

Conference Keynote Speaker



Beth Van Meeteren, MEd

Director of the Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education

A veteran early childhood teacher of 24 years, Beth taught for 18 years in a rural school and six years in an urban setting at DeVries's Freeburg Early Childhood Program. In the process, she developed and piloted constructivist early childhood curriculum focusing on early STEM. Beth holds a master's degree in literacy and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. She currently serves as the Director of the Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education for the state of Iowa where she continues to research creativity within early STEM experiences, and design professional learning in early STEM. VanMeeteren publishes regularly in practitioner journals and has authored two chapters in the 2016 Teachers College Press publication, *STEM Learning with Young Children: Inquiry Teaching with Ramps and Pathways*, a chapter in Lyn English and Tamara Moore's Springer publication, *Early Engineering Learning* and is a co-author of a chapter in the upcoming *Handbook of STEM Education Research*. She has been featured in webinars for the National Academy of Engineering, Applied Engineering Management, and for Engagement Strategies.

Keynote: Cultivating Curiosity and Creativity in Young Children: STEM on Their Own Terms



Creative and innovative thinkers are increasingly valuable in STEM fields where new technologies are being engineered. Recent research in brain development is identifying the early years of learning as critical in building the brain for creativity and innovation. Children are already curious about what is in the world and how it works. This session will examine early education environments that cultivate this curiosity and creativity to raise the next generation of inventors.

Session 1: Pattern Blocks and Puzzle Frames



Explore a new way to use the pattern blocks available in many high-quality early childhood classrooms. These puzzle frames challenge children as they develop spatial thinking that is essential in STEM disciplines. As they learn, they build cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control.

Session 2: Exploring Light and Shadow



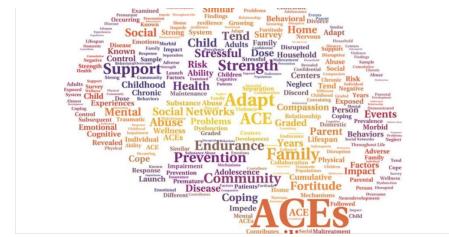
Come learn how light and shadow experiences can be designed to nurture engineering habits of mind and spatial thinking as children manipulate light sources, screens, and other materials to produce a specific effect.

CLOSING KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Mary Crnobori, PhD, BACA

Coordinator of Trauma-Informed Schools
Department of Student Support Services
Metro Nashville Public Schools



Dr. Mary Crnobori is the Coordinator of Trauma-Informed Schools for Metro Nashville Public Schools. She holds a PhD in Special Education from Vanderbilt University and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. She is dedicated to equipping educators with information and strategies they need to promote compassionate school environments that support healthy development and school success for all. From a collective impact lens, she developed and drives implementation of a system-wide approach to raising awareness about the impacts of childhood adversity on school success and lifelong health and wellness; and guides and supports implementation of whole-school and individualized trauma-informed school practices that are healing centered and foster resilience and empowerment. Dr. Crnobori has extensive experience with classroom teaching, district administration, speaking, consulting, research, and behavior analysis. She has co-authored multiple journal articles and book chapters and the book *Managing Challenging Behaviors in Schools: Research-Based Strategies That Work*, and has given a TEDx talk about trauma-informed schools. Most importantly, she gets her greatest joy from her role as parent of two sons who attend public schools.

Closing Keynote: Planting Powerful Seeds of Resilience in a High-Stress World: Compassion-, Connection-, and Regulation-Rich Classrooms that Support Success

The impacts of toxic stress and trauma that many students bring to today's classroom can interfere with healthy development and social emotional well-being and impact school readiness and success for early learners. Fortunately, there are proven ways for educators to reach *all students by promoting connection and supporting well-regulated brains to unleash and optimize the curious learning engines that young students naturally possess*. In this inspirational closing session we explore practical (and fun!) strategies and resources early childhood educators can use to create positive and healthy classroom environments that promote resilience and build strong, regulated brains and happy, healthy students and teachers alike.

Breakout Session: The Role of Mindfulness to Promote Social Emotional Health for Students (and Teachers!)

Teachers face a particular challenge in creating trauma-informed early learning environments that support social emotional health when they are burned out themselves or struggling to manage a wide array of student needs including toxic stress and trauma –often with inadequate support. Fortunately, classroom-based mindfulness encompasses a host of promising, evidence-informed strategies grounded in a strong body of neurobiological science to capitalize on the incredible neuroplasticity of the young brain and help students develop the ability to self-regulate their attention, emotions, and behavior. Mindfulness, or the ability to be present with curiosity about what is happening in each moment, or to develop awareness about what's happening inside one's own body, is important for healthy early childhood development and classroom success. Arguably, mindfulness is even more important for teachers as they work to reflectively understand challenging student behaviors, not take them personally, and respond calmly and effectively rather than reacting punitively. Simple and feasible mindfulness practices designed to benefit teachers and young students alike will be shared in this presentation.