



SHERMAN CENTER

for Early Learning
in Urban Communities

Director's Message

Spring 2020 has not been what any of us expected. Several Sherman Center activities have been postponed and others are in limbo due to COVID-19. Nonetheless, we are gratified to share updates on the work of the Sherman Center and its amazing partners in this fifth issue of the newsletter. Melissa Bailey, program coordinator, describes the professional development that has been offered to Sherman Center partners and volunteers to realize shared goals for students' well-being and school success. Louise Corwin, Visiting Executive in Residence at the Sherman Center, provides an update on the [Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program](#), in particular the launch of its course - SHER 601, Leading for Change in Early Childhood Education. Our featured article is written by Ms. Melinda Moody, Director of Early Childhood Education, and Ms. Eryn Lessard, Director of Differentiation, Operations & Partnerships at Maree G. Farring, a [Sherman Center partner school](#). They describe the impetus, goals, and outcomes of the school's first annual Kindergarten Bootcamp, partially funded by the Sherman Center. In this issue, we also introduce the 2020 recipients of the [Sherman Center Faculty Research Award](#), Dr. Patricia Young and Dr. Jane Lincove. Finally, in a message for our times, Ms. Kayon Depina at Curtis Bay Elementary/Middle School describes how she used *After the Fall (How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again)* from the Sherman Center's [Diverse Books Collection](#) in her pre-kindergarten classroom to build students' reading comprehension skills, and also teach them about self-care and resilience. We hope you enjoy the newsletter and visit [our website](#) to learn more about the Sherman Center's ongoing work.

Mavis G. Sanders

Dr. Mavis G. Sanders is professor of education and inaugural director of the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities at UMBC

Sherman Center Update

by Melissa Bailey, Program Coordinator

This spring issue marks our third year of service in southern Baltimore. To ensure that our work is effective, the Sherman Center assesses the needs of and offers professional development (PD) to its partners and volunteers. So far this year we have held a restorative practices PD for [Sherman Center/Shriver Center Literacy Fellows](#) and volunteers, and a [Teacher Summer Institute](#) follow-up PD for early childhood educators at our [four partner schools](#).

The Literacy Fellows PD was held in February and facilitated by Kaleigh Mrowka, Director of Residential Education at UMBC, and her amazing team members, Sydne Arnold and Aisha Amolegbe. Mrowka and her team provided an overview of the philosophy and tools of restorative practices, an approach to behavior management that promotes inclusiveness, relationship building and problem solving. During the two-hour PD, Literacy Fellows and volunteers learned how to think about young students' behaviors

through the lens of affective psychology, and implement restorative strategies to deescalate and resolve student conflicts. Nine Literacy Fellows and volunteers, community school coordinators from two partner schools, Bay Brook and Maree G. Farring, and a UMBC psychology faculty member and his intern attended the PD, describing it as "extremely helpful" and "beneficial."

In March, we hosted a follow-up PD to Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon's successful 2019 TSI two-day workshop on translanguaging (read more [here](#).) Over thirty pre-K-2 classroom, ESOL, and special education teachers from all four partner schools came together to share progress on how they are creating learning environments that build on the diverse language repertoires of all students. Teachers interacted across grade levels and schools to share best practices and brainstorm new ways to implement translanguaging pedagogy. These two examples highlight the role PD plays in achieving the Sherman Center's [vision](#) for young children in Baltimore.

Featured Article: Building a Strong Foundation for Kindergarten Readiness through Summer Learning

By Melinda Moody, Director of Early Childhood at MGF and Eryn Lessard, Director of Differentiation, Operations, and Partnerships

Each fall for the past fifteen years, we've had the pleasure - and the honor - of bearing witness to the nearly-magical moment when children come to school for the first time. Becoming a "student" means making new friends, joining the "big kid" world with a real sense of purpose, and *learning how to read*. We've never met a child who didn't have an innate sense of wonder around learning, but we continue to meet youngsters whose lack of prerequisite literacy and social emotional skills become an immediate roadblock to meeting kindergarten learning benchmarks. Ultimately, lack of kindergarten preparedness can have a negative impact on students' own determination to thrive. We became acutely aware of this distinction in the fall of 2018 while

reviewing beginning-of-year student learning data; kindergarteners who had attended our own pre-K program were learning foundational math and literacy skills much more quickly - and retaining them better

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- than were students who had little or no prior formal schooling. We would have liked to use this information to advocate for an additional pre-K classroom at Maree G. Farring (MGF) Elementary/Middle School. Unfortunately, the space limitations of our building - we are currently operating above 200% capacity - disallow an increase in the size of our early childhood program.

In consultation with the teachers at MGF and recognizing that many early childhood students have little to no background knowledge of basic phonics skills (i.e. letter recognition and sound fluency), we came up with an idea to try a two-week intervention during the summer prior to kindergarten. With a grant funded through the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities, we



MGF teachers, Amanda Bila and Amaris Miller, with Kindergarten Bootcamp students



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Research Notes:

Sherman Center 2019-2020 Faculty Research Award Recipients

In March 2020, the Sherman Center announced its [2019-20 Faculty Research Award Recipients](#). Two projects were selected for funding - one led by Dr. Patricia Young, associate professor of education, and the other led by Dr. Jane Lincove, associate professor of public policy at UMBC.

