



FAMILIES LEARNING
CONFERENCE

2025

Charlotte, NC

*Staying true
to the mission.*



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To learn more, visit pncgrowupgreat.com.

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GUG 0625-0102-2704701



Daylight Saving Time ends Sunday, November 2nd.

Double check that your devices are set to Eastern Standard Time before bed on Sunday evening.



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Visit FamiliesLearning.org to learn how we support family well-being and success through education.
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About NCFL

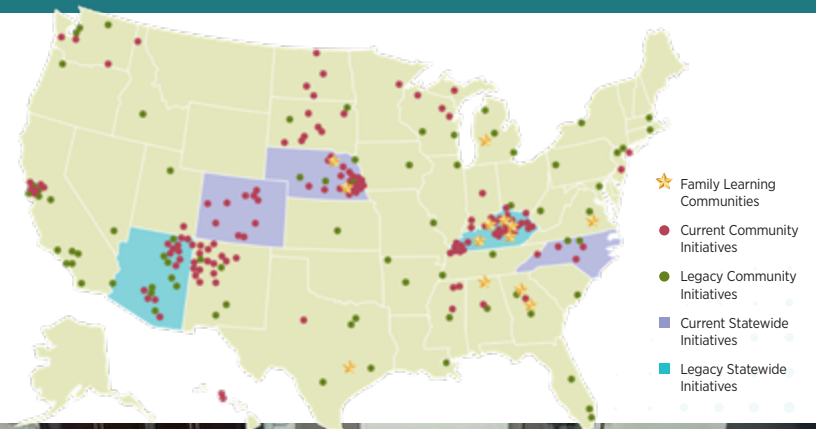
NCFL is a national nonprofit that has worked for more than 35 years to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. We believe education is a shared, nonpartisan responsibility and that collaboration among families, schools, and community members can lead to powerful learning experiences. NCFL's vision is to establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create thriving communities. To learn more about our work or become a Family Learning Community™ partner, visit FamiliesLearning.org.

Our Mission:

NCFL works to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families.

Our Vision:

Establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create thriving communities.



President's Letter

Much has changed since we last gathered together in Louisville for the 2024 Families Learning Conference. For many, the future of the work that you do has become more uncertain over the last few months. This evolving landscape has left many education programs across the country with a sense of tenuousness and instability. While change is really the only constant, collectively we are now facing shifts that may dramatically impact the districts, partner organizations, and community supports that children and families rely on.

Leadership through uncertain times calls for grit, determination, and graciousness. We're demonstrating our grit by doubling down on our commitment to the children and families we serve. The heart of the work we're all engaged in is our collective belief in the power of learning to transform lives, lift families out of poverty, and fundamentally reshape the trajectory of communities. It is that mission that must be our guiding principle in the days ahead.

Staying true to our mission of eradicating poverty through education solutions for families isn't about maintaining the status quo. It's about adapting boldly to new circumstances and nurturing resilience in the face of adversity. It's also about staying grounded in what's most impactful: engaging in the meaningful work of building literacy skills, developing stronger pathways to the workforce, and creating greater access to the learning opportunities that will enable children and families to shape a brighter future.

This year's Families Learning Conference, made possible by Toyota, the Heising-Simons Foundation, PNC Grow Up Great®, and the Mebane Foundation, offers a compelling lineup that showcases the leading voices in the field informing family learning. We're honored to welcome Dr. Rebecca Winthrop, Dr. Karen Mapp, and Dr. Iheoma Iruka to the mainstage, where they'll provide thought-provoking keynotes for our general sessions. You'll find presentations from 50CAN, Howard University, Learning Heroes, Partners for Rural Impact, RTI International, Search Institute, TMW Center for Early Learning, Unite for Literacy, and many more. In addition, our lineup of 70+ concurrent sessions includes the opportunity to gain inspiration from changemakers who are committed to improving the places they call home.

You may not know, but the heart of family literacy is strong in North Carolina. Indeed, NCFL's family literacy model was first piloted in the mountains of North Carolina in 1988, thanks to funding from the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust. In the ensuing decades, our connection to North Carolina has only grown. Today, NCFL remains a legacy partner of the Kenan Trust and has expanded its reach across the state through partnerships with Book Harvest, North Carolina Parents as Teachers, University of North Carolina Greensboro, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. It feels like a full circle moment to bring this year's conference to Charlotte. What began more than 35 years ago as the seed of an idea has become a national movement, impacting more than 4 million families across 41 states and 180 communities. Today, we remain true to the mission, even as we seek out new partners and champions for family learning along the way.

After four days of learning together, my greatest hope is that each of you will return home with a renewed commitment to lead courageously, innovate fearlessly, and never forget that the work you do matters.

