



**SHERMAN
CENTER**

for Early Learning
in Urban Communities

**2021
ANNUAL
REPORT**



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



In 2021, we continued riding the wave of frequent change produced by the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We began the first part of the year delivering our programmatic activities virtually, as we did for most of 2020. Fortunately, by the fall semester we had returned to campus and resumed in-person workshops, orientations, and all programmatic events. In August 2021, we said farewell to the inaugural Sherman Center director, Dr. Mavis Sanders, and I was honored to transition from a Sherman Center Research Faculty to the exciting role of directing the center. We also witnessed the departure of two of our Campus Advisory Committee members, Drs. James Bemby and Anita Komlodi, and welcomed Dr. Patricia A. Young as a new Campus Advisory Committee member. I am thrilled to introduce new members of our Sherman Center team and share with you all we accomplished in 2021.

In this year's Annual Report, we use our [Theory of Change](#) to present the impact we had in bringing the Sherman Center's mission into fruition. Our mission focuses on building a strong foundation for lifelong learning among young children in Baltimore City, as well as developing best early childhood education practices in urban schools. We carry out this mission through three main pillars, which will be used as guidelines for the sections of this report, to organize and present our accomplishments. In the Partnerships section, we share the achievements we reached through collaborations with the Shriver Center, the Enoch Pratt Free Library, the Judy Centers, the Sherman STEM Scholars Program, and our five partner Baltimore City public schools through our [Literacy Fellows Program](#); [Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program](#); [Diverse Books Project](#); and one of our new initiatives, the [Breathe2Think program](#). In the Professional and Leadership Development section, we share the encouraging outcomes of the [Teacher Summer Institute](#) and the [Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program](#). In the Multidisciplinary Research and Scholarship section, we share the [Faculty Research Award recipient](#), the research advanced by our Research Faculty, our Research Reports and various [publications](#), as well as our two new research initiatives, the [Doctoral Student Research Award](#), and the [Sherman Center Research Conference](#). Lastly, we recognize the invaluable contribution of our funders, as well as showcase this year's [Childhood Literacy Scholarship](#) recipient. It is my pleasure to share with you the many accomplishments we achieved this year, setting the stage for continuing the important work we do to advance our mission in 2022.

Jennifer Mata-McMahon

SHERMAN CENTER THEORY OF CHANGE

Sherman Center Theory of Change

The Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities seeks to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning and academic success by connecting theory, evidence, and practice.

PARTNERSHIPS.

Collaborating to expand resources and opportunities for young learners, birth to eight.

Activities: Diverse Books Project; Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Project; Literacy Fellows Program

MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP.

Producing and disseminating new knowledge on early childhood education policies and practices.

Activities: Faculty Recruitment, Faculty Research Award



PROFESSIONAL AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.

Building professional knowledge and leadership in early childhood to promote transformational change.

Activities: Teacher Summer Institute, Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program



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NEW SHERMAN CENTER PERSONNEL

EXPANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERTISE AT UMBC

In 2021, the Sherman Center welcomed Liran Laor as the new program director for the Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP). In this role, she collaborates with and supports the many stakeholders involved with MECLP. She assists in developing and executing new programs and initiatives, such as the Community of Practice, and is responsible for managing MECLP's grants and financial operation. Importantly, she represents MECLP in the broader community by building relationships and recruiting new fellows.

We also welcomed three talented graduate assistants from the UMBC community to support existing Sherman Center initiatives. Sravanti Vitta Sanjay serves as a communications intern and handles communication, social media, and strategy for digital and offline activities. Anika Aquino serves as a graduate research assistant working with Dr. Rochester on research and professional development initiatives. Michele Berry works with MECLP as a graduate assistant providing administrative support for program initiatives. The Sherman Center has greatly benefited from adding these staff members to our growing team!



"I was excited to join the Sherman Center community due to our common passion to empower early childhood professionals to assume leadership positions; advocate on behalf of children, families, and educators; and promote change to strengthen the Maryland early care and education field."

Liran Laor received a BA in social work from Haifa University, Israel, an MA in early childhood education from Towson University, and an early intervention certificate from Georgetown University. She has more than 18 years of experience working with educators, children, and families, including as preschool director at Greenzaid and Har Shalom Early Childhood Centers and adjunct professor in early childhood education at Montgomery College in Maryland. In addition, she volunteers for several organizations in Montgomery County to promote collaboration among diverse early childhood practitioners, including the Early Childhood Coordinating Council.



"It has been an absolute pleasure working with the Sherman Center. I am extremely glad to be a part of all the amazing programs and initiatives launched by the Center. To be able to contribute my bit that can impact, amplify, and raise awareness about early childhood learning is what excites me the most every day at work."

Sravanti Vitta Sanjay is a graduate student in Human Centered Computing program. She received her Bachelor of Engineering in information science and engineering from Nitte Meenakshi Institute of Technology, India. Sravanti comes with four years of experience as a senior systems engineer at Infosys Limited. Prior to pursuing her Master's degree, she founded a creative design studio, Dramaartic, catering to all design and brand development requirements across verticals for a wide base of clientele. Sravanti is an enthusiastic product designer and graphic artist who loves to dive deep into the world of experimental design.



"The staff and faculty at the Sherman Center are truly committed to their community and model well what it means to be a partner and collaborator in the work. I look forward to learning more and continuing my work here!"

Anika Aquino is a doctoral student in the Applied Developmental psychology program. She received her Bachelor's degree from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, in Psychology. Anika also received her Master's degree in applied developmental psychology at UMBC. Anika's research interests focus on parenting and early childhood care and education, particularly among immigrant families and families of color. She also works as a graduate assistant for the Culture, Child, and Adolescent Development Lab at UMBC and is a graduate intern for the American Psychological Association's RESilience Initiative.



"Working with MECLP has provided me with an opportunity to explore the intricacies of early childhood education policy at work and all of the possibilities that come with it. It is inspiring to see so many early childhood leaders put themselves forward to further their leadership potential and create better educational opportunities for young learners."

Michele Berry holds a Bachelor's degree in environmental studies from The New School and is currently pursuing her Master's degree in environmental policy. She is a Maryland local and is passionate about environmental justice, including environmental literacy and access to equitable education. She comes to MECLP with five years of experience in outdoor education and instruction. Prior to MECLP Michele traveled extensively, including living and working in Australia, volunteering and traveling in Central and South America, and serving in The Peace Corps in Senegal as a health volunteer.

