Concurrent Sessions

11:00 AM – 12:15 PM

Understanding Diversity: An Introduction

Moderator and Panelists share importance of understanding diversity from the perspectives of race/ethnicity. Engaged participant discussions on the impact of negative bias in social environments, police shootings, and White privilege. “Un-discussable” issues dealing with race relations are addressed.

Learn how to discuss racial and ethnic diversity without being offensive. Diversity has always been a difficult topic. There have been various college and special programs created to explain diversity over the years. However, many do not address the un-discussable topics or real life, practical issues. It is imperative that frank discussions become a part of everyday conversations.

At the end of this session, participants should better understand the real meaning of diversity (particularly as it pertains to race/ethnicity) and how it impacts our lives; learn barriers to exploring racial/ethnic diversity and tips to building a culture of influence; obtain answers to issues in today’s current events; learn ways to respond in situations presenting negative behaviors.

Panelists: Dr. Arthur L. Brewton, Director, Piedmont Community Action Head Start and Early Head Start; Cherokee County First Steps Board; Rebecca Williams Agee, Adolescent Health Coordinator and Personal Responsibility Education Program Grant Coordinator, DHEC, Columbia; German Wright, Senior Pastor, Daily Living Ministries Christian Church and staff member of Focus Living Ministries, Cayce

Solving the Human Capital Crisis in South Carolina

Release of the report from the Early Childhood Taskforce, a partnership between business and education stakeholders supported by the South Carolina Council on Competitiveness and which advocates for the importance of early childhood education and school readiness programs in the first five years of life. Included in the report are profiles of four successful community coalitions: Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative (Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester), STARTSmart Initiative (Florence), Spartanburg Academic Movement (Spartanburg) and Beaufort County Early Childhood Coalition (Beaufort). Come hear from representatives of each coalition about their work to improve access to resources and evidence based programs for the children and families of their communities.

Panelists: Dr. Floyd Creech, Director of STARTSmart Initiative; Fred Leyda, Director of the Beaufort County Alliance for Human Services and Facilitator for Beaufort County Early
S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) in Early Childhood

The acronyms “STEM” and “STEAM” have become ubiquitous in K-12 education as a means of preparing children for a competitive, global workforce. The good news is children are “STEAM ready” from birth, with an innate curiosity to explore the world around them. Parents, caregivers, and early childhood practitioners have critical roles to play in providing children with opportunities to explore, investigate, and create while developing foundational skills in mathematical thinking, inquiry, creativity, and problem solving.

Panelists: Thomas T. Peters, Ed.D. Executive Director, SC Coalition for Mathematics & Science (SCCMS); Sandra M. Linder, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Early Childhood Mathematics Education, Eugene T. Moore College of Education, Clemson University; Nichole Myles, Executive Director, Children's Museum of the Lowcountry

Promoting Equity with Supports for Social-emotional Development

When children struggle with behavioral/mental health needs, responses often are exclusion and blame—not productive or proactive. Panelists on this crucial topic provide an update on current programs at the state and local levels to address the needs of families with young children with behavioral/mental health needs. At the state level, information on personnel development and technical assistance in early childhood environments will be presented. The panel will also address this topic on the local level, highlighting “on the ground” efforts using inclusion supports and practices to assist children with these needs. The focus will be on supports for quality learning environments at home, in child care settings, and the community at large.

Panelists: Amity Buckner, Executive Director of Pickens County First Steps; Amy Holbert, Executive Director of Family Connection SC; Heather Googe, Director of the South Carolina Child Care Inclusion Collaborative; and Jenny May, Coordinator of the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

Early Childhood Allies in the Latino Community
This session will describe programs within the early childhood community in South Carolina whose aim is building partnerships and allies with Latino Communities across the state. Participants will come away with deeper understandings of what it means to be allied with culturally diverse communities through learning SC specific statistics, best practices for child care centers, and strategies when working with Latino families.

Panelists: Lydia Carnesale, Quality Coach, SC Child Care Resource and Referral Network; Virginia Vedilago, PASOS; Adrienne Troy-Frazier, Executive Director, Berkeley County First Steps

**Quality Counts: Spartanburg Community Collaborations Spur Growth and Expansion**

Quality Counts has experienced both grow and expansion this past year. Strong community collaborations including Spartanburg Academic Movement, Spartanburg School Districts 3 and 7, and the Mary Black Foundation, who have worked together to positively impact early childhood in Spartanburg County. The impacts include capacity building programs for the early childhood workforce and intentionally improving program practices which can improve services and create positive outcomes for children.

