njaeyc

New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children

naeyc 100 years of EXCELLENCE

2026 LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Leadership During Uncertain Times

NEW CENTRAL LOCATION!

MAY 29, 2026

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON MONROE HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER

An Affiliate of naeyc

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

7:30 AM – 8:30 AM	REGISTRATION/EXHIBITORS/BREAKFAST
8:30 AM – 8:45 AM	WELCOME
8:45 AM - 9:45 AM	KEYNOTE: DR. GERRY COSTA
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM	SESSION I
11:15 AM – 12:15 PM	SESSION II
12:15 PM – 1:45 PM	LUNCH, ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING EXHIBITS, DOOR PRIZES
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM	SESSION III

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

DR. GERRY COSTA

Ph.D., DIR-C®, IMHM- C®



KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Why Leadership is Needed Now More Than Ever

Gerard Costa was the founding director of the Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health, YCS Institute for Infant and Preschool Mental Health, and is a Professor in the Department of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University. He holds certificates in the Brazelton Touchpoints model, DIR-C®, and Infant Mental Health. He serves as the Coordinator of the Northeast Regional Terrorism and Disaster Coalition and is past president of the NJ Association for Infant Mental Health and Past President of the Interdisciplinary Council on Development and Learning (ICDL). He is the co-editor of the 2025 volume published by Paul H. Brookes, Publishers., ***Uniting Infant Mental Health and the Pyramid Model: Connecting Principles and Practices to Improve Outcomes.***

In his keynote, *Why Leadership is Needed Now More Than Ever,* Dr. Costa will examine the need for servant leadership as a response to those times when authoritarian styles are prevailing. We will consider the impact of leaders on personal, professional and organizational growth, and examine the ways in which an organization's core values and goals are promoted. Leaders function at all levels of an organization, not just "top-down", and leaders can either reflect or challenge ways of knowing, ways of doing and ways of being-with. A model of professional formation will be used to illustrate the impact leaders have on the culture and practices of the organization.

SEE GERRY IN ACTION

SESSION I - 10:00 AM-11:00 AM

1. LEADING CHANGE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

CINDY TEREBUSH, EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST

In today's world, there seems to be stress everywhere. One peek at the news or an expensive trip to the supermarket can raise cortisol levels and impact our ability to be our best selves. Our programs are short-staffed, and there is so much to do. At the same time, early education is ever-evolving, and we know we have to keep up with changes driven by research-based practices, because children and families deserve high-quality care. This session will give us a chance to discuss "Yes And..." strategies for leading change that acknowledge and validate emotions while moving the needle of quality with intention.

2. NEW JERSEY'S PRESCHOOL STORY: PROGRESS, PARTNERSHIPS & POSSIBILITIES

CINDY SHIELDS, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST - ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NJ AND PRESIDENT, NJAEYC

For over 25 years, New Jersey's preschool program has been recognized as a national model for quality and impact. Born out of the landmark Abbott v. Burke decisions, the state's commitment to high standards — including certified teachers, small class sizes, aligned curriculum, and coaching — has led to measurable, long-term gains in student achievement and reduced grade retention and special education placements.

As expansion continues across the state, this session explores the evolution of New Jersey's preschool system, the role of mixed-delivery partnerships between school districts and community-based providers, and the opportunities shaping its future. Participants will gain insight into funding structures, quality requirements, and strategies to strengthen collaboration and sustainability as the state builds toward universal access.

3. LEADING WITH PURPOSE: USING THE NJ SHARED SERVICES PLATFORM TO GROW A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

AMANDA KRAUSE DISCALA, ED. D., ED. M., PROGRAM DIRECTOR, NJ SHARED RESOURCES, NJAEYC

During this session, we will examine how to use the resources and tools on the NJ Shared Resources platform for support staff and build a strong team, plan for the future and use the resources to maximize your savings and best use your time each day. If you haven't tried the platform yet, this is the perfect time to see how to use it to maximize your outcomes for your program with shared resources and collaboration. If you are already using the platform we will be discussing how to use the resources to look towards the future and expand your usage in new ways.

SESSION I - 10:00 AM-11:00 AM

4. LEADING FOR QUALITY: LEVERAGING NJ DIRECTOR AND ADMINISTRATOR COMPETENCIES TO DRIVE CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

COLLEEN HICKS, MANAGER, GROW NJ KIDS, NJ DIVISION OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT, RITA KOROMI, SUPERVISOR, GROW NJ KIDS, NJ DIVISION OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT, JEN CORTES, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE, ROWAN UNIVERSITY

Strong leadership is the cornerstone of high-quality early childhood programs across all settings. Grounded in the McCormick Whole Leadership Framework, the New Jersey Director and Administrator Competencies provide a research-based roadmap for continuous leadership growth.