PARTNERSHIPS

COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES BY THE NUMBERS

The Sherman Center executes its mission by implementing initiatives through research-practice partnerships with our five Baltimore City partner schools. These initiatives provide professional learning opportunities for early childhood education stakeholders that work closely with young students, such as pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and families. The following pages provide an overview of four Sherman Center partnership initiatives—the Literacy Fellows Program; the Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program; the Diverse Books Project; and Breathe2Think—along with their impact in 2021.

LITERACY FELLOWS PROGRAM

The Sherman Center and [The Shriver Center](#)—UMBC’s service-learning and community engagement center—developed the Literacy Fellows Program (LFP) to provide English Language Arts (ELA) support to prekindergarten through Grade 2 classrooms. UMBC undergraduate volunteers engage in weekly service at two schools: Bay Brook Elementary/Middle School and Curtis Bay Elementary School (formerly Curtis Bay Elementary/Middle School). In addition to engaging in weekly service, LFP Fellows take on leadership roles in the program by (1) recruiting and managing classroom volunteers at their host school, (2) enrolling in a practicum course taught by The Shriver Center to deepen their understanding of community assets and needs, and (3) critically reflecting on their experience through end-of-semester reports. The Sherman Center also facilitates professional development sessions to enhance Fellows’ literacy-specific knowledge.



Literacy Fellows and volunteers at Curtis Bay Elementary/Middle School, fall 2021

Our spring 2021 cohort included five Fellows and three volunteers who supported elementary-aged students during online learning in six virtual classrooms. Their involvement during ELA instruction varied from one fellow to the next (e.g., leading small breakout groups, delivering whole-group book reading), and Fellows reported that consistent communication with classroom teachers helped to create a positive volunteer experience.

While technology did serve as a barrier in the spring leaving some volunteers unable to engage fully in the LFP, we invited Fellows to continue their service in the fall to support classroom teachers as they returned to in-person instruction. The fall LFP team included four Fellows and eight volunteers across eight classrooms. Fellows used creative strategies to ensure that all students could participate meaningfully in classroom activities, such as using picture clues when working with English language learners. Bay Brook Literacy Fellow Nihira Mugamba shared the following about a key success of her spring experience:

“The key success experienced this semester was the involvement of the volunteers throughout the virtual environment. ... Some of the key successes that were observed was the communication between the volunteers and the teachers. The first grade classroom teachers were adamant at keeping the volunteers in the loop and notifying them of any changes, such as school cancellations and schedule changes. . . .The student’s participation, and the teacher’s preparation, made the volunteers experience seamless.”

A total of eight Fellows and 12 volunteers served 417 total hours during 2021. Fellows supported 14 classrooms and served approximately 350 students. The Sherman Center looks forward to continuing supporting additional early childhood classrooms in the future!

FAMILIES, LIBRARIES, AND EARLY LITERACY PROGRAM

The Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program (ELP) provided virtual and in-person family meetings for caregivers of young children (birth to age 3) at Curtis Bay and Lakeland Judy Centers. The program—which includes a collaboration between the Sherman Center, the [Enoch Pratt Free Library](#), and the [Judy Centers](#)—hosts meetings with families in community-based settings to share books, information, and materials to support children’s kindergarten readiness and family literacy engagement at home.

We held five ELP events in 2021 at Curtis Bay and Lakeland (bilingual), including a virtual winter session on children’s socioemotional development and a virtual session on using the five sense to explore outdoors during the spring. Families created personalized books to identify emotions and decorated a t-shirt to guide outside learning using the five senses. In the summer, Curtis Bay hosted their first in-person ELP session since Spring 2020, which focused on promoting literacy through learning about animals, and Lakeland hosted their summer session virtually. The summer family events included experiential learning activities that brought the session’s theme to life, and children engaged in an interactive animal exploration opportunity with wildlife group Wildlife Adventures.

Our in-person October ELP session focused on mindfulness and emotional wellness; families learned about breathing techniques to raise their child’s awareness of their emotions. Families also participated in an interactive read aloud hosted by the Enoch Pratt Free Library and a child-friendly yoga session hosted by Queen of the Moon Fitness. The in-person December ELP session highlighted how cooking together can support kindergarten readiness. Families received ingredients to bake cookies at home and decorated bibs and aprons together for use during mealtime. As requested by the Judy Centers, our fall sessions at both sites were fully bilingual responding to the linguistic needs of the families we serve.

Family Participation and Engagement

We distributed **222 books** and sets of kindergarten readiness materials to families throughout the year. In addition, **44 total families** participated in ELP events in 2021, and an average of eight families (per site) attended each session. When asked whether ELP events helped in their understanding of kindergarten readiness, families who attended one or more meetings had an average rating of 4.2 on a five-point scale (1 = *The ELP did not help me at all*; 5 = *The ELP helped me a lot*). Returning families also reported using ELP materials and books at home on a weekly basis.



Materials distributed to families for the winter ELP event meeting on socioemotional development.



Materials distributed to families for the spring ELP event on the five senses.



Children at Curtis Bay interact with wildlife animals during the summer ELP event.



Lakeland families listen to read aloud by Enoch Pratt Library staff.



Curtis Bay families practice breathing exercises during child-friendly yoga session in the fall.



Lakeland family decorates bib together during the cooking-themed ELP in December event.

DIVERSE BOOKS PROJECT

Early childhood classroom libraries play an important role in helping children make sense of the world around them. Research suggests that teaching with books that reflect diverse cultural backgrounds can support children’s socio-emotional and literacy skills. Our Diverse Books Project aims to ensure that early childhood educators at Sherman Center partner schools have access to multicultural children’s books for their classroom libraries. Educators review 15 books from the Diverse Books Collection each grading period and request up to two titles for their classroom. In addition, the project encourages educators to reflect on their use of books from the Diverse Books Collection both before and after using them during instruction. We have a growing library of educator [videos](#) describing how they used multicultural books in their classrooms and how their students engaged with the texts.

Educators representing all five Sherman Center partner schools participated in the Diverse Books Project in 2021 for the second year in a row. As we transitioned back to in-person learning, educators could request up to six copies of one or two books for use with their students. The Sherman Center distributed **192 books** from the Diverse Books Collection to **36 early childhood educators** at our partner schools. Prekindergarten to Grade 2 classroom, special education, and English as a Second Language teachers submitted 53 requests for 35 books.

