



**New Mexico
Early Childhood**
ASSOCIATION

Annual Conference Program

August 28 – 29, 2026 | Embassy Suites Albuquerque



Rooted to Rise

Expanding Child Care, Elevating Educators

Venue Map

Sierra Ballroom

- How to Cultivate Your Playful Brain
- Aprendizaje Activo en la Primera Infancia
- GIGGLES & WIGGLES! It's Circle Time

Sandia 1-5

- All Friday programming
- Saturday Welcome (9-9:45 am)
- Saturday Lunch (12:30-1:30 pm)
- Saturday Afternoon Keynote (1:30-2:30 pm)
- Saturday Closing Session (4:00-4:15 pm)

Sandia 6-8

- You Can Learn Everything Outside
- Taking Learning Outdoors
- CLASSroom Connections

Ocotillo Ballroom

- Reigniting the Joy of Teaching
- How to Trust the Child
- Outdoor Equity

Check In

Restrooms →

Pre-Function

Sage Board

Business Ce



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Early Childhood
Education & Care Department

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EXHIBITORS





New Mexico Early Childhood ASSOCIATION

About Us

The New Mexico Early Childhood Association (NMECA) is the statewide professional and trade association representing early childhood providers and professionals.

We strengthen New Mexico's early childhood system by advocating for effective policies, developing and connecting leaders, and elevating the professionals who help young children, families, and communities thrive.

What We Do

- **Advocacy and Policy Engagement:** Represents early childhood providers at the State Legislature, educates policymakers, and keeps members informed about laws, regulations, and funding changes.
- **Professional and Leadership Development:** Offers monthly peer-learning circles, webinars, workshops, and an annual conference for educators, administrators, owners, and emerging leaders.
- **Connection and Professional Support:** Creates opportunities for providers across early education, home visiting, and early intervention to collaborate, share solutions, access resources, and celebrate excellence in the field.



[Learn More About
Membership](#)



WORKFORCE SURVEY



Help shape more accessible higher education pathways for New Mexico's early childhood workforce.

AGAVE Alliance is listening to your educational experience, professional knowledge, and the barriers you face.

YOUR INPUT CAN HELP CREATE



ACCESS



COLLEGE CREDIT



PATHWAYS

Complete the survey for a chance to win one of twenty \$50 Visa gift cards.



[Take the survey.](#)

Friday, August 28

8:00 am – 9:00 am

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Check In & Breakfast

Start Leadership Day with a full breakfast and time to connect with early childhood leaders from across New Mexico. Please check in when you arrive to receive your attendee name badge and conference bag before settling in for breakfast, networking, and the day's sessions.

Sponsored by:  **AGAVE**
ALLIANCE
Advancing Growth and
Visualizing Education

9:00 am – 9:30 am

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Welcome to Leadership Day: Rooted to Rise

Español

Speakers:

- Barbara Luna Tedrow, President of NMECA
- Rick Tedrow, Conference Emcee

Kick off Leadership Day by coming together with early childhood leaders from across New Mexico for a day focused on learning, growth, and connection. This opening session will set the tone for the day while sharing NMECA's role in supporting, strengthening, and advocating for the early childhood field.

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Lead on Purpose, Influence that Changes Everything

Español

Speaker:

- Regina Miller, Early Childhood Expert & Professional Speaker

Leadership is one of the greatest privileges and one of the greatest challenges. Regina will invite leaders to reconnect with their passion and lead with greater intention through compelling stories and practical strategies. Attendees will leave with renewed clarity, energy, and a deeper commitment to leading with purpose, because when leaders thrive, schools and workplaces thrive.

Friday, August 28

10:30 am – 10:45 am

Conference Lobby

Networking Break & Visit Exhibitors

Grab some coffee, take a quick phone call, and make sure to visit our many exhibitors to learn more about programs and products that can help your early childhood business.

