education classrooms, teacher preparation programs, and state-level implementation efforts in Washington and other states, which highlight both the barriers and the promising practices already underway.

*Presenters: Jamie Cho, Seattle University; Ninderjit Gill, North Seattle College*

## **REGISTRATION CLOSED**

### **106. From Mixed-Delivery Patchwork to Mixed-Delivery System: What Will it Take in Your State or Community?**

A robust early learning system offers a variety of settings and program types: school-based preschool, center-based child care, family child care, and other services. Too often, however, the services provided are driven more by the structure of public funding streams than by the needs of children and families. Using state-funded pre-K as an example, we'll walk through the obstacles that often stand in the way of implementing a well-coordinated and adequately financed system. Through interactive exercises, we'll illuminate how state and local governance, aligned standards, and—especially—the design of funding mechanisms—all play a critical role. While no state or community has fully built the system we need, state leaders will share how they've solved pieces of this puzzle. Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of the most critical next steps for redesigning the funding of their mixed-delivery system, with children and families at its center.

*Presenters: Theresa Hawley and Sessy Nyman, The Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE); Nasha Patel, Watershed Advisors*

### **107. From Survival to Strategy: Leading with Courage in Unstable Systems**

Designed for systems leaders navigating political and economic pressures, burnout, and organizational instability, this interactive session explores what it means to lead with clarity and courage in chaotic environments. Participants will reflect on their leadership values, identify shared interests across divergent stakeholders, and practice making high-stakes decisions that don't sacrifice integrity. Built on principles of resilience, self-awareness, and systems thinking, this session will help leaders lead from values, not just reaction.

*Presenters: Danielle Davis, Liberated Development*

### **108. It's Your Story; You Should Tell It!**

Every one of us carries a powerful story—and it's time to share yours!

Join this dynamic, hands-on workshop to explore the art of storytelling as a tool for advocacy, connection, and change. Discover how your personal narrative can inspire action, influence decision-makers, and deepen trust with families and colleagues. Learn practical techniques to craft stories that move hearts and shift policies, all while building your confidence and sharpening your listening skills.

Led by LaDon Love, Executive Director of SPACES In Action, this session invites you to step into your voice and power. Through storytelling, SIA uplifts Black, brown, and immigrant families in DC to organize for child care, health, climate, and economic justice. Come ready to connect, reflect, and leave transformed—with the tools to tell your story and spark change in your community.

*Presenters: LaDon Love, SPACES in Action*

### **109. Show Me the Money: A Taxing Look at Funding Great Ideas**

You've got the perfect policy to support the babies in your community—high impact, research-backed, beloved by families. But then someone says: "This is too expensive!" or the dreaded: "Where's the money going to come from?" Don't panic—get prepared. This deep-dive session will demystify tax policy and revenue generation for early childhood advocates and system builders. Learn how to respond with confidence (and maybe a pie chart), explore strategies to fund what matters, and leave with the tools to turn fiscal frowns upside down. Warning: May cause spontaneous bursts of empowered advocacy.

*Presenters: Olivia Allen, Children's Funding Project; Amber Wallin, State Revenue Project*

### **110. Strengthening Family Connections: Building Social Capital through Whole Family Systems and Policy Change**

Building social capital - the connections families have with each other and their communities - is one of the most effective and affordable strategies for strengthening family well-being and preventing child welfare system involvement. Yet it remains one of the least understood by public systems. Research shows that when families are connected to others with shared experiences, trusted resources, and community-based support, they are better equipped to weather stress, advocate for their children, and avoid crises that lead to system involvement. Yet, too often, programs and services operate in silos, unintentionally isolating families or offering limited pathways for authentic relationship-building.

This interactive pre-conference session is designed for leaders ready to move upstream. It invites participants to explore how state systems can enhance family well-being by supporting social connections through peer support, community cohorts, and family-centered policies and practices. Grounded in the Protective Factors Framework, the session examines how state policies and practices can either strengthen or hinder social connection, and what is required to shift the course.

*Presenters: December Brakefield and Megan Waltz, Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Molly Sullivan, MNStory Collective*

### **111. Unlocking the Power of Data: Building Effective Early Childhood Systems in Uncertain Times**

This engaging and interactive discussion will focus on understanding and leveraging data to enhance early childhood systems. Whether you're a data user or a developer of data systems, this session is designed for you. Together, we'll explore how we can work together as a field to meet urgent data needs, safeguard critical information, and build resilient early childhood systems.

We'll examine together:

- How we can use data to advance equity for children, families, and the workforce - especially during times of change
- The data we risk losing, and how we can protect and safely use the information that matters most
- How can we align on shared priorities and collaborate across systems to strengthen the impact of our data efforts
- The strategies, infrastructure, and capacity needed to ensure data is accurate, accessible, and used effectively
- How can we trust the accuracy and availability of the data we rely on in today's dynamic landscape

Join us to collaborate, share insights, and empower our communities to foster positive outcomes for young children and their families.

*Presenters: Efren Aguilar, Early Childhood Ecosystems Transformation Accelerator UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities; Carlise King and Dale Richards, Child Trends; Kemi Naji, Aisha Ray, and Michelle Stover Wright, The BUILD Initiative*

## **REGISTRATION CLOSED**

### **112. Unsticking the System: Building a Sustainable, Equitable Early Childhood Workforce Through State Infrastructure and Cross-System Innovation**

A strong early childhood system begins with a qualified, stable, and respected workforce—yet most states struggle to create systems that support the recruitment, growth, retention, and compensation of early educators. This interactive session will explore how states can build sustainable, equitable early childhood workforce systems. Highlighting policy infrastructure, career ladders, compensation, higher education pathways, workforce registries, and data systems, the session will feature examples from Kansas, Illinois, New York, and Maine. Participants will reflect on their state context, identify key barriers and enablers, and engage in team planning to advance aligned, cross-sector workforce strategies that center educator voice, equity, and accountability.

Together we will explore:

- How research can catalyze change – both KCCTO and NY PDI did comprehensive workforce studies that helped to fuel their system building.
- How to align higher education, credentialing, and career lattices
- The role of KCCTO and the NY Professional Development Institute in implementing professional development, navigation, individual educator plans, scholarships, and career ladders.
- Compensation initiatives, including wage supports and parity pilots.
- Transitions and supports for students and professionals entering and advancing in the field.
- The integration of workforce registries and data systems to inform policy and track impact.
- Meaningful provider and educator engagement in the design of workforce systems.

*Presenters: Dona Anderson, New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute; Sherry Cleary; Bronwyn Fees and Patty Peschel, Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities; Sherri Killins Stewart; Tara Williams, Maine Office of Children and Families*

### **113. Using Design Thinking as a Tool to Create Resilient Strategies and Communities**

State and local leaders are seeking durable solutions to pervasive problems in early childhood systems. New tools can inspire a way forward to more resilient fixes. Design Thinking is a methodology that engages those most impacted by the early childhood system in the design of solutions that improve their daily experiences. This pre-conference session will bring in expert Design Thinking professionals and highlight how Michigan and other states have utilized Design Thinking to address problems in collaboration with communities, focusing on the needs of end-users, including families, children, and healthcare providers. Participants will learn about Design Thinking tools and be given the opportunity to practice applying them.

*Presenters: Joan Blough, Early Childhood Investment Corporation; David Cogswell, The Holding Co.; Sara Mickelson, Consultant*