Educator Feedback

Educators who selected diverse books for their classrooms did so to support their students as they related to themselves, each other, and the books’ characters. They mentioned the following when asked to describe their reason for selecting particular books for their students:

*“I [choose *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* (2019) by Sonia Sotomayor and Rafael Lopez and *You Matter* (2020) by Christian Robinson] to diversify my class library and read aloud options [with books] that may not be in the curriculum.”*

- Shontelle Capers, Kindergarten Teacher, Arundel Elementary/Middle School

*“I have a lot of students in my class [whose] parent were born elsewhere, and some of them may have been born elsewhere also. [A *Different Pond* (2017) by Bao Phi and *The Thing About Bees: A Love of Bees* (2019) by Shabazz Larkin] will be good for them to relate to.”*

- Jennifer Green, Prekindergarten Teacher, Bay Brook Elementary/Middle School

*“*Benny Doesn’t Like to Be Hugged* (2017) by Zetta Elliott will help [my students] understand that it’s okay to be different and how to be friends with someone for who they are.”*

- Anu Grover, Kindergarten Teacher, Curtis Bay Elementary/Middle School



2020-2021 Second Grading Period Book List Selection



(11 requests)

(10 requests)

Most Requested Books of 2021

BREATHE2THINK



In alignment with Baltimore City Public Schools' (BCPS) inclusion of wholeness in their 2021-22 budget, and in recognition of the need for spiritual and mental health support as teachers and students returned to in-person learning, the Sherman Center piloted the Breathe2Think (B2T) program in fall 2021. The main goal of B2T is to support and nurture the spirit of BCPS children and their pre-service and in-service teachers, as they develop mindfulness to be better prepared for teaching and learning.

B2T is the newest Sherman Center programmatic initiative in collaboration with the [Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program](#), specifically working with scholars seeking certification in early childhood education. Fall 2021 saw the first iteration of the program with a small number of Sherman Scholars (pre-service teachers) who designed and implemented a Mindfulness Project with the students in their internship site. The Scholars received a stipend and a budget to purchase materials to implement their project. Materials used included children's books, fidgets, beany toys, breathing balls, diffusers and oil essences, music, videos, and glitter jars. The results were 100% positive for both the pre-service teachers and the children with whom they worked. The participating Scholars reported seeing changes in the behavior of the children between week two and three of the six-week intervention project, as well as observed impacts in the children's academic outcomes. The stories pertaining to specific children were compelling and showed how much a two-to five-minute meditation practice can do for children ages three to six.

Scholars' Quotes

- Related to benefits received from practicing meditation:

"Sleep throughout the night without waking up, wake up less tired, less headaches, less stressed, made time to reflect on my thoughts/feelings, felt lighter" (P1)

"Less stressed. Lower anxiety levels. Connection to the world. Finding purpose." (P2)

- Related to the Mindfulness Project benefits for students:

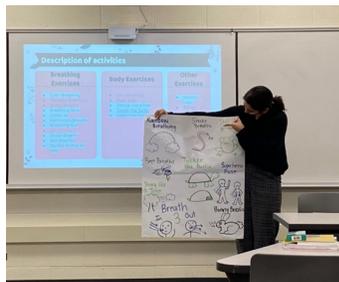
"It helped the students connect to themselves and focus on that moment in time." (P2)



Dr. Mata-McMahon models a guided meditation exercise for B2T Scholars.

B2T materials used by Scholars to facilitate meditation practice at their internship sites.

Julie Gilbert describes her definition of spirituality at the project kick-off.



Ashley Delgado Penaranda presents the meditation exercises she used for her project.



B2T Scholars and Dr. Mata-McMahon after their final presentations.

PROFESSIONAL AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A cornerstone of expanding educators' knowledge and skills to implement effective work with young learners is professional and leadership development. The Sherman Center includes two such opportunities—The Teacher Summer Institute and the Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program—that build the capacity of early childhood stakeholders to effect change. Below we share highlights from these initiatives.

TEACHER SUMMER INSTITUTE

In 2021, the Sherman Center hosted a hybrid Teacher Summer Institute (TSI) on July 26-29 for 40 early childhood educators from our five partner schools, UMBC faculty and staff, and guests. The kick-off event included a virtual discussion by Dr. Zetta Elliott about inclusive children's books publishing and her book *Benny Doesn't Like to Be Hugged*, which uplifts the experiences of an autistic child through the eyes of his friend. Next, Dr. Michele Stites, associate professor of education at UMBC and expert in mathematics instruction and special needs education, facilitated a two-day virtual workshop on inclusive early childhood education and differentiated instruction. On the final day, educators created action plans in school-based groups—virtually and at UMBC—to support their students during the 2021-22 academic year. Teachers also identified materials for instruction, which the Sherman Center purchased and delivered to their respective schools.

Teacher Feedback

All teachers rated the quality of the 2021 Teacher Summer Institute as "very good" (22%) or "excellent" (78%). When asked what they like most about the professional development (PD) session, teachers shared the following:

- "I feel that [the TSI] has helped me to think about the next year in a positive light."
- "The small group tasks and Jamboards were an engaging way to do the activities. I always leave feeling inspired and ready to put these strategies into action."
- "Zetta [Elliott]'s talk on the book industry and its effect on the production of diverse books was very eye opening."
- ". . . exceptional speakers who used adult learning strategies; the hands-on approach to walking away with a product (lesson plans, ideas, discussions, etc.); . . . and of course the respect and appreciation that you show in the way you approach us, the empathy for the challenges, the humor, and the amazing outpouring of materials."

Reported Growth

Before and after the TSI, participants rated their knowledge about topics covered in the professional development sessions, including differentiated instruction, promoting positive behavior through inclusive practices, and collaborating with families and other educators on a scale from 1 (novice) to 4 (expert). As shown in Figure 1, more educators rated their knowledge about engaging with families of young students with special needs at the "advanced" or "expert" levels compared to the "novice" or "intermediate" levels at the end of the TSI. There was also an increase in the percentage of educators who rated their knowledge of promoting young students' positive behavior through inclusive classroom practices as "advanced" or "expert" as compared to "novice" or "intermediate" at the conclusion of the four-day event (see Figure 2).