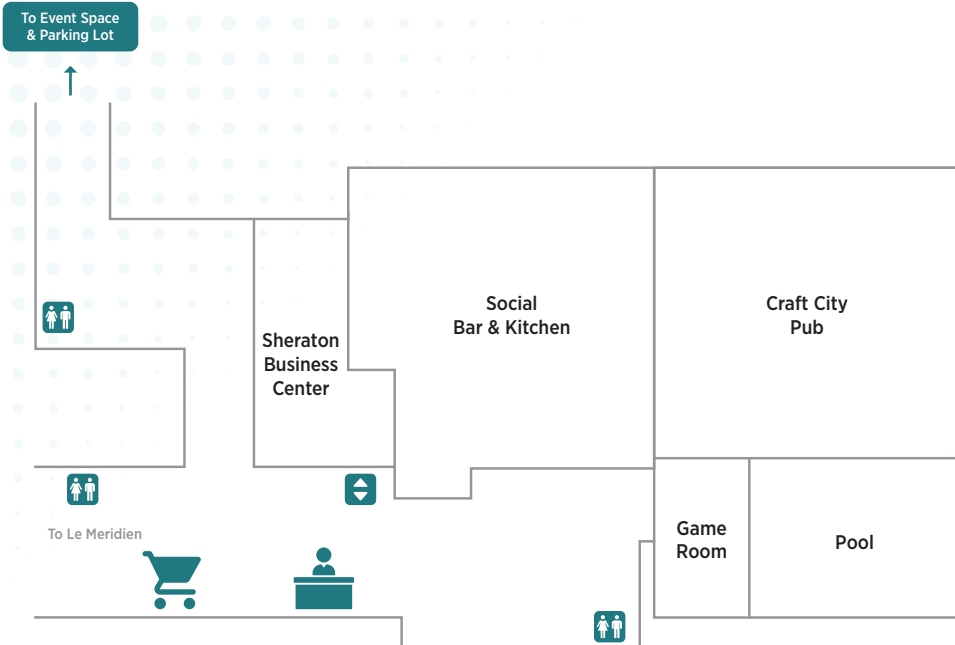
Sincerely,



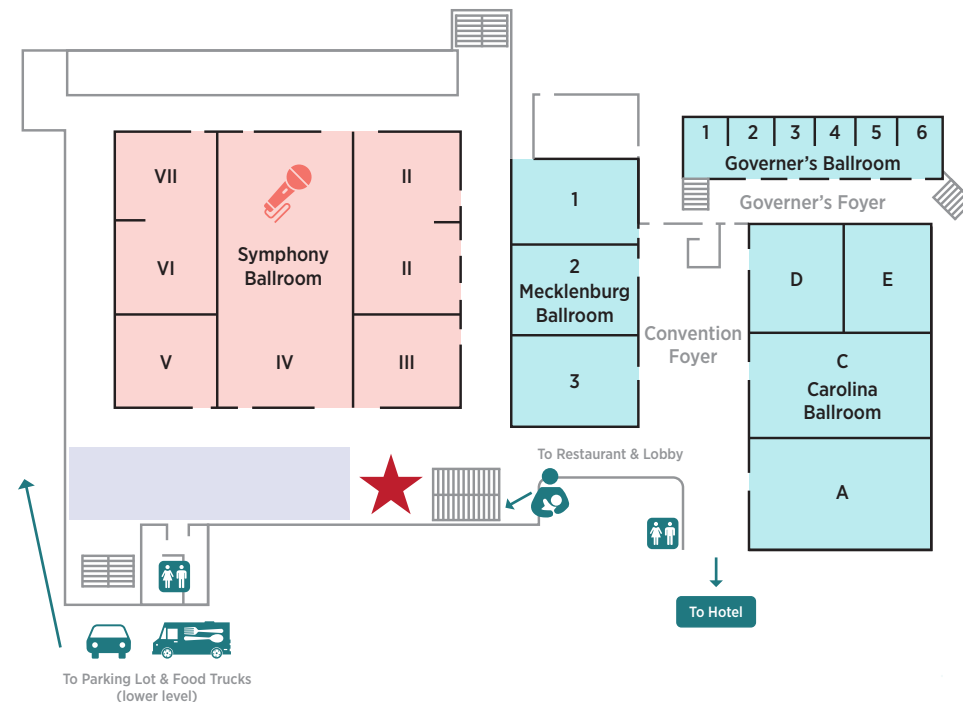
Felicia C. Smith, EdD
President and CEO
National Center for Families Learning



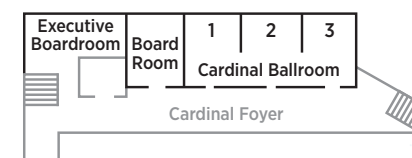
Facility Map



First Floor



Second Floor



- ★ Registration
- 🎤 General Sessions ("mainstage")
- 🟡 Concurrent Sessions
- 🟠 Buffets, Exhibit tables
- 🚗 Parking
- 👶 Nursing Moms' room (lower level)
- 🚚 Food truck location (Tuesday lunch only)
- 🏨 Hotel Front Desk
- 🛒 Grab & Go Market



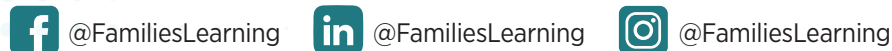
General Information

Wifi

Sign on to **ncfl2025** and enter password **ncfl2025**

Join us on social media!

Use **#NCFL25** to share what you are learning, and be sure to tag **@FamiliesLearning**.



Mobile app

Download our event app to build your schedule, view presenter information, and connect with your fellow attendees! Get started by aiming your phone's camera at either the Google Play or App Store QR code below. When prompted, enter event app code **25flc**.

Be sure to allow notifications so that you receive real-time alerts for any schedule changes.



Smile! You may be recorded or photographed



All persons on the premises of the 2025 Families Learning Conference consent by their participation to the reproduction of their likenesses in connection with the photography and recording of conference events.

Please direct any questions or concerns to the Registration Desk or by emailing conference@familieslearning.org.

Schedule changes

In the event that a session is canceled, a sign will be posted outside the session room and a notification will be sent to conference mobile app users.

Safety Information

In the event of a fire, the hotel fire system will sound. Guests should exit the building through stairwells and street/lobby level doors. Do not use elevators. Our gathering spot is to the left if exiting the Sheraton or to the right if exiting Le Meridien. **In the event of a weather emergency**, gather in Symphony Ballroom or Carolina A-B. **In the event of an emergency**, call 9-1-1 or locate a hotel house phone and report the emergency and location to the hotel operator who will call the appropriate responder.

Meal Information

The hotel complex features Craft City Sports Pub, Social Bar & Kitchen, and City Lights Rooftop. On Tuesday, food trucks will be on the premises for attendees to purchase lunch on their own (see map on page 6 for location).

Food & beverage included in the 3-day registration fee:

Monday, Nov. 3

- Coffee and tea before the morning's programming begins
- Lunch at the Opening Session
- Appetizers at the Welcome Reception

Tuesday, Nov. 4

- Breakfast before the General Session

Wednesday, Nov. 5

- Coffee and tea before the morning's programming begins
- Lunch at the Closing General Session

Vegan, vegetarian, nut-free and gluten-free options are available. Food will be labeled with allergens listed. See the Registration Desk for questions.

Nursing mothers

Nursing mothers who are not staying on property may check out a key to a private space* **during open registration hours**. Visit the Registration Desk with your identification card to retrieve a key. The key to the lactation room will be made available **until 45 minutes prior to Registration closing each day**. **See the Agenda on page 11 for Registration hours**.

**The private room has a refrigerator, but users who choose to store milk do so at their own risk. The National Center for Families Learning is not responsible for milk left in the nursing mothers' room.*

We want to hear from you!

Share your feedback by completing our post-event survey, and you'll be entered into a drawing to win a free registration to our 2026 event! bit.ly/ncfl25survey



Sponsors, Exhibitors, and Partners

NCFL is grateful for the support of the following organizations to help make the 2025 Families Learning Conference possible.

Sponsors

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Cultivators



Technology Sponsor



Featured Sponsor



Family Learning Community Collaborative Partners



Exhibitors

Take a trip around the exhibit area and have your name badge scanned by each exhibitor you visit. Scan your badge by all exhibitors to be entered into a drawing to win a prize at the Closing Session, courtesy of Books by the Bushel, Hasan Davis Solutions, and Bedtime in a Box!



Agenda

Sunday, November 2

1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Registration open
2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Pre-Conference Seminars <i>[signup required; additional fee]</i>

Monday, November 3

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Registration open
8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	Morning Coffee and Networking
8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Exhibits open
9:00 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.	Concurrents 1
10:35 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.	Concurrents 2
11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.	Offsite tour of ImaginOn, Tour 1 <i>[signup required]</i>
11:50 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.	Opening Session with Buffet Lunch
2:00 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.	Concurrents 3
2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	Offsite tour of ImaginOn, Tour 2 <i>[signup required]</i>
3:35 p.m. to 4:35 p.m.	Concurrents 4
4:35 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Welcome Reception

Tuesday, November 4

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Registration and exhibits open
8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	Buffet Breakfast
9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.	General Session
10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.	Concurrents 5
11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.	Offsite tour of ImaginOn, Tour 3 <i>[signup required]</i>
11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.	Lunch on your own at Food Truck Tuesday
1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.	Concurrents 6
2:45 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.	Concurrents 7
3:15 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.	Offsite tour of ImaginOn, Tour 4 <i>[signup required]</i>
4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Afternoon General Session

Wednesday, November 5

7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.	Registration and exhibits open
7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.	Morning Coffee and Networking
8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.	Morning General Session
9:50 a.m. to 11:05 a.m.	Concurrents 8
11:05 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.	Closing General Session with Buffet Lunch

Schedule Highlights

Mainstage Speakers

Monday, November 3 | 11:50 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.



Felicia C. Smith, EdD

A lifelong educator and national thought leader for teaching and learning, Dr. Felicia C. Smith brings decades of experience to advance NCFL's mission of working to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. With a career in education spanning nearly three decades, she has served in various leadership roles in P-12, higher education, nonprofits, and philanthropy. Through her experience leading systems, she's developed a unique perspective on a learner's educational trajectory. She is driven by her commitment to excellence for every learner.

