

# MSEI Newsletter

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 2024



## Welcome to the 2024-2025 Academic Year!

I'm delighted to welcome you back to another exciting year in the Master of Science in Early Intervention (MSEI) program! Whether you're returning or joining us for the first time, I hope you had a wonderful summer.

MSEI faculty have been hard at work over the summer! We've updated our courses to reflect the latest research and practices in early intervention. Several of you just wrapped up the classes you took with Drs. Parker and Sonnier and have gained valuable information on family-centered practice and intervention strategies. We are all ready to tackle another year!

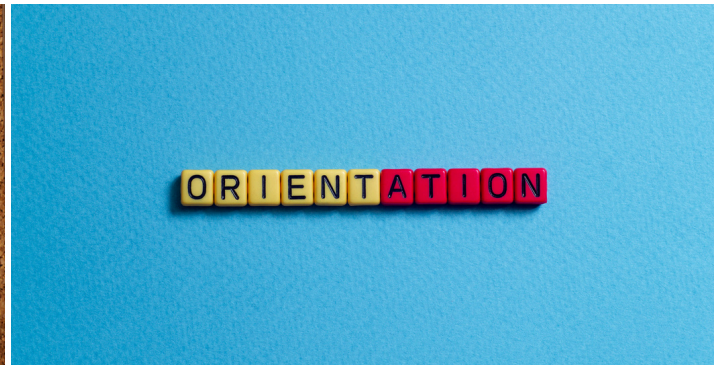
This issue includes a range of important information and updates. In the **Research Corner**, we explore a recent

study which shares results from a study on teaching joint attention to toddlers with autism. Our **Student Spotlight** features an MSEI student who developed an inclusive playgroup at her practicum site in Booneville, MS. In **Updates from the Field**, we recap an interview with New America on the well-being of the EI/ECSE workforce, along with strategies and resources to support your own well-being. Lastly, check out **Career-Building Opportunities** for professional growth opportunities. I have also shared a few resources for job searching within EI.

I hope you all enjoy this first newsletter of the 2024-2025 year!

*-Dr. Pansé-Barone*

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## MSEI Program Updates: Save the Date for Orientation!

We have an important change to announce for this year's MSEI graduate student orientation for new students. Instead of our usual stand-alone meeting, we're integrating the orientation into Dr. Pansé-Barone's HDF5 8523 class. The orientation will take place from 5:30 to 6:00 PM on August 26th.

We hope this change will be more

convenient for everyone by allowing you to attend orientation without needing to fit an additional meeting into your schedule.

During the orientation, we will provide an overview of the program and address any questions you may have. We look forward to seeing you there!



### Research Corner

Joint attention, the ability to focus on an object with another person while recognizing their shared focus, typically begins to develop between 8 to 15 months. For example, when a parent points to a picture in a book and the toddler looks where the parent is pointing, joint attention is occurring. This skill is crucial for language and social development. A delay or absence of joint attention is considered an early indicator of autism.

This is an important skill that early interventionists can - and should - coach caregivers to teach to young children.

In "Coaching Caregivers to Teach Responding to Joint Attention for Toddlers with Autism" by Kim et al. (2024), the authors examined whether coaching is an effective way to help caregivers teach joint attention skills to toddlers with autism. They recruited three board-certified behavior analysts and three families (professional-parent-child dyads). Using a single-subject design, they found that behavioral skills training improved caregivers' intervention techniques. All three toddlers showed better joint attention behaviors, though the degree of improvement varied. This suggests coaching is effective but outcomes can differ among children.

Check out the article [here](#) if you are interested!

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## MSEI Student Spotlight: Alexia Owens

One of our MSEI students, Alexia Owens, spent this summer gaining hands-on experience through a practicum at the Mississippi Child Resource and Referral (R&R) Center located at MSU Extension in Booneville, MS. The Booneville R&R supports local childcare centers and preschool programs by providing essential items to enhance educational experiences in the classroom. We interviewed Alexia about her experience. Check out her responses below!

### **Can you tell us about the inclusive playgroup you created at your practicum site? What inspired you to start this initiative?**

Under the guidance of Dr. Julie Parker, I organized an inclusive playgroup for infants and toddlers at the Booneville R&R this summer. Every Monday in July, parents brought their children for themed lessons, including reading, singing, activities, and free play. The playgroup was well-received, with 8 children attending on the final Monday, contributing to over 100 visitors at the R&R this month.

### **What were some of the challenges you faced in establishing the playgroup, and how did you overcome them?**

The biggest challenge was finding families to participate, followed by keeping the children engaged and managing space limitations in our small Booneville center.

To address the recruitment issue, I reached out to friends in the community who helped spread the word, proving that “word of mouth” is highly effective. For the other challenges, I used toy rotation to maintain interest and collaborated with my supervisor, Sarah Hollis, to rearrange the room for better space utilization.



### **How has the playgroup been received by the children, families, and practicum site leadership?**

All of the families and children seem to enjoy the playgroups. The children who were shy coming in are now all smiles and ready to play when they arrive. The parents have also begun to make connections with each other, which is wonderful, especially for those with children who have special needs. An adequate support system is essential for these families. We were also able to add a few parents into the R&R system. They utilized the center and checked out some resources to take home.