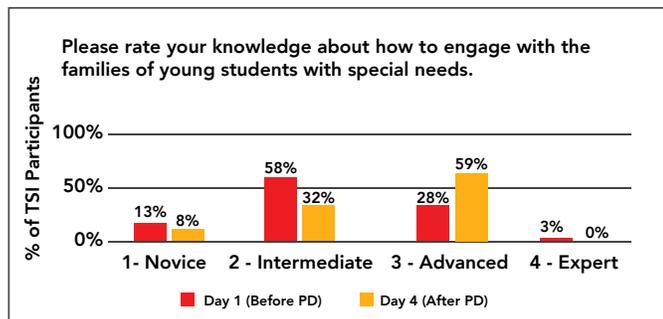


Figure 1

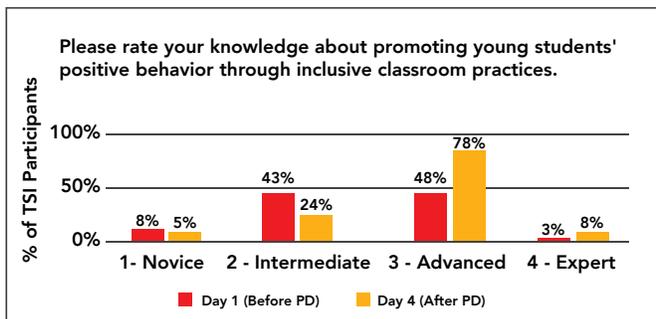


Figure 2

MARYLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM:

Building Professional Knowledge and the Leadership Capacity of Early Childhood in Maryland

The Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP), a program of the Sherman Center, is a workforce development initiative designed to accelerate cross-sector leadership in early childhood. MECLP's singular goal, as articulated in its Theory of Action, is to develop highly qualified, experienced, and diverse early childhood leaders in Maryland to improve outcomes for young children, families, and communities. MECLP achieves this goal by providing leadership training through the innovative 12-month hybrid course, SHER 601 (Leading for Change in Early Childhood Education), developed and taught by faculty at the University of Massachusetts Boston's Institute for Early Childhood Education Leadership and Innovation (IEELI). The next few pages feature MECLP's accomplishments in 2021.

Despite the constraints of COVID-19, MECLP continued to make strides toward shaping strong leaders with the second cohort of MECLP Fellows completing the SHER 601 course in December 2021. These Fellows presented their capstone projects to their colleagues, MECLP Fellows from Cohorts I and III, Advisory Committee members, and invited guests. The projects reflected their personal and professional growth and illustrated what they will continue to contribute to their organizations and the early childhood field in Maryland. We are proud of the Fellows' accomplishments. Below are the Cohort II Fellows and their capstone project titles.



"The MECLP graduates are a powerful force, individually and collectively, for positive change in early childhood in Maryland. They have brought deep expertise and diverse perspectives to the Leading for Change course, where they designed innovative solutions to some of the most urgent challenges in the field. Over this yearlong experience, they formed a strong network within and beyond their cohort to support and sustain their leadership and the impact of their change projects."

- Dr. Anne Douglas, SHER 601 Faculty



Adopting an Equity Lens in Early Childhood Education

Alicia Cross, Assistant Director/Teacher at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Montgomery County

Accreditation Maintenance

Crystal Harris, Coordinator of the DRU Judy Center at Dorothy I. Height Elementary School, Baltimore City

Increasing Participation in Parenting Education Through Community Partnerships

Heather Harding, Child Development Coordinator for Caroline County's Early Head Start Program, Caroline County

Strengthening Partnership and Collaboration between Local Education Agencies and Head Start

Vanessa Jones, Early Childhood Program Specialist, Maryland State Department of Education

Changing How We Engage Stakeholders in Parental Involvement

Janelle King, Assistant Principal at Port Towns Elementary School, Prince George's County

Increasing Communication and Strengthening Reciprocal Partnerships between Head Start/ Early Head Start and Carroll County Public Schools

Kaymi Plank, Judy Center Service/Site Coordinator at the Judy Center Early Learning Hub at Robert Moton Elementary School, Carroll County

Expanding Professional Learning Models in Early Childhood

Krista Respass, Managing Director, Early Childhood Education Services at Maryland Public Television

Pyramid Model Framework Partnerships and Supports in Harford County

Melissa Romano, Coordinator of Special Education: Birth to 5 Programs, Harford County Public Schools

Developing Practitioner Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Emily Samuels, District Director at Celebree Schools, Maryland

MECLP Salutes its 2021-2022 Cohort III Fellows

In 2021, MECLP welcomed its third cohort, a diverse group of Fellows representing the unique fabric of early childhood practitioners in Maryland. Below are the Cohort III Fellows at their in-person orientation session.



MECLP Salutes its 2021-2022 Cohort III Fellows:

- **Amanda Beacham**, Lab School Director and Adjunct Professor, Carroll County Community College
- **Tamika Blair-Staton**, Education and Mental Health Coordinator, Dayspring Head Start, Anne Arundel County
- **Raviv Brooks**, Preschool Lead Teacher, Music & Hebrew Specialist, Ohr Kodesh Early Childhood Center, Montgomery County
- **Roshon Casey-Lee**, Director of Early Childhood Programs, Archdiocese of Washington, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's, and St. Mary's Counties
- **Robyn Graham**, Special Education Teacher Specialist, Birth to Five, Harford County Public Schools
- **Margaret (Peg) Jarboe**, Director, Anne Arundel Early Head Start, Anne Arundel County
- **Robin Mellen**, Director, The Wilkes School, Howard County
- **Deanna Morton**, Director of Education and Health Services, Head Start & Early Head Start, Baltimore City Y Head Start, Baltimore City, Baltimore and Anne Arundel Counties
- **Bernadine Occhiuzzo**, Teacher / Director, Cedar Lane Nursery School, Montgomery County
- **Cherry Price**, Paraprofessional, Prince George's County Public Schools
- **Imani Rose**, Center Director and Delegating Nurse, Joshua's Place, Baltimore City
- **Lainie Santos Torres**, Montessori Teacher, Barrie School, Montgomery County
- **Ameka Smith**, Executive Director, Y of Central Maryland, Baltimore City and Baltimore County
- **Nkenge Yasin**, Center Director, Busy Bee Child Care Center, Baltimore City

MECLP's New Initiative: Community of Practice

To sustain the leadership journey of SHER 601 course completers, in 2021, MECLP initiated a Community of Practice (CoP) to support the Fellows' leadership skills and networking capacity. The CoP provides Fellows with opportunities to formalize, articulate, and advocate for their capstone projects by interacting with Maryland and national early childhood speakers on problems of practice germane to early childhood and their specific interests. MECLP's CoP currently includes four intersecting elements described below.

- 1. A mentoring program** connects mentors and course completers (mentees) to support them with problems of practice and the implementation of their capstone project.
- 2. Leadership in Action Conversations** invite Fellows to join with their colleagues and state and national experts to explore current events that affect the early childhood field.
- 3. The annual Leadership Institute** engages the wider Maryland early childhood leadership community with important topics in the field.
- 4. Webinars** support the Fellows in promoting topics that are timely and critically important to improving the early childhood system in Maryland and beyond.