Smith recently completed her fourth year at NCFL, where she's launched a new strategic plan. Before joining NCFL, Smith served as the senior director of Global Delivery at the National Geographic Society, where she oversaw the implementation and programming of domestic and global education strategies aimed at transforming classroom and family experiences. Prior to that, Smith served as Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning in the 27th largest school district in the country (Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY). She has also served as a senior program officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and as associate commissioner for the Kentucky Department of Education. She began her career as an elementary classroom teacher and taught at the University of Kentucky, where she led the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development, which provided professional development and conducted research in literacy for preschool through adult learners. Recognized as an Aspen-Pahara Education Fellow, she also serves on several national, regional, and state boards. Smith serves as Vice Chair of the Southern Regional Education Board and was appointed by Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear to both serve on the PreK for All Advisory Committee and chair the state's Early Childhood Advisory Council.

Smith holds an EdD in Educational Leadership and Administration and an MA in Elementary Education, with an emphasis on literacy development.



Dr. Rebecca Winthrop, PhD

Rebecca Winthrop is a leading global authority on education, the director of the Center for Universal Education at Brookings and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University. She is dedicated to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive in life, work, and as an engaged citizen. She leads cutting-edge research and initiatives aimed at transforming education systems around the world to better support children's learning and development.

Rebecca is a trusted advisor to both school communities and national and international organizations. Her expertise is sought by many including parent networks, schools, district education leaders, the White House, the United Nations, and Fortune 500 companies. Rebecca's work is centered on developing and advocating for evidence-based strategies that bring people together—families, educators, policymakers, and companies—to help children maximize their potential.

She holds a PhD from Columbia University's Teachers College, an MA from its School of International and Public Affairs, and a BA from Swarthmore College.

Tuesday, November 4 | 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.



Karen Mapp, EdD

Karen L. Mapp, EdD, is a Professor of Practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). Over the past twenty-five years, her research and practice focus has been the cultivation of partnerships among families, community members and educators that support student achievement and school improvement. Dr. Mapp holds a Doctorate and Master's of Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a Master's in Education from Southern Connecticut State University, and a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

From 2008 to 2022, Dr. Mapp served as the Faculty Director of the HGSE Education, Policy and Management (EPM) Master's Program. She is a founding member of the District Leaders Network on Family and Community Engagement and serves on the boards of the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) and The Hyams Foundation (Boston). From 2010 to 2023, she served as board member and six years as board chair of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL).

From 2011 to 2013, Dr. Mapp served as a consultant on family and community engagement to the United States Department of Education (USDOE) in the Office of Innovation and Improvement where, in collaboration with the USDOE, she developed the first version of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships.



Wednesday, November 5 | 11:05 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.



Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD

NCFL Research Advisory Council Member

Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD, is an award-winning tenured professor in the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the Gillings School of Global Public Health and the Founding Director of the Equity Research Action Coalition at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Iruka is leading projects and initiatives focused on ensuring that minoritized children and families and those from low-income households thrive by attending to their sociocultural contexts and assets. Dr. Iruka has authored over 100 books and papers and has given over 300 talks addressing systemic inequities and advancing research and action on the well-being of children and families. She serves on numerous national and local boards and committees, including the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the American Psychological Association's Board of Educational Affairs, the National Science Foundation, and the Lancet Commission on Racism and Child Health. In addition to being a Census Advisor for the National Urban League, Dr. Iruka is the recipient of the 2022 American Psychological Association Mid-Career Award for Outstanding Contributions to Benefit Children, Youth, and Families and the 2023 Association of University Centers on Disabilities Leadership for All award-winner. She is a 2023 American Psychological Association (APA) Fellow.



Holly Walters

NCFL Board Member

Holly Walters is chief information officer and group vice president of information systems for Toyota Motor North America. Walters oversees the company's information systems, solutions, and technology.

Previously, Walters was president and CEO of Toyota Financial Savings Bank (TFSB). In this role, Walters oversaw all of Toyota's U.S. banking operations, which provide a range of services to Toyota and Lexus dealers as well as consumers.

Walters has also served as vice president of information and digital systems for Toyota Financial Services (TFS), where she was responsible for the development and delivery of business capabilities to the company's sales, originations, servicing, channel management, dealer lending, insurance, and transaction platform functions.

Prior to joining Toyota in 2007, Walters held senior roles in the banking sector, focusing on the integration of technology and business operations, solution development and deployment, as well as IT risk and compliance.

Walters earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in both Economics and Business Administration from Muskingum College, New Concord, Ohio, and an MBA from The Ohio State University.

Pre-Conference Seminars

Sunday, November 2 | 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Helping All Students Find Their Place in STEM

Student identity development is complex, but we know that a major factor that shapes students' aspirations is what they see in the media and the entertainment they watch. A 2022 study by the Geena Davis Institute revealed that, from 2018–2022, 38% of STEM characters in movies and television were women. This number represents only a 1% increase from a similar study of female representation in movies and television from 2007 to 2017. The same 2022 study showed that 42% of STEM characters were people of color, but that they were concentrated in medical professions and not other STEM fields.

We also know that STEM careers are a clear pathway to a family-sustaining wage in many communities. The question then becomes: how do we let our students know that everyone has a place in STEM? And, if everyone has a place in STEM, how do we expose all students to meaningful STEM opportunities?

There are intentional strategies that schools and communities can use to open the doors of STEM opportunities for students from all backgrounds. In this session, we will explore some of these strategies with a particular focus on how families and communities can partner with schools to infuse STEM into in- and out-of-school learning experiences and tap into the local STEM assets that can be found in every community if you look for them! We will also explore how to build multiple pathways into STEM that allow for students to engage from kindergarten into postsecondary pursuits into STEM careers, as well as how schools, families, and communities can embed career connections into STEM for students of all ages.



Angela Quick, EdD
NCFL Board Member,
RTI International



Rebecca Stanley, PhD
RTI International

The State of Educational Opportunity: What 20,000 U.S. Parents Want Schools to Deliver

Parents are clear about what they want from schools—but are policymakers listening? In this session, 50CAN and CarolinaCAN unpack findings from *The State of Educational Opportunity in America: A Survey of 20,000 Parents*, an unprecedented 50-state study conducted with Edge Research. Drawing on insights from one of the largest parent surveys ever conducted, this discussion will explore what families prioritize for their children's education, how those priorities differ by state, and what trends are shaping the future of learning opportunities nationwide. Attendees will learn how to access and use the full 200-page report—including state-specific data and question-level detail—to inform strategy, advocacy, and decision-making. Whether you work in practice, community engagement, or policy, this session will help you better understand and respond to the voices of parents across the country who are redefining what educational opportunity means today.



Marc Porter Magee
50CAN



Marcus Brandon
CarolinaCAN

Make a Plan for Effective Family Engagement that Connects with Your Community

Effective family engagement requires intentionally inclusive practices which enhance dual capacity-building of families and educators and support student learning. In our diverse schools and communities, which span race, ethnicity, culture, language and other demographics, engagement must be based on culturally-responsive approaches to planning and implementation of family engagement.

Participants will participate in an interactive game activity to understand the experiences of families; explore structural barriers that keep families out of the spaces they deserve and need to be in to support their children; examine the role race and culture has on engagement; and apply a planning tool for effective culturally-responsive family engagement to events and activities in their own schools or organizations.



Frances Frost
Strategic Dialogue
Group



John Landesman
Strategic Dialogue
Group



Edwin Hernandez
Montgomery County
Public Schools

Featured Sessions

Monday, November 3 | 9:00 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.

Community Book Gardens: Growing Language and Literacy in Cherokee Nation

Language, culture, and literacy are deeply intertwined—and nowhere is that more evident than in the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians’ commitment to preserving their language while strengthening reading habits for families. This panel will feature community and school leaders from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians sharing how they are advancing language revitalization alongside efforts to foster reading as a daily practice for both children and parents. Participants will hear how literacy is being practiced and pursued in ways that honor tradition while preparing future generations for success. Moderated by Mike McGuffee, CEO of Unite for Literacy, the conversation will highlight the role of innovative approaches like Community Book Gardens, which place culturally relevant, accessible books directly into communities. Join us to learn how this community is blending heritage and innovation to advance literacy, build stronger family connections, and secure the survival of a language and culture for generations to come.