In this interactive session, participants will explore how these competencies translate into everyday leadership practice and align with professional development opportunities and leadership supports available statewide, including resources offered through Rowan's Early Childhood Leadership Institute and New Jersey's broader quality network. Attendees will leave with practical strategies, greater clarity about available supports, and a focused action step to strengthen their leadership capacity and advance program quality.

5. LEADING TOGETHER IN UNCERTAIN TIMES: STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL–FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS FOR LASTING IMPACT

CAROLYN HAYER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; DEEPA SRINIVASAVARADAN, DIRECTOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES; AND ALLYSON MATTHEWS, EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION PROJECT COORDINATOR; STATEWIDE PARENT ADVOCACY NETWORK (SPAN)

In uncertain times, strong family–professional partnerships are essential to sustaining community-centered systems. This interactive session introduces practical strategies grounded in the Leading by Convening framework to help professionals and families move beyond engagement to true co-leadership. Participants will explore how to build trust, ensure family voice is central, and convene stakeholders effectively. Attendees will leave with actionable tools to strengthen partnerships and create a consistent, supportive presence for families and communities.

SESSION I - 10:00 AM-11:00 AM

6. INTRODUCTION TO CHILD CARE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TRAINING (CCEPT)

JAXON RICHARDS, LEAD ASSOCIATE, EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES- SAVE THE CHILDREN

Child care programs are often overlooked in emergency planning at the federal, state, and local levels, despite the essential role they play in supporting children and families during crises. CCEPT helps providers identify potential risks, develop practical emergency plans, and build year-round preparedness practices within their programs. In this one-hour introductory session, participants will learn the key components of effective emergency planning in early education settings and explore how to begin developing, communicating, practicing, and regularly updating a written emergency plan. This session provides a condensed overview of the core concepts and tools included in Save the Children's full CCEPT training.



SESSION II - 11:15 AM-12:15 PM

7. THE INNER COMPASS: LEADING WITH SELF-AWARENESS IN CHILD CARE LEADERSHIP

REBEKKA ZYDEL – PRESIDENT, COALITION OF INFANT/TODDLER EDUCATORS (CITE)

Great leadership in child care starts from within. "The Inner Compass" is a dynamic professional development session designed specifically for child care directors, supervisors, and emerging leaders. Grounded in adult learning principles and peer-reviewed research, this interactive workshop will help you unlock a deeper understanding of yourself to lead your team and center more effectively. We will explore frameworks like the Johari Window, integrate Simon Sinek's principles of inspirational leadership, and practice applying emotional intelligence and courage in real-world scenarios. Leave with actionable strategies to enhance your self-awareness, build trust, and foster a positive, resilient organizational culture. Transform your leadership journey by first looking inward.

8. THE REVISED CODE OF ETHICS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

MEGHAN SALAS ATWELL PHD | SENIOR DIRECTOR OF APPLIED RESEARCH, NAEYC

Updated for the first time since 2011, NAEYC's revised Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators reflects three years of collaboration with early childhood educators across states and settings, along with leadership from the revision workgroup, staff, Senior Advisors, and the Governing Board. In this session, we'll explore how educator voices shaped the revision, what's changed from the previous version, and how you can use this updated position statement to guide and strengthen your work as an ethical early childhood educator—plus a preview of the resources and supports you can expect moving forward.

9. USE YOUR BRAIN! APPLIED NEUROSCIENCE FOR RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

DR. DONNA VOLPITTA - EDUCATION DIRECTOR AT PATHWAYS TO EMPOWER & DANNI DRAGONFLY

Understanding the brain is the foundation for building resilience and mindful decision-making. In this workshop, Dr. Donna Volpitta simplifies complex neuroscience concepts and makes them accessible, so they can be applied every day. Educational brain-breaks, activities, and guided discussions help participants contextualize and retain the information learned. While many presentations and workshops can leave us feeling inspired, this one is designed to give you tools and strategies that make leading your community easier, particularly in challenging times.

SESSION II - 11:15 AM-12:15 PM

10. USING THE NJ MIXED DELIVERY HANDBOOK TO STRENGTHEN COLLABORATIONS

PRESENTERS- STAFF FROM THE NJ DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, DIVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES (KIMBERLY FRIDDELL, KERRYN BROWN, DENNA WATSON)

Participants will gain an understanding of the purpose of the document, ways the document can be used by child care providers, Head Start Programs, school districts and other stakeholders to support current collaborations and provide an understanding of the requirements for providers looking to offer state-funded preschool in the future.