10:45 am – 11:45 am

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

The Courage to Save Childhood: 14 Commitments for Leaders

Español

Speaker:

- Jennifer McCarville, Save Childhood Movement

Children have not changed, but the expectations placed on them have. In this inspiring session, Jennifer will introduce 14 commitments leaders can make to protect the essential experiences of childhood. Participants will explore how developmentally appropriate practices, meaningful relationships, play, emotional safety, and trust in the learning process help children thrive. Educators and program leaders will leave encouraged to examine the pressures affecting today's children and equipped to champion learning environments where childhood is honored, protected, and allowed to unfold at its own pace.

11:45 am – 12:15 pm

Conference Lobby

Networking Break & Visit Exhibitors

Grab some coffee, take a quick phone call, and make sure to visit our many exhibitors to learn more about programs and products that can help your early childhood business.

12:15 pm – 1:15 pm

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Lunch

Chicken Piccata; chefs' selection of starch, seasonal vegetables.

Sponsored by:



Friday, August 28

12:45 pm – 1:15 pm

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Remarks from Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky

Español

Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky will share brief remarks and highlight new regulations affecting early childhood programs and professionals across the state. Attendees will hear timely updates directly from ECECD leadership and learn what these changes may mean for their programs.

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Shared Challenges, Shared Solutions: An Open Conversation with ECECD

Español

Join ECECD Leadership for a conversation about the issues affecting early childhood programs across New Mexico. Providers will have an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and share how licensing, regulations, and state policies are being applied in their programs and communities. With new regulations recently introduced, this session will create space for ECECD to explain the “why,” providers to share what is happening on the ground, and both sides to leave with a stronger understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

2:15 pm – 3:15 pm

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Child Care Facility Loans: Next Round Preview

Español

Speaker:

- C. Sandro Tonini, New Mexico Finance Authority

Get an early look at the next application round for the Child Care Facility Revolving Loan Fund before it opens September 1. Sandro Tonini will explain what to expect, including eligible facility construction, renovation, and expansion projects, available financing, and application resources. This session is ideal for child care providers considering a major investment in their facilities, businesses, or communities.

Friday, August 28

3:15 pm – 3:30 pm Conference Lobby **Networking Break & Visit Exhibitors**

Grab some coffee, take a quick phone call, and make sure to visit our many exhibitors to learn more about programs and products that can help your early childhood business.

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm Sandia Ballroom 1-5 **From Investment to Impact: Understanding New Mexico's Child Care Budget**

Español

Speaker: Kelly Klundt, New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee

How is universal child care funded in New Mexico, and what informs the recommendations that shape the state budget? This session will provide an inside look at New Mexico's child care funding structure and the factors legislative staff and policymakers consider when evaluating investments and developing budget recommendations.

With child care revenue now fully connected to universal child care, providers and industry leaders need to understand how funding decisions are made and how outcomes, accountability, access, quality, and long-term sustainability influence those decisions. Participants will explore how the early childhood industry can demonstrate the value of continued investment while protecting high-quality care and preserving a range of options that reflect the diverse needs and preferences of New Mexico families.

4:45 pm – 6:00 pm Sierra Ballroom **Networking Reception hosted by Kaplan Early Learning Company**

Join us for a casual networking reception hosted by Kaplan Early Learning Company with hosted appetizers and one hosted drink.

Saturday, August 29

8:00 am – 9:00 am

Conference Lobby

Check In

Begin Professional Development Day by checking in to receive your attendee name badge and conference bag before heading into the day's sessions. *Please note that a full breakfast will not be served today, so we encourage attendees to eat before arriving at the conference.*

9:00 am – 9:45 am

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Welcome & Early Childhood Legacy Award

Español

Begin Professional Development Day with a warm welcome as we gather early childhood professionals from across New Mexico for a day of learning, connection, and practical inspiration.

This opening session will set the tone for the day and celebrate the important work happening across New Mexico's early childhood field. We will also present the **Early Childhood Legacy Award** recognizing an individual whose leadership, dedication, and lasting contributions have strengthened early childhood programs, supported families, and helped elevate the professionals who serve young children every day.