Michele Galloway
Cherokee Central Schools



Consuela Girty
Cherokee Central Schools



Kristina Hyatt
Unite for Literacy



Mike McGuffee
Unite for Literacy



Chi Shipman,
Qualla Boundary Public Library

Monday, November 3 | 10:35 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

Parents as Learning Heroes

While many parents feel confident in their child’s academic progress, research shows that fewer than half of students are on grade level. Join us as we examine this gap, uncover innovative strategies and practical tools that foster meaningful parent-teacher partnerships, and learn what it means to #GoBeyondGrades.



Michelle Chaudoir
Learning Heroes



Cornelia Calliste-Cooper
Learning Heroes

The Power to Transform Systems Starts with You

For leaders committed to serving families, the work often feels like walking a tightrope—balancing vision with reality, urgency with sustainability, and systemic change with navigating the very systems they seek to transform. This session explores what it takes to lead boldly without losing balance or burning out. Drawing on lessons from The Equity Lab’s Nexus Fellowship, we’ll highlight how leaders are building values-driven organizations, pushing through resistance, and sustaining themselves for the long haul. Participants will examine strategies to align vision with action and cultivate leadership practices that support both transformation and personal resilience. Come ready to reflect, connect, and leave with tangible practices to help you and your organization move from surviving to reshaping the future.



Michelle Molitor
The Equity Lab

Featured Sessions

Monday, November 3 | 2:00 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.

Champions of Family Learning: Lessons from District Leaders

In this session, hear from a panel of district leaders who are true champions of family learning and engagement. Moderated by Jill Hawley, Chief Impact Officer at Gary Community Ventures, this conversation will feature district leaders from across the country who are leading the way for embedding family engagement and family-friendly policies and programming in their schools.



Jill Hawley
NCFL Board Member,
Gary Community
Ventures



Latisha Hensley
Charlotte-
Mecklenburg
Schools



**Dr. Christine
Niven**
Mesa Public
Schools



Robert Tuck
Butler County
Schools

Monday, November 3 | 3:35 p.m. to 4:35 p.m.

How Cross-Sector Collaboration Is Transforming STEM Education and Economic Mobility

Moderated by NCFL President & CEO Dr. Felicia Cumings Smith, in this conversation you'll hear from General Manager at Toyota, Colleen Casey, alongside critical partners supporting and executing this work to explore the early learnings and successes of Toyota's bold, multi-year effort in some of their Driving Possibilities locations. Driving Possibilities is reimagining how communities prepare young people for the jobs of the future by pairing innovative STEM programming with wraparound supports that meet the real needs of students and families.

This session will highlight how Toyota and its partners are building excitement and awareness around STEM pathways, while simultaneously addressing root causes that impact student learning. Panelists will share lessons learned from this work, discuss challenges and opportunities, and reflect on how cross-sector partnerships can strengthen education, workforce readiness, and economic mobility for generations to come.



Colleen Casey
Toyota Motor
North America



Felicia C. Smith, EdD
National Center for
Families Learning

Measuring What Parents Know: Introducing SPEAK-CAT for Early Childhood Insights

Parental knowledge plays a key role in shaping brain-building behaviors and, ultimately, in supporting children's skill development. Yet, the early childhood field has long lacked an easy-to-use tool for measuring what parents know and believe about early childhood development.

Join this session for a focused discussion on SPEAK-CAT—a computer-adaptive survey created by the TMW Center for Early Learning + Public Health at the University of Chicago. This innovative tool offers a comprehensive picture of parents' and caregivers' knowledge and beliefs about early childhood. With these insights, programs and organizations can deliver tailored information and interventions that meet families where they are, ensuring parents are better supported to nurture their children's foundational brain development, school readiness, and lifelong success.



**Dr. Pamela
Truelove-Walker**
TMW Center for
Early Learning +
Public Health at
The University
of Chicago



Featured Sessions

Tuesday, November 4 | 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

From Piggy Banks to Problem Solving: Using Financial Literacy to Spark Family Math Learning

Why talk about money? Because it makes math meaningful for kids and families—both now and for their future. In this interactive session, program leaders will share different approaches to connecting financial literacy and family math. You'll learn about the importance of early math, family math, and family financial literacy, and leave with practical strategies and action plans you can use in your work with families and children.



Holly Kreider, EdD
Center for Family
Math, NAFSCE



Jeanine Fahnestock
PNC Bank



Rebecca Chrystal
Raising A Reader
National Office

Tuesday, November 4 | 1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Possibility and Statistics: Discovering Hidden Family Strengths and Opportunities Through Asset-Based Data

This session introduces the Possibility and Statistics framework, a transformative approach that shifts from documenting family deficits to uncovering existing strengths, resilience factors, and untapped potential within families and communities. Participants will learn practical methods for identifying "positive deviants"—families succeeding against the odds—and discover how to use both quantitative metrics and qualitative narratives to amplify family assets. Dr. Toldson will demonstrate how this human-centered approach to data can help practitioners design more effective, culturally-responsive interventions that honor family wisdom and foster genuine partnership in supporting children's success.

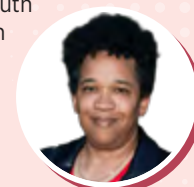


Dr. Ivory A. Toldson
NCFL Research Advisory
Council Member,
Howard University

Tuesday, November 4 | 2:45 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

Unboxed: Reimagining Family Engagement as a Co-Designed Experience

What if families weren't seen as guests in the school system but as co-creators of it? In this highly interactive session, we go beyond the buzzwords and explore a relationship-centered model that positions families as essential drivers of student belonging, engagement, and success. Drawing from rigorous research in relational trust, developmental science, and culturally-responsive engagement, you will learn how to redesign your approach to family partnerships by focusing on what matters most: the quality of the relationship, rather than the quantity of involvement. Participants will explore why relationships are the foundation for youth thriving, trust-building, and equitable systems and how to shift from transactional outreach to transformative partnership, especially with families often excluded by school systems. This session is designed for educators, school leaders, and community partners who are ready to move beyond checklists and toward co-creating a culture of belonging, where relationships are not an "add-on," but the strategy.



Monica Dixon
Search Institute

Rewiring Education: How Brain-Aligned Systems and Practices Can Transform Outcomes for All Students

In this session, you'll learn how GAIN (Growth in Academics through Innovation and Neuroeducation) aligns educational systems and practices with brain development—something most reform efforts overlook. You'll gain practical knowledge about neuroscience that you can immediately apply in your daily teaching, empowering you to better support your students' development. Rather than adding another initiative to your already full plate, GAIN helps you integrate brain science with your existing skills and resources. You'll leave this session with concrete strategies to transform your teaching practice, improve student outcomes, and rediscover your passion for education through a brain-aligned approach.



Susan Phelps
Evansville
Vanderburgh
School Corporation
(EVSC)

Featured Sessions

Tuesday, November 4 | 2:45 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

Breaking Barriers to Adult Literacy Access: Insights from U.S. Adults with Low Literacy

ALL IN, in partnership with FTI Consulting, surveyed 2,000 adults with low literacy (74% of whom were not previously or currently enrolled in an adult education program) and uncovered key barriers to reaching education and career goals. Nearly every adult surveyed (94% of respondents) recognized the value of education and the importance of improving their skills. This report is designed to empower local programs and educators with evidence-based strategies to: 1) more effectively reach and support adults with low literacy, and 2) communicate the value of their work to funders for greater investment and community-level impact.



