

Early Learning Fall Institute Awards

Each year, Iowa AEYC members may nominate an exceptional early care and education professional or advocate to receive an award to be presented at the Fall Institute. There are seven awards available: Children’s Chamption, Commitment to Young Children, Emerging Leader, Equity and Opportunity, Family Partnership, and Influencer Awards. This year, we extend a warm congratulations to Rebeca Braster, Shanell Wagler, and Amber Kollbaum for being incredible leaders in the field!



Nominate an exceptional early care and education professional here!

Educator of the Year - Rebeca Braster



Rebeca is a passionate early childhood educator! She strives to meet the needs of the children and their families daily. Rebeca joined the National Association for the Education of Young Children in order to learn more about developmentally appropriate practice. She has been the lead teacher in both the toddler and three-year-old preschool classrooms at Kids World, in addition to stepping up to receive her substitute license to help in other rooms when needed. Colleagues at Kids World often refer to Rebeca as the “Child Whisperer” as she has the natural ability to understand children and their needs. Rebeca’s calling in life is teaching; she teaches the children to respect others and to love learning. She is a problem-solver, an innovator, and a dynamic member of the Kids World team.

Children’s Champion - Shanell Wagler



Shanell has provided leadership for the Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) system since its inception in the late 1990’s. She’s held a very difficult position navigating both the wishes and wants of people in state government and the needs of communities at the local level. She provided oversight and direction when needed to all the local ECI areas, providing never-ending support for local directors and improving many systems and tools. During her career, Shanell remained steadfast in her commitment to creating the best environments for Iowa’s children. We hope that Shanell retired realizing that she has impacted many families and children over the years, leading a system to improve their lives for decades to come; she is truly a Children’s Champion.

Influencer Award - Amber Kollbaum



Amber was a long-time family child care provider in Sioux City area and now is an amazing consultant for Child Care Resource & Referral in Woodbury county. Her knowledge of licensing standards, rules, and regulations, along with her passion for the most current political events which pertain to the early care and education field, are an advantage to the communities and centers she works with. Amber puts her knowledge and skills to work in order to educate and advocate for the child care community as a whole. She serves as an ambassador for the T.E.A.C.H and WAGE\$ programs and sings their praise every chance she has. Amber has the ability to connect with anyone in the ECE workforce and is well-respected. Amber is an impressive, hardworking person who is an incredible resource and advocate for her peers.