9:45 am – 10:00 am

Conference Lobby

Networking Break & Visiting with Exhibitors

Grab some coffee, take a quick phone call, and make sure to visit our many exhibitors to learn more about programs and products that can help your early childhood business.

Saturday, August 29

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Sierra Ballroom

How to Cultivate Your Playful Brain

Speaker: Paige Abrams, UNM Family Development Program

Discover how play can help both adults and children become more curious, connected, creative, and emotionally regulated. In this interactive session, participants will explore the science behind play and learn practical strategies for creating environments that encourage experimentation, problem-solving, and joyful engagement. Through hands-on experiences with loose parts, you'll discover how simple, open-ended materials can spark imagination, strengthen relationships, support self-regulation, and invite deeper learning. You'll leave with science-backed tools and adaptable ideas you can use with yourself and the children and families you serve.

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Sandia Ballroom 6-8

You Can Learn Everything Outside

Español

Speaker: Jennifer McCarville, Save Childhood Movement

The outdoors is a rich classroom where children can move, wonder, create, take risks, and solve problems. Jennifer McCarville will explore how outdoor play supports learning across every area of development, from math and science to creativity, collaboration, and self-regulation. Participants will leave with practical ideas for following children's curiosity and creating meaningful outdoor learning experiences.

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Shared Challenges, Shared Solutions Recap

Speaker: Barbara Tedrow, NMECA President

This recap will highlight key updates to New Mexico's early childhood regulations and summarize the questions, concerns, and insights shared during Friday's conversation with ECECD leadership. Whether or not you attended the original session, you will leave with a clearer understanding of the changes and what they may mean for early childhood programs.

Saturday, August 29

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Ocotillo Ballroom

Reigniting the Joy of Teaching

Speaker: Regina Miller, Early Childhood Expert

Participants will learn how to overcome burnout, reconnect with their "why" and return to their classrooms with renewed enthusiasm and ready to make a lasting difference in the lives of children. This training will offer hands-on group activities and a question-and-answer session.

Sponsored by:  **KidKare**
by Minute Menu™

11:00 am – 11:15 am

Conference Lobby

Networking Break & Visiting with Exhibitors

Grab some coffee, take a quick phone call, and make sure to visit our many exhibitors to learn more about programs and products that can help your early childhood business.

11:15 am – 12:15 pm

Sierra Ballroom

Aprendizaje Activo en la Primera Infancia

Español

English Interpretation

Speaker: Yolanda Borrás, Founder of I'm Bilingual

En esta sesión, los participantes podrán apreciar cómo la música y el movimiento pueden integrarse de manera natural en experiencias de aprendizaje para la educación preescolar, incluyendo el desarrollo del lenguaje, las matemáticas, las ciencias naturales, el aprendizaje socioemocional, el desarrollo motor y la identidad cultural, sin reemplazar lo que ya realizan en sus aulas y programas.

Estas estrategias no solo favorecen el aprendizaje de los niños, sino que también ayudan a que el proceso de enseñanza en el preescolar sea más dinámico, participativo y agradable para los educadores.

Saturday, August 29

11:15 am – 12:15 pm

Sandia Ballroom 6–8

Taking Learning Outdoors: Thoughtful Design and Meaningful Practice Outdoors

Speakers:

- Sondra Carpenter, Christina Kent Early Childhood Center
- Dylan Meier, Community Playthings

Explore how outdoor learning can support children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development while creating new opportunities for deeper engagement, problem-solving, and self-directed play. This session will highlight practical design principles for outdoor classrooms, including space planning, sensory-rich environments, materials, supervision, weather considerations, and how outdoor spaces can evolve over time. Participants will also learn from a real-life case study and leave with ideas for creating outdoor learning environments that are intentional, flexible, and meaningful for children and educators.