Rachel Pleasants McDonnell
Jobs for the Future



Jeff Fantine, PhD
National Coalition for Literacy

Tuesday, November 4 | 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Stronger Together: Communities as Catalysts for Advancing Education and Prosperity

What does it take to build cradle-to-career systems that work for children and families? Join Dr. Felicia Cumings Smith as she moderates a candid discussion with Dreama Gentry, Cecilia Gutierrez, and Russell Booker. Together, they'll highlight bold strategies communities are using to create equitable pathways from early childhood through workforce. With a spotlight on Spartanburg, SC, the conversation will explore how cross-sector partnerships, philanthropic investment, and community leadership are aligning to drive lasting change. Attendees will gain an inside look at how communities are not only addressing barriers but also reimagining what's possible when families, schools, and whole communities work together.



Russell Booker, PhD, CDE
Spartanburg Academic Movement



Dreama Gentry
Partners for Rural Impact



Cecilia Gutierrez
Blue Meridian



Felicia C. Smith, EdD
National Center for Families Learning

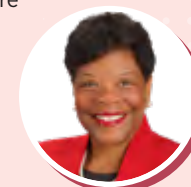
Wednesday, November 5 | 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

AI, Education, and the Workforce: What Educators and Families Need to Know

Artificial intelligence is no longer a future trend. It's already shaping how we live, learn, and work. From the search engines we use to the tools that streamline daily tasks, AI is here, and education and the workforce cannot afford to ignore its impact. As of July 2025, more than half of U.S. states, along with the District of Columbia, have issued guidance on AI in schools prioritizing literacy, ethics, privacy, and workforce readiness. But the real question is: how do we make sure children and families are not left behind in this new era?

This mainstage panel will ground the audience in a basic understanding of AI, highlighting how we've all been interacting with it for years. Panelists will share perspectives across industries, pointing to ways AI can serve as a tool that lifts people up while emphasizing the need for human guidance, critical thinking, and strong guardrails. Together, we'll examine what's required to prepare communities: from teaching digital literacy and responsible use, to ensuring access and opportunity, to building skills that align with the jobs of tomorrow.

Join us for a candid conversation on how educators, practitioners, funders, and policymakers can help shape an AI-informed future that provides access and opportunity to families rather than excludes them.



Felicia C. Smith, EdD
National Center for Families Learning

Wednesday, November 5 | 9:50 a.m. to 11:05 a.m.

From Insights to Impact: Philanthropy's Evolving Role in Education, Family Engagement, and Learning

Join local, regional, and national funders for a dynamic conversation about how philanthropy is shaping opportunities and addressing challenges facing families today. Panelists will share insights on how they're viewing the changing landscape as it relates to their investment priorities as well as lessons learned from their work to strengthen outcomes for children and families. This session will highlight how philanthropic strategies are evolving in response to changing needs in education, workforce, and family engagement, offering conference attendees diverse perspectives on what the future of supporting families and communities may look like.



Nancy J. Cable, PhD
William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust

Book Signings

Join us at Monday evening's welcome reception, where Dr. Karen Mapp will be on hand to sign her latest book. Books by the Bushel will have titles by all three of our keynote speakers for purchase.



The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better

by Jenny Anderson and Dr. Rebecca Winthrop



Everyone Wins!: The Evidence for Family-School Partnerships and Implications for Practice

by Dr. Karen Mapp, Anne T. Henderson, Stephany Cuevas, Martha Franco, Suzanna Ewert



We Are the Change We Seek: Advancing Racial Justice in Early Care and Education

by Dr. Iheoma Iruka, Tonia R. Durden, Kerry-Ann Escayg, Stephanie M. Curenton

Offsite Tour Information

Come and visit a one-of-a-kind youth destination located in the heart of the cultural arts district of Charlotte. **ImaginOn** is a collaborative effort between the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and Children's Theatre of Charlotte. This 102,000-square-foot facility was recently ranked by [Livability.com](https://www.livability.com) as the No. 1 children's library in the United States. **ImaginOn** is visited by more than 300,000 people annually and features two state-of-the-art theatres, a dedicated library space for kids 11 and under, four multi-use classrooms, a teen-only library, a multimedia production studio, and interactive exhibit space.

During a staff-led tour, attendees will discover how this library-theatre collaboration provides cutting-edge services and library collections, an award winning professional theatre and innovative education programs. **ImaginOn** brings stories to life through extraordinary experiences that challenge, inspire and excite young minds.

Advanced signup is required. Visit the Registration Desk to add a field trip to your agenda at no cost. Attendees are responsible for traveling from the conference venue to **ImaginOn** and back (a distance of 1 mile each way).

Location:

ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center, 300 E 7th St, Charlotte, NC 28202



Schedule

To read session descriptions for concurrent presentations, download our mobile app or visit [Bit.ly/NCFL2025](https://bit.ly/NCFL2025).



[Bit.ly/FLCGoogleEvent](https://bit.ly/FLCGoogleEvent)



[Bit.ly/FLCAppleEvent](https://bit.ly/FLCAppleEvent)

Introductory

Geared toward attendees who are new to the topic. The presentation is focused on fundamental concepts or provides an overview of the topic.

Intermediate

Geared towards attendees who have some knowledge of the topic. The presentation delves beyond fundamental concepts.

Advanced

Geared towards attendees who have many years' experience working in the topic. The presentation explores the topic in depth.

Heising-Simons Foundation is proud to sponsor the 2025 Families Learning Conference

The goal of the Foundation's Education program is for all young children to experience joyful, effective, and affirming learning environments that provide the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that set them on a trajectory for success in school and life. Learn more on our website.



**HEISING-SIMONS
FOUNDATION**

Unlocking knowledge, opportunity, and possibilities

Sunday, November 2

1:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. | Symphony Foyer

Registration Open

2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Pre-Conference Sessions

2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Carolina D

The State of Educational Opportunity: What 20,000 U.S. Parents Want Schools to Deliver

Marc Magee, 50CAN

Marcus Brandon, CarolinaCAN

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Research and Evaluation

Introductory

2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Carolina E

Helping All Students Find Their Place in STEM

Angela Quick, EdD (NCFL Board Member) and Jennifer Preston, PhD, RTI International

Family Leadership

Policy and Impact

Advanced

2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Carolina C

Make a Plan for Effective Family Engagement that Connects with Your Community

Frances Frost and John Landesman, Strategic Dialogue Group

Edvin Hernandez, Montgomery County Public Schools

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Research and Evaluation

Introductory

Monday, November 3

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Symphony Foyer

Registration Open

8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. | Symphony Foyer

Exhibits Open

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. | Symphony Foyer

Morning Coffee and Networking

Grab a cup of coffee, take a trip around the exhibit area, and have your name badge scanned by each exhibitor you visit. Scan your badge by all exhibitors to be entered into a drawing to win a prize at the Closing Session, courtesy of Books by the Bushel, Hasan Davis Solutions, and Bedtime in a Box!

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

Concurrents 1

FEATURED SESSION

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Carolina A

Community Book Gardens: Growing Language and Literacy in Cherokee Nation

Mike McGuffee and **Kristina Hyatt**, Unite for Literacy

Michele Galloway and **Consuela Girty**, Cherokee Central Schools

Chi Shipman, Qualla Boundary Public Library

Family Engagement

Introductory

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Carolina D

Beyond Boundaries: Redefining Family Learning for a Connected World

Darani Kettimuthu, University Of The People

Lingarasu Kittusamy, Compunnel Inc.