The 2021 CoP activities focused on the themes of diversity and equity and included the fall Leadership in Action Conversation, where attendees discussed (1) Developmentally Appropriate Practices for all children, (2) ways to provide equitable education to young children, and (3) the importance of reflecting on personal biases in order to provide high quality education to diverse children.

Cohort I Fellows built on their MECLP capstone projects and focused on four critical early childhood areas in the CoP webinars: (a) the transition to formal schooling, (b) supporting family childcare professionals, (c) prekindergarten to Grade 3 alignment, and (d) encouraging early childhood teachers to pursue advanced degrees. Finally, participants in the Leadership Institute dismantled preconceived biases associated with various marginalized groups and raised their awareness about the issues around structural inequality in their programs, organizations, communities, and jurisdictions.

2021 CoP Activities at a Glance

Mentoring Program

- A guide was developed to establish a mentoring framework and recruit new members.

Leadership in Action Conversations

- Mariela Puentes and Carol Gant (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium) facilitated two conversations in September and October to aid MECLP Fellows in promoting and incorporating an equity lens within their practice.
- Christina Lopez (Cohort I Fellow and MDAEYC President) moderated a conversation in December featuring NAEYC's Susan Friedman and Alissa Mwenelupembe, authors of [Each and Every Child](#).

Webinar Series

- The inaugural [webinar series](#) launched in July with four Cohort I Fellows moderating panels with state and national leaders.
- The series theme "Lifting the Voices from the Field to Bring Equity and Transformational Change in Early Education" invited panelists to discuss ways to unify the fragmented early care and education system and ensure equitable access for all.

Leadership Institute

- MECLP hosted [Factuality](#), a facilitated crash course that illuminates the issues of structural inequality in America, in November with early childhood education stakeholders.

MECLP's New Initiative: Community of Practice

Advisory Committee

In 2021, the 12-member Advisory Committee met six times and continued to operate through a workgroup structure guiding MECLP's progress. Members' commitment to the work of MECLP was exceptional and appreciated. To illustrate the strong commitment, we highlight one of our extraordinary Advisory Committee members, Jana Martella. Jana, the senior advisor at Education Development Center (EDC), reflected,

"I am so proud of the work MECLP is doing and so gratified to be a member of its Advisory Committee and see it grow over the last several years . . . Cohort Fellows are gaining skills in using data to make decisions, understanding and moving their systems toward positive change, and communicating powerfully with colleagues, policy-makers, and other stakeholders. Above all, the Fellows are tapping their own energies and each other to transform their work and effect equitable, lasting outcomes for the children they serve."



Critical Insights into the State of Early Childhood Leadership

In early 2021, MECLP commissioned two studies to understand the current state of ECE leadership in Maryland. [Filling the Early Childhood Leadership Gap in Maryland: Meeting the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead](#) enumerates four findings and concludes that there is an urgent need to support leadership development and promote diversity in Maryland's early childhood leadership pipeline. [How Maryland Can Mitigate its Early Childhood Education Gap](#), released in summer 2021, argues that MECLP's contribution in leadership development will fill a critical leadership gap in early education, which will be exacerbated by the broad-based expansion of early childhood education programs in Maryland over the next 10 years. The report identified seven policy recommendations that Maryland should adopt to narrow the field's capacity gap and support workforce development initiatives like MECLP.

Partners Investing in MECLP

MECLP received two grants totaling \$300,000 in 2021, from the Division of Early Childhood in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Trust for Learning. According to Steven R. Hicks, Assistant State Superintendent for MSDE's Division of Early Childhood, "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future includes Early Childhood Education as its first priority. Building a strong and vibrant early education system, including expanding the state's diverse universal prekindergarten delivery program over the next decade, is an ambitious goal that will result in a strong foundation for each child's success. . . [MECLP] has partnered with the Division to establish and expand a rigorous program at UMBC to create a pool of highly talented early education leaders, essential in realizing the Blueprint's success."

The Trust for Learning's funding will be used to expose MECLP Fellows to high-quality early learning environments through field trips, webinars, mentoring, and scholarships. These generous awards, coupled with the support of the Sherman Center and MECLP stakeholders, allow MECLP to achieve its goal of building a network of Fellows representing diverse ethnicities, regions, and sectors in Maryland. Louise Corwin, Co-Chair of the MECLP Advisory Committee stated, "It is gratifying to see the enthusiasm, growth and accomplishments of our outstanding Fellows - trailblazers poised to lead impactful change in early childhood." The expanded MECLP programming will provide Fellows with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to lead innovative early childhood programs throughout Maryland and ultimately, the nation.

MECLP's Momentum Moving Forward

Building on its successful 3-year growth, MECLP plans to move forward with ambitious goals in 2022 and beyond. Future program endeavors include, but are not limited to, (a) adding a second three-credit course, SHER 602: Policy and Advocacy for Systems Change, (b) offering MECLP courses beyond UMBC's campus, and (c) training Maryland-based early childhood stakeholders to teach/co-teach MECLP courses. Please visit the [MECLP website](#) for additional information.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Aiming to produce new knowledge on early childhood education policies and practices, the Sherman Center has worked diligently to support the scholarship of members of the UMBC community. Examples of knowledge production supports provided in 2021 include granting a Faculty Research Award and disseminating research reports by former Sherman Center Research Fellows. This year we also (1) highlight ongoing projects led by Sherman Center Research Faculty, (2) introduce a new grant program for doctoral candidates, and (3) preview the Sherman Center Research Conference, which will be inaugurated in 2022.

2021 SHERMAN CENTER FACULTY RESEARCH AWARD

Currently in its fourth year, the Faculty Research Award provides grant funding to UMBC faculty and their colleagues to improve the learning experiences of young children in Baltimore City. The competition is open to all faculty who hold academic appointments at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) including adjunct faculty, faculty of practice, and lecturers. Ms. Monica Dale, music coordinator and adjunct faculty in UMBC's Dance Department, received the Sherman Center Faculty Research Award in 2021.



Monica Dale, 2021 Faculty Research Award Recipient

Ms. Dale has taught her own method of music and dance to young children in New York City, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. Over the years, her classes have received positive feedback from parents, teachers, and administrators—as well as children—but this is her first opportunity to study the outcomes of her teaching in a scientific way.