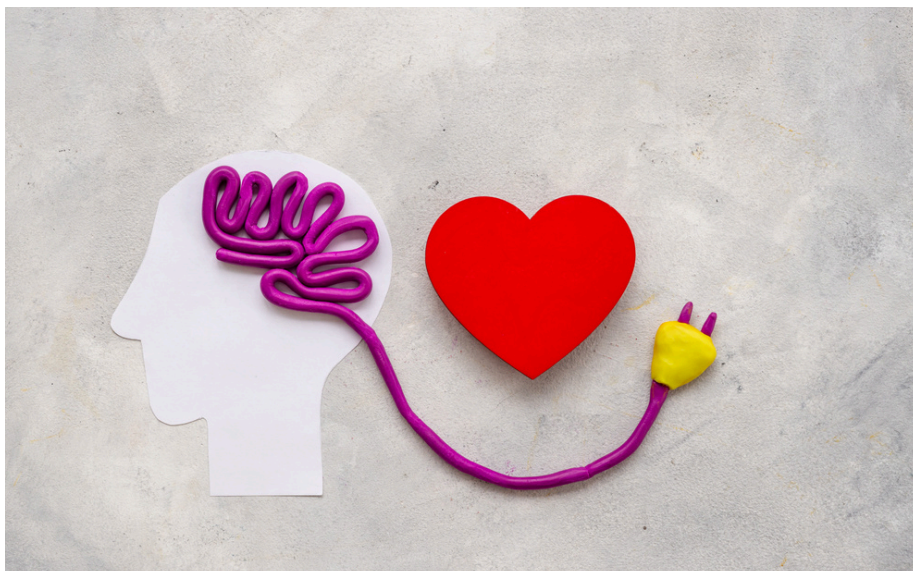
### **What advice would you give to others looking to create inclusive playgroups in their own communities?**

To start, I created a flyer with playgroup offerings and included a survey to determine the most convenient times for parents. This approach was crucial for accommodating parents of young children, especially those with special needs who juggle many appointments. Getting their feedback helped improve participation. Begin with small steps if you're new to working with infants and toddlers. It can be challenging to keep everyone engaged and safe, but don't be intimidated by new experiences and encourage as much parent involvement as possible for the benefit of both parents and children.

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# Updates from the Field: Supporting Your Well-Being



The national shortage of Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) professionals means that as MSEI students, you will have no trouble finding a job after graduation. However, this shortage also highlights the importance of prioritizing your well-being to avoid burnout in our demanding field.

In the article "Well-Being is Key to a Strong Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Workforce," Carrie Gillispie interviews Dr. Heather Walters, who discusses factors affecting the well-being of EI/ECSE professionals. Dr. Walters highlights the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified professionals and emphasizes the need to address turnover to meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Dr. Walters highlighted that low pay, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of diversity contribute to stress and turnover among EI/ECSE professionals, affecting service quality. She advocates for whole-system approaches, better preparation pathways, enhanced professional development, and involving EI/ECSE professionals in policy-making.

For more details, read the full article [here](#). Additionally, you can find data on provider and service coordinator shortages in your state's Annual Performance Report/State Performance Plan [here](#).

## What Can You Do?

Research supports the following strategies to retain qualified EI/ECSE professionals:

- **Induction Programs and Mentoring:** Pairing new professionals with experienced colleagues can boost job satisfaction, retention, and growth. If your school lacks a formal program, seek out a mentor for guidance and support.
- **Join Professional Networks:** Consider joining the [Division for Early Childhood](#) (DEC) for resources, forums, professional development opportunities, and peer support.



## Career-Building Opportunities

### Upcoming Conferences

#### **DIVISION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (DEC) CONFERENCE**

- Dates: Sept. 17-20, 2024
- Location: New Orleans, LA
- Click [here](#) to register!

#### **MISSISSIPPI EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE**

- Dates: Oct. 11-12, 2024
- Location: Pearl, MS
- Click [here](#) to register!

#### **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN (NAEYC) CONFERENCE**

- Dates: Nov. 6-9, 2024
- Location: Anaheim, CA
- Click [here](#) to register!

### Job Search Resources

- **DEC Career Center**
  - Website: <https://careers.dec-sped.org/>
- **Nonprofit Opportunities**
  - Website: <https://www.npo.net/>
- **USAJobs**
  - Website: <https://www.usajobs.gov/>
- **State Department of Education websites**

### Fellowships & Assistantships

#### **RESPECTABILITY NATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (FELLOWSHIP)**

- Location: Remote
- About: Paid, 15-20 hr./week fellowship for people with and without disabilities. Applicants must have a strong commitment to fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Click [here](#) for additional information and to apply.

#### **MISSISSIPPI EDUCATION POLICY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

- Location: Virtual and in-person in Jackson, MS, with a spring trip to Washington, DC.
- About: A 9-month program for professionals interested in education policy, from early childhood to higher education. Tuition costs apply unless sponsored.
- Deadline: Aug. 31, 2024
- To Apply: [MS-EPFP Application](#)

#### **GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS**

- To Apply: View available positions at Mississippi State University [here](#).