Family Engagement

Introductory

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Mecklenburg 1

Beyond the Classroom: Partnering with Community Organizations to Deepen Student Learning

Liz Yandell, Scott County Schools

Family Engagement

Introductory

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Carolina E

Community-Led Early Education Advocacy: Lessons from Atlanta's Ambassador Model

Dawan Barfield and **Ericka Smith**, Gears: Georgia Early Education Alliance For Ready Students

Family Engagement

Family Leadership

Intermediate

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Mecklenburg 3

Using Empathy Interviews to Deepen Family Engagement: Ensuring Fairness, Belonging, and Multigenerational Connections

Heather Hester, Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation

Family Engagement

Introductory

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Carolina C

Showcasing Family Engagement Excellence: Lessons Learned from North Carolina SFEC

Dr. Ye He, **Jocelyn Turner Whitlock**, and **Inga Siler**, University Of North Carolina At Greensboro

David Sisk, National Center for Families Learning

Research and Evaluation

Introductory

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Mecklenburg 2

Stories for Every Child: Centering Authentic Experiences in Early Literacy

Sharon Hudgins-Beck and **Tatjana Elmore**, Black Child Development Institute (BCDI)- Atlanta

Family Literacy

Introductory

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

Building Bridges: Supervised Visitation and Family Learning

Dr. Mark Roseman, The Toby Center for Family Transitions

Family Engagement

Research and Evaluation

Intermediate

9:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. | Cardinal 2 & 3

Research Advisory Council Private Meeting

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Concurrents 2

FEATURED SESSION

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Carolina A

Parents as Learning Heroes

Michelle Chaudoir and Cornelia Calliste-Cooper, Learning Heroes

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Introductory

FEATURED SESSION

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Carolina C

The Power to Transform Systems Starts with You

Michelle Molitor, The Equity Lab

Policy and Impact

Introductory

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Carolina D

A Yearly Calendar of Tips to Support Family School Communication and PBS for Student Success

Kiki McGough, NCFL Colorado Parent Advisory

Family Engagement

Family Leadership

Intermediate

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

Bridging Community Cultural Wealth in Education and Family Engagement: A Rural Appalachian Framework

Kayla Benson, Dr. Nina Riivald, and Victoria Taylor, WVFE/The Edventure Group

Family Engagement

Introductory

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Mecklenburg 2

Creating a Culture of Multigenerational Family Literacy

Chris Lott, Debra Francis, and Dr. Shawanda Stewart, Bastrop County Cares

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Introductory

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Mecklenburg 3

From Barriers to Bridges: Leveraging Lived Experience to Foster Authentic Family Engagement

Natalie Hicks, In*source

Tabitha Jackson, MSD Warren Township

Family Engagement

Research and Evaluation

Intermediate

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Mecklenburg 1

Partnerships with Promise: Building Trust and Power Between Families and Educators

Laura Beard and Grace McKenzie, The Prichard Committee

Family Engagement

Family Leadership

Intermediate

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Governor's 3 & 4

Love the One You're With: Using AI and Everyday Tools to Tell Stories of Impact

Teri Walker, Commonteri Services

Policy and Impact

Research and Evaluation

Intermediate

10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | Governor's 5 & 6

Family Literacy National PLC Meeting

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. | ImagineOn

Offsite Tour of ImagineOn, Tour 1

Signup is required and transportation is the attendee's responsibility; visit the Registration Desk.

ImagineOn 300 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28202

11:50 a.m. – 1:45 p.m. | Symphony Ballroom

Opening Session with Buffet Lunch

Join us for lunch and an energizing start to the Families Learning Conference! This mainstage session will set the tone for our time together, as we explore what it means to stay true to our mission of serving families in learning and education. We'll be joined by Dr. Rebecca Winthrop, senior fellow and director of the Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution and professor at Georgetown University. Dr. Winthrop works to promote quality and relevant education, including exploring how education innovations and family and community engagement can be harnessed to leapfrog progress, particularly for children and youth furthest from opportunity. Dr. Winthrop has authored numerous articles, reports, books, and book chapters, including her latest book, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*.

Come ready to be inspired, challenged, and connected as we kick off our time together!

Felicia C. Smith, EdD, National Center for Families Learning

Dr. Rebecca Winthrop, Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Concurrents 3

FEATURED SESSION

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Carolina A

Champions of Family Learning: Lessons from District Leaders

Robert Tuck, Butler County Schools

Dr. Christine Niven, Mesa Public Schools

Jill Hawley, Gary Community Ventures, NCFL Board Member

Family Engagement

Introductory

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Carolina D

Building Family Partnerships for Literacy Success

Dr. Keo Chea-Young, Springboard Collaborative

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Introductory

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Carolina E

Community-Centered Book Access: Building Literacy, Equity and Empathy

Daniel Gumnit, Little Free Library

Research and Evaluation

Family Literacy

Introductory

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Mecklenburg 1

Global family literacy: Programmatic Examples from Argentina, the Caribbean, Egypt, and Liberia

Dr. Esther Prins, Pennsylvania State University, NCFL Research Advisory Council Member

Dr. Arlene Bailey, University of the West Indies, Mona

Dr. Celia Rosemberg, Interdisciplinary Center for Research in Mathematical and Experimental Psychology

Huai Ming Sanchez, Educational Specialist

Yvonne Weah, WE-CARE International

Dr. Rakhat Zholdoshalieva, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Family Literacy

Research and Evaluation

Intermediate

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Carolina C

Math is Family Engagement: Engaging with/Learning from Families of Early Learners in Meaningful Ways

Jessica Gesinger, Zeno Math

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Intermediate

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Mecklenburg 2

Parent Leaders in Action: Strengthening School-Family Connections through the “Moving Forward Together” Toolkit

Ealasha Vaughner, Clayton Early Learning

Family Leadership

Family Engagement

Intermediate

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Mecklenburg 3

The 5th Component of a 4-Component Model: Meeting Family Needs in Times of Crisis

Dr. Kay Combs and Jeana Wallace, Thorn Hill Education Center

Dr. Anna Kaiper-Marquez, National Center for Families Learning

Family Literacy

Family Engagement

Intermediate

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Governor's 3 & 4

Learners as Co-Designers: The Method and Three Projects

Dr. Wendy Falb and Karrie Roy, Literacy Center Of West Michigan

Family Leadership

Family Engagement

Introductory

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

How to Host a Family Fun Night

Maria Kemp, Black Hills Special Services Cooperative

Family Engagement

Introductory

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Governor's 5 & 6

Keys to Success in Family Literacy

Lynn Hernandez, Little Wound School

Family Literacy

Family Leadership

Intermediate

2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. | ImaginOn

Offsite Tour of ImaginOn, Tour 2

Signup is required and transportation is the attendee's responsibility; visit the Registration Desk.

ImaginOn 300 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28202

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m.