Dr. Young and co-investigator, Ms. Deborah Kariuki (Master of Arts in Education Graduate Program, UMBC), will conduct a yearlong study entitled, *Infusing a Culture-based Computational Thinking Curriculum in Urban Preschools*. They will work with Judy Center faculty and staff at Lakeland Elementary/ Middle School to improve young learners' computational thinking, thereby enhancing their problem solving skills and creativity. In addition, they will design a parents' guide to computational thinking for young learners.

Dr. Lincove with co-investigators, Dr. Lieny Jeon (Johns Hopkins University) and Ms. Sarah Bollard (Baltimore City Public Schools), will conduct a three-year study entitled, *Judy Centers in Baltimore: Improving Data-Informed Decisions*. This study will develop a new database from existing sources to investigate the effect of Judy Center services on young children's kindergarten readiness, the relative effectiveness of different Judy Center programs and services, and the potential for measuring outcomes for children before they enter kindergarten. This project will produce relevant research for policy and program improvements in early childhood education.

Stay tuned to learn about findings from these important studies in future newsletters!

were able to welcome 12 students into MGF's Kindergarten Bootcamp just weeks prior to the commencement of the 2019-20 school year. Our overarching goal was to position more students - especially those who had not attended pre-kindergarten learning programs - for success in the first months of kindergarten. Specifically, we designed a two-week program to ensure that each student could meet critical kindergarten readiness benchmarks in literacy, math, and socio-emotional development (see Table 1).

Early family engagement was critical. Each family received a resource backpack filled with learning tools for home at the first day's orientation. We gathered information on literacy knowledge of families through a pre-survey and explained the expectations and goals of the bootcamp. Parents received training and materials to support home literacy, including (1) letter-recognition and sound flashcards, (2) read-aloud books and materials, and (3) phonics strategy games. Supports were differentiated for Spanish-speaking families in order that *all families* could feel confident supporting English literacy development at home. Parents committed to logging 30 minutes/daily of literacy practice with their students at home.

We were thrilled by the success of year one of MGF's Kindergarten Bootcamp: students matriculated into kindergarten better prepared with letter and sound knowledge, and counting and number recognition; additionally, they had developed the emotional and self-regulation "muscles" to actively engage in school-day learning routines. Parents also reported improved understanding of kindergarten literacy expectations, deeper awareness of the importance of daily reading, and increased knowledge on how to support their young children's literacy development at home. We also learned a lot from the experience and are looking forward to growing and improving our bootcamp for the summer of 2020 to positively impact a greater number of South Baltimore students and families.

Goal Category	Learning Goals
Literacy Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify 10 lower-case and upper-case letters Identify and produce letter sounds Write first name
Math Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count and identify numbers from 1-10 Identify 1-to-1 correspondence
Social Emotional Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will be able to sit on the carpet for 15-minute increments as appropriate for early childhood learners Interact with classmates appropriately Follow directions and self-regulate.

The Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP) Update

by Louise Corwin, Sherman Center Visiting Executive in Residence

On January 11, Dr. Nancy Grasmick, a member of [MECLP's Advisory Committee](#) and former state superintendent of education, was guest speaker at the first face-to-face class of SHER 601, [Leading for Change in Early Childhood Education](#).

Following individual conversations with each cohort fellow, Dr. Grasmick offered her personal background and the history of early childhood in Maryland, including George and Betsy Sherman's support for the development and expansion of Judy Centers in the state. She then pivoted to the topic at hand - leadership in early childhood. Dr. Grasmick focused on three characteristics of leadership: *self-awareness* - the ability to surround yourself with people who complement your weaknesses giving you the opportunity to build an effective team; *resilience* - the ability to fail, analyze

the failure and move forward, and *intelligent execution* - the ability to translate great ideas into meaningful policies and actions.

In closing, Dr. Grasmick stated, "It's a privilege to be a leader. By your leadership and what you represent, you are creating a culture that becomes pervasive. It makes things happen when you have credibility and people believe in you and believe in your ideas. Thank you for being Maryland's early childhood leader pioneers and a part of MECLP. It's a wonderful galvanizing opportunity." Dr. Grasmick concluded her presentation by graciously responding to questions from cohort members. Her timely and insightful remarks set the tone for the day, getting the course off to a great start.

For more information, please visit <https://meclp.umbc.edu>, or email Louise Corwin (lcorwin@umbc.edu), Visiting Executive in Residence, or Laurel Bassett (lburgg1@umbc.edu), Graduate Assistant.

Research to Practice

In this video clip, Kayon Depina, early childhood educator at Curtis Bay Elementary/Middle School, provides an uplifting account of how she used *After the Fall (How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again)* by Dan Santat in her pre-kindergarten classroom. Ms. Depina used this selection from the Sherman Center Diverse Books Collection to teach her students a variety of reading comprehension strategies. Importantly, she also used the book to teach students that we can always "soar higher than our present situation." To learn more about the [Diverse Books Project and Collection](#), and view other [teacher videos](#), please visit our website.