Panelists: Ida Thompson, Spartanburg Academic Movement; Linda Lawson, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System; Keisha Gray, The Mary Black Foundation; Dr. Julie Hartman, Palmetto Leadership Academy

2:00 PM – 3:15 PM

**Conversation with the Keynoter**

Equity and inclusion for all begins with the education of our youngest citizens. Join our keynote speaker Dr. Walter Gilliam for a more in-depth discussion of how the early childhood community can promote high quality and social-emotional supports for all our children in their very first classrooms. Your questions asked and answered!

**Real Fathers are Dads!**

There is a father absence crisis in America. According to the U.S. census bureau, 24 million children (1 out of 3) live without their biological father in the home. Consequently, there is a father factor in nearly all social ills facing America today (National Fatherhood Initiative, https://www.fatherhood.org/fatherhood-data-statistics, 2017). Any man can father a child but our children need dads actively involved in their daily lives from the very beginning. Learn how to advocate for dads and navigate the sometimes complex and daunting legal system. Talk with a fatherhood practitioner who helps men and women ensure that their children have positive relationships with both parents, learn from SC Child Support Services about new supports they
are providing for non-custodial parents, and hear the latest about federal government programs supporting fatherhood.

Panel: Michael Gaskin, Executive Director, Greenwood County First Steps; Phillip Gilliard, Veterans and Outreach Coordinator, Office of Congressman Tom Rice; and Gary Gamble, Director of Operation Work, SCDSS Division of Child Support Services.

Supporting Parents as their Child’s First Teacher: Universal Messaging through Technology

Parenting in the Information Age provides virtually unlimited access to research on how to support your young child’s learning and development. So much so, that what’s out there can be overwhelming and hard to digest for many busy, stressed parents. Thankfully, several initiatives have combined best practices for child development with technology-based messaging platforms – videos, Apps, and social media – to create universal messages of how to engage infants, toddlers and preschoolers in nurturing, serve and return interactions and provide them with stimulating environments to play and explore, all in smartly designed, bite-sized packages that parents and caregivers can consume quickly and easily put into practice as part of their daily routine.

Panelists: Chris Boggiano, Co-founder, VersaMe; Kayla Stewart, MSW, ReadyRosie; LaKisha Bowman, Program Specialist, Save the Children, Early Steps to School Success Program; Annie Walters, Community Engagement Specialist, Save the Children

Supporting Families of Homeless Children

According to the 2016 Point-In-Time Report for South Carolina Coalition for the Homeless, it was estimated that 5,050 persons experienced homelessness in which 34 percent of those interviewed were unsheltered, 36 percent were staying in emergency shelters, and 30 percent were staying in transitional housing. A total of 384 families were identified as experiencing homelessness in 2016. This included 759 children under the age of 18. A panel of experts will share information and strategies on how their agencies are addressing the needs of young homeless children.

Panelists: Jon Artz, Vice President, Homeless No More; Christi L. Jeffcoat, SC Voucher Program Manager, Division of Early Care and Education, South Carolina Department of Social Services;
Learn how School Readiness Tax Credits can be used to drive quality improvement in early childhood classrooms in South Carolina. Participants will hear how Louisiana’s creation of the tax credit fundamentally changed the child care provider landscape through rewarding educational attainment for early childhood teachers and directors without increasing parent fees.

Panelists: Latifah Long, Director, Columbia Federal Child Development Center/Bright Horizons Family Solutions; Naomi Lett /Senior Director, Public Policy, United Way Association of South Carolina; Bryan Boroughs, Vice President and General Counsel, Institute for Child Success

Early Childhood Leadership Discussion: National Director’s Credential Experience

Research shows that child care center directors have a significant impact on the quality within the center. In an effort to assist child care center directors who participate in the First Steps 4K program to build and sustain quality improvements throughout their center, a cohort of child care directors were selected to participate in the first South Carolina Cohort of the McCormick Center’s AIM 4 Excellence National Director’s Credential. In this session, you will be able to learn more about the credential, hear these directors’ stories of their experience obtaining the credential, and how they will apply what they learned in their centers!

Panelists: Kristine Jenkins, Lead First Steps 4K Regional Coordinator, Jeanne Voltz-Loomis, and Sharon Burton, First Steps 4K Regional Coordinators and 4K Child Care Center Directors