Concurrents 4

FEATURED SESSION

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Carolina A

Measuring What Parents Know: Introducing SPEAK-CAT for Early Childhood Insights

Pamela Truelove-Walker, TMW Center for Early Learning + Public Health at The University of Chicago

Family Engagement

Introductory

FEATURED SESSION

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Carolina C

How Cross-Sector Collaboration Is Transforming STEM Education and Economic Mobility

Colleen Casey, Toyota Motor North America

Felicia C. Smith, EdD, National Center for Families Learning

Family Engagement

Introductory

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Mecklenburg 3

A.I. and Education: the Good, the Bad and the Future

Kara Mason and **Ricky Mason**, BrainSTEM

Family Engagement

Introductory

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Carolina E

Building Bridges: Strengthening Family Engagement by Embedding Social Emotional Practices in Early Childhood Settings

Jimena Hernandez and **Shiloh Murillo**, Southwest Human Development

Family Engagement

Intermediate

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

Pursuing Literacy and Justice for All: How One Children's Literacy Organization Is Prioritizing Advocacy

Mary Mathew and **Isabel Geffner**, Book Harvest

Charryse Frederick-Omari, NIA Educational Services

Policy and Impact

Family Leadership

Intermediate

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Carolina D

SPARKLE with Shared Reading: Promoting Early Literacy through Responsive Book Interactions with Toddlers and Twos

Sheena Jennings and **Dr. Laura McCorkle**, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Introductory

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Mecklenburg 2

The Power of Family Leadership as Cultivated Through Practitioner-Parent Communities of Practice

Dr. Maggie Hanna, Eastern Michigan University

Alexis Thomason, The Noble Maat Collective

Family Leadership

Introductory

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Governor's 3 & 4

Strengthening Early Learning Through Family Engagement and Outdoor Play

Dr. Mary Beth Stevens, National Center for Families Learning

Kristen Williams, Play Cousins Collective

Sharon Betts-Palmer and **T'Sha Buycks**, Village of Promise

Angela Brooks and **Whitney Garner**, Birmingham Public Library

Family Engagement

Introductory

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Governor's 5 & 6

Parent Advisory Councils: Elevating Family Voice and Leadership in Education

Dr. Emily Markovich Morris, Brookings Institution, NCFL Research Advisory Council Member

Steve Sheldon, PhD, Johns Hopkins School of Education, NCFL Research Advisory Council Member

Jessie Coffey, MS, RD, Nebraska Department of Education

Latisha Hensley, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Research and Evaluation

Policy and Impact

Introductory

3:35 p.m. – 4:35 p.m. | Cardinal 2 & 3

Colorado Family Literacy Private Meeting

4:35 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. | Symphony Foyer

Welcome Reception

Don't miss this evening that celebrates the North Carolina culinary scene. Learn about exhibitor resources while savoring authentic North Carolina cuisine, and enjoy the opportunity to have a book signed by keynote speaker, Dr. Karen Mapp. This event will provide a warm backdrop for networking and connecting with fellow conference attendees in an atmosphere that embodies the spirit of Southern hospitality.

Books by the Bushel will have titles by all three of our keynote speakers for purchase.

After hours

Dinner on your own

Got dinner plans? Scan the QR code and peruse Charlotte's visitor center website to help you decide. CharlottesGotALot.com/Eat-Drink



Tuesday, November 4

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Symphony Foyer

Registration and exhibits open

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. | Symphony Foyer

Breakfast Buffet

8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. | Carolina A

North Carolina Networking Breakfast

Open to any attendees living in NC.

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. | Symphony Ballroom

General Session

Day 2 begins with Harvard Professor of Practice and family engagement expert Dr. Karen Mapp, who will share what we know, given the extensive research on family engagement, about the powerful impact of effective family-school partnerships on students, parents, teachers, and schools. Dr. Mapp will discuss what we have learned from over 50 years of research about the critical role of home-school partnerships to support student success and school improvement. She will also highlight findings from her newly released book, *Everyone Wins!: The Evidence for Family-School Partnerships and Implications for Practice*.

Felicia C. Smith, EdD, National Center for Families Learning

Karen L. Mapp, EdD, Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE)

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Concurrents 5

FEATURED SESSION

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Mecklenburg 2

From Piggy Banks to Problem Solving: Using Financial Literacy to Spark Family Math Learning

Holly Kreider, EdD, Center for Family Math, NAFSCE

Jeanine Fahnestock, PNC Bank

Rebecca Chrystal, Raising A Reader National Office

Family Engagement

Introductory

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Mecklenburg 1

A Trust Pulse Check: Tools and Strategies to Foster Trust between Families, Students, and Schools

Dr. Emily Markovich Morris and Richaa Hoysala, Brookings Institution

Family Engagement

Research and Evaluation

Introductory

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Carolina E

AI In Action! Supporting Families with AI: Are You All In or All In-timidated?

Dr. Lynn Reynolds, Jefferson County Public Schools

Family Literacy

Family Engagement

Introductory

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Carolina C

Empowering Digital Citizens: Media Literacy and Critical Thinking in the Age of Edtech

Shannon Miller, Van Meter Community School and Future Ready Schools

Lia Dossin, All4Ed's Future Ready Schools

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Intermediate

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Mecklenburg 3

Thinking Outside the Box: Enhancing Parent Engagement in Programming

Esteban Alba-perez, Larissa Lujan-Judd, and Amber Myers, Haaku Family and Child Education (FACE)

Family Engagement

Introductory

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Governor's 3 & 4

Using the Smithsonian's Talk with Me Toolkits for Learning in a Variety of Program Contexts

Dr. Elisabeth McLean, Goodling Institute For Research In Family Literacy

Dr. Esther Prins, Penn State University

Family Literacy

Family Engagement

Introductory

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

Policy and the New Normal: Perspective on DC

Tony Peyton, National Center for Families Learning

Kuna Tavalin, Stride Policy

Policy and Impact

Introductory

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Governor's 5 & 6

Calling All Hope Dealers: Families as Champions of Possibility

Hasan Davis, Hasan Davis Solutions

Family Leadership

Family Engagement

Introductory

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Cardinal 2 & 3

SFEC Network Private Meeting

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. | ImaginOn

Offsite Tour of ImaginOn, Tour 3

Signup is required and transportation is the attendee's responsibility; visit the Registration Desk.

ImaginOn 300 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28202

11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. | Northeast Parking Lot (outside Symphony Ballroom)

Lunch on your own at Food Truck Tuesday

Take time to enjoy some fresh air and check out the food trucks stationed in the parking lot outside the Symphony Ballroom. Take the stairs beside the Registration Desk or elevator to the lower level.



11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. | Carolina A

Family Learning Network Private Meeting

11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. | Carolina D

Driving Possibilities Coalition Lunch Meeting

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Concurrents 6

FEATURED SESSION

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. | Carolina C

Possibility and Statistics: Discovering Hidden Family Strengths and Opportunities Through Asset-Based Data Approaches

Ivory Toldson, Howard University, NCFL Research Advisory Council Member

Research and Evaluation

Introductory

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. | Mecklenburg 3

Libraries as Catalysts for Family Learning: A Conversation with NCFL, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, and PNC Bank

Maddie Myers, PNC

Barbara Cantisano, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library

David Sisk, National Center for Families Learning

Family Engagement

Introductory

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. | Governor's 3 & 4

Developing High-Quality Family Literacy Programming: Teacher-Student Partnership in Action

Megan Singh and Aura Diaz Guido, Enlace Academy

Family Literacy

Family Engagement

Intermediate

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. | Mecklenburg 2

Learning and Leading Together: A Model for Building Family Leadership

Kailanya Brailey, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC)

Family Leadership

Family Engagement

Intermediate

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

Prep Your PK Garden for a Kindergarten Bumper Crop!

Lakeisha Leonard, Momentous School

Research and Evaluation

Intermediate

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Governor's 5 & 6

The Outcomes of a Movement: A Case Study from Camden City Schools

Dr. Terica Butler, Scholastic Inc.