Sponsored by:



11:15 am – 12:15 pm

Ocotillo Ballroom

How to Trust the Child – A Lesson from the Bluey Episode “Space”

Speaker: Samuel Hufnagel, LCSW, Collaborative Counseling 505

Join to watch an episode of Bluey together and reflect on what it can teach us about how to get out of children's way, follow their lead, and trust their 'inner healing intelligence.' We will explore concepts of CPP/play therapy, home visiting, and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health to enhance the learning from the episode. Then participants will have time to reflect on what they saw, as well as discuss how they can apply what they've learned to their practice.

Saturday, August 29

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm
Networking Lunch

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Refuel midday with green chile chicken enchiladas paired with borracho beans and spanish rice.

Sponsored by: 
**Just Right
Reader**

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

START YOUR ENGINES! Active Play Sparks Brain Growth

Español

Speaker: Sharron Krull, Play Expert

Ready, Set, Go! Jump start your body and brain as we get moving. Participate in cooperative group games, dance to the music, and use simple equipment to promote motor skill development, increase physical activity and boost cognition. Discover how the brain works, what affects brain development, and how children learn best.

2:30 pm – 2:45 pm

Conference Lobby

Networking Break & Visiting with Exhibitors

Grab some coffee, take a quick phone call, and make sure to visit our many exhibitors to learn more about programs and products that can help your early childhood business.

Saturday, August 29

2:45 pm – 3:45 pm

Sierra Ballroom

GIGGLES & WIGGLES! It's Circle Time

Español

Speaker: Sharron Krull, Play Expert

Join in this engaging and participatory workshop demonstrating a variety of techniques and props for presenting music, movement, finger plays, name games, stories, puppets, and creative activities. Have fun, get inspired, and acquire lots of new ideas to make group time more active and enjoyable for the children and you!

2:45 pm – 3:45 pm

Sandia Ballroom 6-8

CLASSroom Connections: Small Interactions, Big Impact

Speakers:

- Valerie Cervantes, CREC
- Laura Sala, CREC

Every interaction matters. Join us for an engaging professional learning experience that helps educators move beyond viewing CLASS® as simply an observation tool and embrace it as a framework for reflection, professional growth, and meaningful instructional improvement. Throughout this interactive session, participants will explore how CLASS scores tell the story of everyday interactions and learn practical, evidence-based strategies for strengthening teacher-child relationships, increasing student engagement, and inspiring deeper learning. Together, we'll discover that improving CLASS is not about increasing scores—it's about intentionally strengthening daily interactions that build trusting relationships, create engaging learning experiences, and support every child's success.

2:30 pm – 2:45 pm

Conference Lobby

Networking Break & Visiting with Exhibitors

Grab some coffee, take a quick phone call, and make sure to visit our many exhibitors to learn more about programs and products that can help your early childhood business.

Saturday, August 29

2:45 pm – 3:45 pm

Ocotillo Ballroom

Outdoor Equity Through Community, Collaboration & Social-Emotional Learning

Speaker: Sarah Candelaria, Nature Ninos

Discover how early childhood educators, home visitors, and early interventionists can use the outdoors as a powerful setting for social-emotional learning, child development, and connection. This session will offer practical, adaptable strategies for bringing nature into everyday practice, supporting children's emotional regulation, relationships, curiosity, and confidence while creating inclusive outdoor experiences for children and families.

4:00 pm – 4:15 pm

Sandia Ballroom 1-5

Closing Session & Door Prize Giveaway

Wrap up two inspiring days of learning by receiving your Saturday professional development certificate, connecting with fellow attendees, and entering for a chance to win a door prize!

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION NOW OPEN



New Mexico
Early Childhood
ASSOCIATION



2027 NMECA ANNUAL MEETING

BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Advancing policies that strengthen early childhood professionals, support families, and sustain high-quality services across New Mexico.



JANUARY 26, 2027

• RIO CHAMA STEAKHOUSE
SANTA FE, NM