11. GROWING LEADERS: PLANTING SEEDS AND CULTIVATING CAREER PATHWAYS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

LINDA RUTTER, DIRECTOR OF LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT, YMCA OF MEWSA

Spotting the next leaders, creating a growth culture, and coaching them with encouragement, education, mentorship and professional development.



SESSION III - 2:00 PM-3:00 PM

12. FROM STORY TO STRATEGY: TURNING LIVED EXPERIENCE INTO POLICY POWER IN 2026

MEGHAN TAVORMINA, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY, AND SUSAN DANNEMILLER, SENIOR POLICY & ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST, NJAEYC

Early childhood leaders navigate complex challenges every day — but those challenges are not just operational realities, they are policy opportunities. This workshop will explore how to transform on-the-ground experiences into strategic advocacy aligned with the Start Strong NJ Blueprint and the 2026 budget landscape. Participants will learn how to frame their stories to influence legislators, shape media narratives, and advance unified funding priorities. Grounded in the three equal pillars of affordability, workforce stability, and long-term investment, this session will equip leaders to turn real-world challenges into coordinated policy momentum.

13. BELLE (BUILDING EARLY LEARNING LATINÉ EDUCATORS)

LITEOVE RODRIGUEZ-TIGHE, NJAEYC AND ALEXANDRA FIGUERAS-DANIEL, ASSISTANT RESEARCH PROFESSOR, BILINGUAL ECE POLICY SPECIALIST , NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EARLY EDUCATION RESEARCH (NIEER)

This workshop offers an asset-based model that emphasizes cultural wealth through self-reflection and highlighting educators' strengths to create a "Community of Practice." By pairing teachers and leaders in dyads, BELLE connects classroom practices with leadership advocacy across private providers, Head Start, and school districts. The SESEBA (Self-Evaluation of Supports for Emergent Bilingual Acquisition) tool enables dyads to reflect on and enhance environments for multilingual learners, while the program encourages mentorship, resource sharing, and leadership development among Latiné educators.

SESSION III - 2:00 PM-3:00 PM

14. ETHICAL SOCIAL MEDIA + PRACTICAL AI FOR ECE LEADERS

TIRUSHA DAVE, OWNER & FOUNDER, ELLIE'S ACADEMY

Childcare directors are expected to market their program, retain families, recruit staff, and protect their reputation—often without a dedicated marketing team. This practical session breaks down a simple social media operating system that works for early childhood programs, plus safe, time-saving ways to use AI to support planning, writing, and consistency. Participants will learn how to build content pillars, create a repeatable weekly workflow, convert engagement into tours, and set guardrails for privacy, consent, and professionalism.

15. NAVIGATING CHALLENGES FACING IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND EARLY EDUCATORS

PRIYA PANDEY, POLICY ANALYST IMMIGRATION AND IMMIGRANT FAMILIES (CLASP)

Join the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) to learn how child care and early education providers can protect their programs from immigration raids. We will cover the impact of immigration policies on access to early childhood programs, including the removal of the protected areas/sensitive locations policy, and strategies for ensuring immigrant families feel safe in your facilities and programs.

16. ARE YOU HAVING THE HARD CONVERSATIONS — OR AVOIDING THEM? LEADING WITH CLARITY, COMPASSION, AND CONFIDENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

JOAN DILLON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GLASSBORO CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

Difficult conversations are an unavoidable part of early childhood leadership, yet many leaders delay or avoid them out of concern for relationships or conflict. When issues go unaddressed, stress increases and program quality can suffer. This workshop explores practical strategies for addressing staff and parent concerns with clarity, compassion, and confidence. Participants will learn how to balance empathy with accountability, set professional boundaries, and approach challenging conversations in ways that strengthen relationships and support a healthy program culture. Leaders will leave with practical language and tools they can immediately apply in their programs.

REGISTRATION

Registration Fee for registrations received by April 15th

- NJAEYC Members: $139
- Non-members: $215

*After April 15th an additional $25 will be charged

***JOIN NOW* AND RECEIVE THE MEMBER RATE**

Name: _____

Mailing Address:

_____

_____

_____

Email: _____

Daytime Phone: _____-_____-_____

Position: _____

Employer Name: _____

Workshop Choices:

Session I: (1-6) 1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____

Session II: (7-11) 1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____

Session III: (12-16) 1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____

Breakfast, lunch, and hotel parking are included

You can register and pay online or by mail to:

NJAEYC
PO Box 1024
Barnegat Light, NJ 08006

For more information, or to use a P.O. email mail@njaeyc.org