As a part of her yearlong project entitled, “The Effectiveness of MusiKinesis®, an Integrated Arts Experience, for Urban Preschool Children,” she will work with early childhood educators at Arundel Elementary School to investigate the influence of MusiKinesis® on prekindergarten students’ music and movement skills, executive functioning, and kindergarten readiness. MusiKinesis® is an original way of teaching music and dance based on principles of the traditional Swiss Dalcroze method and developed to meet the needs of contemporary American children. MusiKinesis® has garnered positive feedback since its inception for preschool children in the 1990s, but Ms. Dale’s project will be the first to test its effectiveness through an experimental design. The study will include a pilot of MusiKinesis®, followed by an eight-week series of biweekly classes.

The Sherman Center award will allow Ms. Dale to expand knowledge about the effects of intentional exposure to the arts on young children’s social, academic, and physical development while strengthening UMBC’s relationship with Arundel Elementary School.

“I am so grateful for this award. I’m looking forward to working with the children and seeing what results the study might show -not only in the children’s music and movement abilities, but also in other skills we’ll be looking at. There could be some surprises!”

Ms. Monica Dale (MMus, BA, Dalcroze License) has worked as a choreographer; performer; and teacher of piano, dance, and Dalcroze Eurhythmics. She founded MusiKinesis®, a Dalcroze-based pedagogy. She has published six books including the 3-volume *Eurhythmics for Young Children*, a songbook, and an Apple Book of dance stories with original, embedded music files. Her articles have appeared in *Music Educators Journal*, *Design for Arts in Education*, *Dance Magazine*, and international publications. She has presented her work at numerous national conferences including the Early Childhood Music and Movement Association, National Dance Education Organization, Dalcroze Society of America, American Orff-Schulwerk Association, and Music Teachers National Association. During the summer, you can find her teaching at the Eastman School of Music.

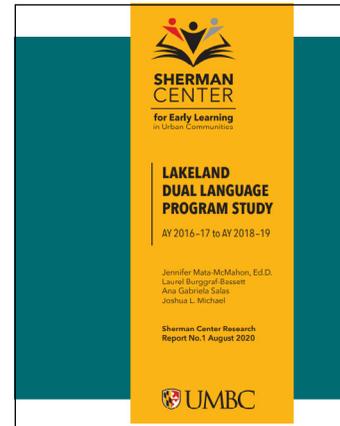
2021 SHERMAN CENTER FACULTY RESEARCH

Sherman Center Research Faculty, Drs. Jennifer Mata-McMahon (with Education), Karrie Godwin (with Psychology), and Shana E. Rochester, led projects in 2021 to advance early childhood research. Dr. Mata-McMahon's project, which began in 2019, explores an expansion of the Dual Language Program at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School. Dr. Godwin's project investigates how the design of books for beginning readers may enhance attention regulation and instruction uptake. Dr. Rochester's project assists early childhood educators at Sherman Center partner schools use multicultural picture books within their literacy instruction. These projects address important aspects of early education practices, including how to support emergent bilinguals and how to use classroom instructional materials to support students' learning and improve literacy instruction. These projects are described below.

Dual Language Program Evaluation: Advancing Bilingual Education in Baltimore City

In spring 2019, Dr. Mata-McMahon and her graduate assistant Laurel Burggraf-Bassett (doctoral candidate, Language, Literacy, and Culture) partnered with Lakeland Elementary/Middle School's teacher Ms. Ana Gabriela Salas to conduct an evaluation of the recently implemented Dual Language Program (DLP). Spearheaded by Ms. Salas the program began with her Kindergarten class in AY 2016-17. By AY 2020-21 the program had scaled up to include Prekindergarten classes through 4th grade, and the research project now welcomed graduate assistant Adebola Daramola (doctoral student, Policy). Joshua Michael (doctoral candidate, Policy) also contributed to the study with quantitative data analysis of students' mCLASS Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC) scores. Through interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, salient documents, and testing, data were collected during the first iteration of this project and were analyzed using Coburn's (2003) reconceptualization of scale as a guiding conceptual framework.

This initial phase concluded in summer 2020, resulting in the [Sherman Center Research Report No. 1](#). In 2021, the second iteration of the project began, completing online surveys, classroom observations, and attaining available test results, adapting the data collection to the ever-changing modalities of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In looking at the three cohorts from AY 2016-17 to AY 2018-19, qualitative findings point to the DLP as a beneficial program for students, both Latinx and African American, pertaining specifically to Spanish language proficiency, academic performance across subject matters, and overall socio-cultural benefits for families, as well as the school community at large. The quantitative analysis indicated that while DLP students exhibited lower annual growth in English compared to their mainstream program counterparts, they showed higher annual growth than the native-English speaking students when tested in their primary language of instruction (Spanish). Findings and recommendations based on the two cohorts from AY 2019-20 and AY 2020-21 will be released in Sherman Center Research Report No. 3, to come in summer of 2022.



"The importance of this research lies in evaluating how well public schools can respond to the linguistics needs of its diverse student body by developing, scaling, and sustaining programs focused on high-quality bilingual education as they prepare students to become global citizens. We need more Dual Language Programs in Baltimore City Schools like the one being put forth by Lakeland Elementary/Middle School and we are learning from their experience."

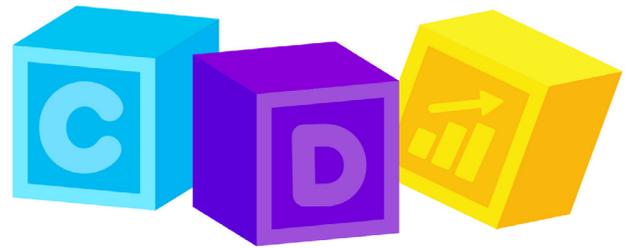
- Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Sherman Center Director and Associate Professor of Education

Attention and Reading Comprehension in Young Readers: Optimizing Beginning Reader Books

In her research, Dr. Karrie Godwin partners with educators and families to explore how instructional materials can be optimized to better support attention and learning. Recently, her work has focused on the design of beginning reader books. Learning to read is a critical skill to master as reading is considered a key gateway to future learning and success. Despite its foundational importance, many children struggle to become proficient readers. While there are a number of factors that may contribute to the difficulties children experience learning to read (e.g., ADHD, Dyslexia, pre-reading skills gaps), we know much less about whether the design of beginning reader books may support or hinder children's early reading.