Family Engagement

Intermediate

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Mecklenburg 1

Adapting Family Literacy and Adult Education's Partnership to Meet the Needs of Families and Programs

Ashley Janicki, Jefferson County Public Schools

Ashley Pierce, Jefferson County Adult Education, Kentucky

Dr. Anna Kaiper-Marquez and Zeljana Javorek, National Center for Families Learning

Family Literacy

Intermediate

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Carolina E

From Family Literacy to Family Engagement: K-12 and Community College Partnerships

Ana Damaris Ortiz-Ortiz and Yaraima Mera-Rodriguez, Forsyth Tech Community College

Family Engagement

Introductory

2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Concurrents 7

FEATURED SESSION

2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. | Carolina C

Unboxed: Reimagining Family Engagement as a Co-Designed Experience

Monica Dixon, Search Institute

Family Leadership

Introductory

FEATURED SESSION

2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. | Carolina A

Rewiring Education: How Brain-Aligned Systems and Practices Can Transform Outcomes for All Students

Susan Phelps, Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC)

Family Literacy

Policy and Impact

Intermediate

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Mecklenburg 3

Breaking Barriers to Adult Literacy Access: Insights from U.S. Adults with Low Literacy

Jeff Fantine, PhD, National Coalition for Literacy

Rachel Pleasants McDonnell, Jobs for the Future

Research and Evaluation

Policy and Impact

Intermediate

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Carolina D

Building Reading Success: Connecting, Collaborating, and Celebrating with Literacy Focused Family Engagement

Kristen Walter and LaTrice Carter, Kids Read Now

Family Engagement

Family Literacy

Intermediate

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Carolina E

Evidence to Action: Empowering Parents as Active Collaborators for School and Student Success

Shanette Porter (NCFL Research Advisory Council Member) and Rosa Ramirez Richter, UChicago Consortium On School Research

Jessica Tansey, UChicago Urban Education Institute

Family Engagement

Family Leadership

Intermediate

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

Home + School = Success

Nareny Martinez and Yamil Bullock, Winston Salem Forsyth County Schools

Family Engagement

Intermediate

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Mecklenburg 2

Leaders Are Readers: Live and in Action

Dr. Artika Tyner, Planting People Growing Justice

Family Literacy

Family Engagement

Intermediate

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Governor's 5 & 6

Through the Looking Glass of Two Seasoned Evaluators

Laura Westberg, Retired

Dr. Lori Nebelsick-Gullett, NG Consulting

Research and Evaluation

Introductory

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Mecklenburg 1

College & Career Readiness: A Family Learning Partnership

Charliese Lewis and Monica Jones, Fayette County Public Schools

Family Engagement

Intermediate

2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | Cardinal 2 & 3

PDG and Play with Purpose™ Private Meeting

3:15 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. | ImaginOn

Offsite Tour of ImaginOn, Tour 4

Signup is required and transportation is the attendee's responsibility; visit the Registration Desk.

ImaginOn 300 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28202

4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. | Symphony Ballroom

Stronger Together: Communities as Catalysts for Advancing Education and Prosperity

Russell Booker, PhD, CDE, Spartanburg Academic Movement

Dreama Gentry, Partners for Rural Impact

Cecilia Gutierrez, Blue Meridian

Felicia C. Smith, EdD, National Center for Families Learning

After hours

Dinner on your own

You've worked up an appetite! Let Charlotte's visitor center lead you to a delicious meal by scanning the QR code. CharlottesGotALot.com/Eat-Drink



Wednesday, November 5

7:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. | Symphony Foyer

Registration Open

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. | Symphony Foyer

Morning Coffee and Networking

Last call to get your badge scanned by exhibitors! Attendees who are scanned by all exhibitors will be entered to win a prize at the Closing Session.

Must be present to win.

8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. | Symphony Ballroom

AI, Education, and the Workforce: What Educators and Families Need to Know

Artificial intelligence is no longer a future trend. It's already shaping how we live, learn, and work. From the search engines we use to the tools that streamline daily tasks, AI is here, and education and the workforce cannot afford to ignore its impact. As of July 2025, more than half of U.S. states, along with the District of Columbia, have issued guidance on AI in schools prioritizing literacy, ethics, privacy, and workforce readiness. But the real question is: how do we make sure children and families are not left behind in this new era?

This mainstage panel will ground the audience in a basic understanding of AI, highlighting how we've all been interacting with it for years. Panelists will share perspectives across industries, pointing to ways AI can serve as a tool that lifts people up while emphasizing the need for human guidance, critical thinking, and strong guardrails. Together, we'll examine what's required to prepare communities: from teaching digital literacy and responsible use, to ensuring access and opportunity, to building skills that align with the jobs of tomorrow.

Join us for a candid conversation on how educators, practitioners, funders, and policymakers can help shape an AI-informed future that provides access and opportunity to families rather than excludes them.

Felicia C. Smith, EdD, National Center for Families Learning

9:50 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.

Concurrents 8

FEATURED SESSION

9:50 a.m. – 11:05 a.m. | Carolina C

From Insights to Impact: Philanthropy's Evolving Role in Education, Family Engagement, and Learning

Nancy J. Cable, PhD, William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust

Policy and Impact

Introductory

9:50 a.m. – 11:05 a.m. | Carolina D

Kentucky Adult Education Family Literacy PLC: A Case Study of Shared Learning

Dr. Patricia Erwin and **Dr. Anna Kaiper-Marquez**, National Center For Families Learning

Family Literacy

Introductory

9:50 a.m. – 11:05 a.m. | Governor's 1 & 2

An Introduction to ABE & ESOL: Teaching Remedial Reading Letters and Sounds

Herman Lee, Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE)

Family Literacy

Introductory

9:50 a.m. – 11:05 a.m. | Carolina E

Building Bridges: A Holistic Approach to School, College, and Career Readiness

Amanda Mehl, **Chris Huntley**, and **Mya Walker**, shift_ed

Family Engagement

Introductory

9:50 a.m. – 11:05 a.m. | Carolina A

Enhancing Summer Learning and Literacy: North Carolina's Success with Books on Break and the 21st Century CCLC Grant

Susan Brigman, NC Department Of Public Instruction

Rachel Stine, Book Harvest

Policy and Impact

11:05 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. | Symphony Ballroom

Closing General Session with Buffet Lunch

To close out the conference, we'll hear from **Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD**, award-winning tenured professor in the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the Gillings School of Global Public Health and the Founding Director of the Equity Research Action Coalition at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As an applied developmental psychologist, Dr. Iruka is focused on ensuring that minoritized children and children from low-income households thrive during the prenatal through early childhood period by attending to their sociocultural assets and contexts. Her specialty is in early childhood development, adult-child interactions and relationships, and health, wealth, and education policies and programs that disrupt inequities and advance equity. Dr. Iruka has authored over 100 books and papers including her latest book, *We Are the Change We Seek: Advancing Racial Justice in Early Care and Education*.

Felicia C. Smith, EdD, National Center for Families Learning

Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD, Gillings School of Global Health at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG), NCFL Research Advisory Council Member

Holly Walters, Toyota Motor North America, NCFL Board Member

2025 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year

Join NCFL and Toyota in congratulating **Dr. Shalun Matthews**, Fulton County Schools, Atlanta, Georgia, for being selected the **2025 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year**.

Congratulations to **Anne Abbott**, Literacy NRV, Christiansburg, Virginia and **Paige Reuber**, Briya Public Charter School, Washington, D.C. as runners-up.



Dr. Shalun Matthews
Atlanta, GA



Anne Abbott
Christiansburg, VA



Paige Reuber
Washington, D.C.



TOYOTA

Current NCFL Family Learning Communities™



- Huntsville, Alabama*
- East Point, Georgia
- Macon-Bibb, Georgia
- Butler County, Kentucky*
- Frankfort, Kentucky
- Lexington, Kentucky
- Louisville, Kentucky
- Rockcastle County, Kentucky*
- Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Crete, Nebraska
- O'Neill, Nebraska
- Bastrop County, Texas*
- Chesterfield, Virginia

*New FLCs established in 2025

Learn more about our FLC vision and how your community can be part of it here:
[Bit.ly/FLCommunities](https://bit.ly/FLCommunities)



ncfl '25
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CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE

The National Center for Families Learning
is proud to recognize

for participating in the 2025 Families Learning
Conference, held November 2-5, 2025,
in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Fifteen Professional Development Hours

Felicia C. Smith

Dr. Felicia Cumings Smith, President and CEO
National Center for Families Learning

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