Beginning reader books often contain bright, detailed, and colorful illustrations in close proximity to the text. Such design choices are likely made with a focus on aesthetics and increasing engagement but may inadvertently overlook the impact on children's slowly developing attention regulation system and emerging decoding skills. It is important to consider how we can create instructional materials that support attention and learning, while also maintaining engagement. With her colleagues Dr. Anna Fisher and Cassondra Eng, Dr. Godwin is investigating whether the layout of beginning-reader books may create attentional competition between the text and illustrations, and if we can redesign beginning reader books to better support children's attention and in turn reading comprehension¹. They found that by simplifying illustrations (i.e., removing extraneous details unrelated to the text), children are better able to attend to the text and reading comprehension improves! Dr. Godwin and her collaborators are extending this work to examine how the text and illustration placement can be optimized. For more information, please read their [recent article](#), visit their [website](#), or email Dr. Karrie Godwin (kgodwin@umbc.edu).

Note. This work¹ is supported in part by a National Science Foundation award (BCS-1730060) to A.V.F and K.E.G. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.



CHILD DEVELOPMENT LAB

"I love collaborating with educators and families to conduct research that makes a meaningful difference in the lives of children. I can't imagine a more rewarding career than contributing to this critical mission of improving children's learning."

- Dr. Karrie Godwin, Sherman Center Research Faculty and Assistant Professor of Psychology

The Diverse Books Project 2.0: Supporting Early Care and Education Teachers' Use of Multicultural Books Through University-Based Research-Practice Partnerships

Multicultural literature represents the cultural backgrounds of different people and its use in elementary classrooms has been associated with students' diversity awareness, perspective-taking, and comprehension skills. Multicultural picture books are ripe with opportunities to teach students how to be active agents in analyzing messages through critical discussions about social issues (e.g., ableism). Not all teachers, however, feel prepared to facilitate critical conversations. When we surveyed early childhood teachers at Sherman Center partner schools, 94.6% of teachers agreed that they would like information on effectively integrating diverse books into their daily instruction ([Sherman Center Annual Report, 2018](#)). Providing teachers with targeted professional development may facilitate children's critical literacy skills and inform children's subsequent capacity to thrive in a multicultural society.

The Diverse Books Project (DBP) 2.0 seeks to support Kindergarten to Grade 2 (K-2) teachers' use of multicultural books to promote children's critical literacy skills, such as identifying how the book's language and imagery reproduce (or disrupt) privilege, injustice, biases, and inequities. Led by Dr. Shana E. Rochester, Ms. Anika Aquino, graduate research assistant and doctoral student in UMBC's Applied Developmental Psychology program, supports the project along with school leaders at Sherman Center partner schools and a Baltimore City Public Schools' (BCPS) district administrator. The DBP 2.0 has three project phases.

- Phase I (Summer 2021) involves a critical content analysis of multicultural picture books in the BCPC K-2 English Language Arts curriculum and the Sherman Center's Diverse Books Collection. Preliminary findings suggest that some critical multicultural picture books disrupt dominant narratives associated with people from marginalized identities in ways that promote allyship from former oppressors. For example, the characters that doubted William in the book *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* by William Kamkwamba, Bryan Mealer, and Elizabeth Zunon believed that people with limited resources are powerless against natural disasters. By the end of the story, the doubters praised William for successfully building a windmill that supported his community.
- Phase II (Fall 2021–Spring 2022) pilots a series of critical literacy professional development sessions to help educators (a) reflect on their beliefs and teaching practice related to different social identities (e.g., gender), (b) analyze analysis of children's literature from a critical literacy frame, and (c) develop critical read alouds with school-based and grade-level colleagues.
- Phase III (Summer 2022–Spring 2023) includes a quasi-experimental study of the critical literacy sessions' influence on Sherman Center partner school educators' critical literacy instruction and multicultural self-efficacy, and children's critical literacy talk.

For more information, email Dr. Shana E. Rochester at shana1@umbc.edu.

Note. This project is supported in part by the [Foundation for Child Development's Young Scholars Program](#).



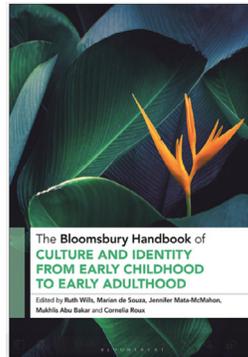
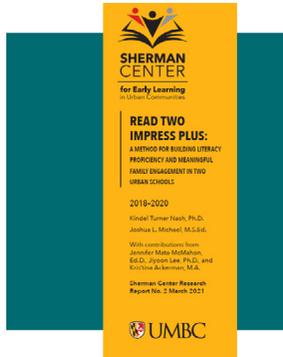
"One of the most important parts of the DBP 2.0 is the iterative feedback we receive from BCPS stakeholders. Their insights inform how we ensure that the professional development content is aligned with school-and district-level activities."

- Dr. Shana E. Rochester, Sherman Center Assistant Director and Research Associate

2021 RESEARCH REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

One of the final steps in the research process is developing a written report, and Sherman Center faculty disseminated their findings through various outlets in 2021.

We published [the Sherman Center Research Report No. 2](#), summarizing the scholarship by Dr. Kindel Nash (Associate Professor of Education at UMBC) and Mr. Joshua Michael (Director Baltimore School Partnerships in the Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program) during their time as 2018 Sherman Center Research Fellows. Their mixed-method study examined the influence of Read Two Impress Plus (R2I+), an echo reading intervention for elementary and middle school students and their families, on students' reading skills. In addition, portions of their work expanding on the experiences of bi/multilingual students and their families was published in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Culture and Identity from Early Childhood to Early Adulthood*. Dr. Nash noted the following about the publications:



"How can schools engage and empower families as partners in problem solving low literacy proficiency? What does it look like to train families in Read Two Impress Plus, a one-to-one echo reading fluency intervention? This report shares learnings about implementing Read Two Impress Plus in partnership-centered approach to family trainings aimed at improving the literacy proficiency and attitudes of elementary students."

Read to Impress Plus

The work of 2019 Faculty Award Recipients Drs. Susan Sonnenschein (Professor of Psychology at UMBC) and Claudia Galindo (Associate Professor of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park), in collaboration with Mavis G. Sanders (Former Sherman Center Director and Senior Research Scholar of Black Children and Families at Child Trends) was published in the School-University Partnerships Journal. Their multiple case study examined the experiences of Literacy Fellows Program undergraduate students and classroom teachers. Drs. Sonnenschein and Galindo shared the following as a key takeaway from their [study](#):

"School-university partnerships, like the Sherman Center's Literacy Fellows Program, have the potential to improve students' educational experiences, provide teacher support, and enhance service-learning opportunities for students in higher education. Our findings indicate that teachers and volunteers are very positive about the benefits of the program for them and the children, even with the challenges experienced during COVID-19."



A Case Study of a School-University Partnership Focused on Literacy and Educational Equity: Responding to COVID-19 in the Early Grades

NEW RESEARCH INITIATIVES

The Sherman Center developed two new research initiatives in 2021 to involve all members of the Sherman Center community in knowledge generation and dissemination.

Doctoral Student Research Award



Like the Faculty Research Award, the Doctoral Student Research Award supports doctoral candidates to investigate the policies and practices that enhance the learning of young children, ages three through eight in urban communities like Baltimore. The Sherman Center developed the award in the summer of 2021 to advance the scholarship of the next generation of early childhood education researchers.

The competition is open to doctoral candidates currently enrolled at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and those in the University of Maryland School of Social Work who are eligible to submit applications for external support. Awards of up to \$15,000 for 12-month projects will be available, and individuals and collaborative groups are encouraged to apply. The 2022 competition will close in the winter of 2022, and the first grant recipient will be named in the spring of 2022.

Sherman Center Research Conference



In fall 2021, we announced the inauguration of our daylong Sherman Center Research Conference to highlight the innovative early childhood education research being conducted in Maryland. The goals of the conference are to: (a) disseminate findings to a diverse audience of early childhood professionals, (b) encourage educators to participate in action research, and (c) promote collaborations among members of the Sherman Center community.

The conference will include presentations by Baltimore City Public School educators, MECLP Fellows, Sherman Scholars and Fellows, and Sherman Center Research Fellows and Faculty. Presenters can choose from three types of formats (30-minute talk, 20-minute flash talk, poster), and take part of a networking luncheon. The Sherman Center will provide professional development to support individuals with limited research experience develop their conference proposals and presentations. The conference will take place immediately following the 2022 Teacher Summer Institute.

THE CHILDHOOD LITERACY SCHOLARSHIP

Donna Helm '70 and Louise Goodrich Izat '70 endowed the Childhood Literacy Scholarship in 2020 in honor of their late professor, Dr. May Roswell. Dr. Roswell, a professor of French and German, was a founding UMBC faculty member, the architect of its modern languages program, and beloved by her students and peers. The scholarship provides financial support for an undergraduate student at UMBC who is committed to supporting the literacy development of young children.

The Sherman Center selected the second recipient of the Childhood Literacy Scholarship, Daniela Caceres Bereau, in the fall of 2021. Ms. Caceres Bereau is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in psychology with a certification in industrial-organization psychology. She has experience volunteering with a non-profit organization in Baltimore, and she implemented a "book per week" program with students "that aims to help them create a habit of reading." She believes in the value of improving "children's literacy development not only for the individual, but for the community as a whole." The Sherman Center is grateful that these outstanding literacy supporters are committed to support the education of future generations.



Daniela Caceres Bereau,
2021 Childhood Literacy
Scholarship Recipient

"The aid that this scholarship provided was a great relief and a beautiful sign of acknowledgment of my work."



Donna Helm ('70) and Louise Goodrich Izat ('70)

SHERMAN CENTER FUNDERS

The Sherman Center is grateful for the sustained generosity of individuals who are deeply committed to building a strong foundation for learning among young children in Baltimore City.

George and Betsy Sherman



George and Betsy Sherman have a profound belief in the power of education to propel multifaceted opportunities, empower communities, and strengthen families. Through their foundation, they make long-term, strategic investments in programs that are scalable and have compelling evidence of supporting vulnerable, economically disadvantaged children and their families to improve outcomes in all aspects of their lives. George Sherman says about his wife, *"Betsy's lifelong commitment to child advocacy drives our family's focus to improve the lives of children."* George and Betsy Sherman have been recognized for their philanthropy through several awards. Most recently, they were named honorees of the Baltimore Sun's Business and Civic Hall of Fame and 2018 Maryland Outstanding Philanthropists by the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

The UMBC community celebrated the life of George Sherman in 2021, who passed away in August. Rehana Shafi, director of the Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program and Sherman Center Advisory Committee member, paid tribute to George Sherman's legacy in the feature article of the [Fall 2021 Sherman Center Newsletter](#).

We are forever grateful for the generosity of the Sherman Family Foundation, without which we could not continue to advance the significant service we provide to young learners in urban communities.

Sherman Center Personnel

Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon
Director and Associate Professor of Education

Dr. Shana E. Rochester
Assistant Director and Research Associate

Dr. Karrie Godwin
Research Faculty and Assistant Professor of Psychology

Ms. Melissa Bailey
Program Coordinator

Ms. Liran Laor
MECLP Program Director

Ms. Louise Corwin
MECLP Advisory Committee Co-Chair

Ms. Sravanti Vitta Sanjay
Graduate Communications Intern, Human Centered Computing Program

Ms. Anika Aquino
Graduate Research Assistant, Applied Developmental Psychology Program

Ms. Michele Berry
MECLP Graduate Assistant, Public Policy Program

Campus Advisory Committee

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Professor Emerita of Psychology

Dr. Jeff Leips
Professor of Biology

Ms. Marie Lilly
Director, Community Engagement

Ms. Rehana Shafi
Director, Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program

Dr. Patricia A. Young
Professor of Education and Elementary Program Director

Steering Committee

Dr. Philip Rous
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dr. Kimberly Moffitt
Interim Dean, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Mr. Gregory Simmons
Vice President for Institutional Advancement



**Rehana Shafi, Sherman Center
Campus Advisory Committee Member**

Ms. Rehana Shafi is the inaugural director of the [Sherman STEM Teacher Education Program](#) and an inaugural member of the Sherman Center Campus Advisory Committee. Ms. Shafi has grown the Sherman Scholars Program in size and scope, now supporting all majors who want to teach across PreK-12. She is also an inaugural leader of the partnership with Lakeland Elementary/Middle School, seeding the current landscape of the program's school partnership work, which now requires five full-time and three part-time staff. Her previous roles at UMBC include Program Coordinator of Service-Learning and K-12 Partnerships at the Shriver Center and Caseworker with the Choice Middle Schools Program. She also taught middle school English as a Second Language in Massachusetts. Rehana earned a BS in exercise science with a minor in psychology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and an MSW from the University of Maryland, Baltimore. She is the past president of UMBC's Professional Staff Senate and continues to serve on numerous campus committees.

For more information, visit us at:
shermancenter.umbc.edu and
meclp.umbc.edu

