



# SHERMAN CENTER

for Early Learning  
in Urban Communities

## Director's Message

The Sherman Center's vision is to "empower schools, families, and communities to prepare Baltimore's children for lifelong success." Spring is the perfect time to share how we have advanced that vision and renew our commitment to promoting the achievement of young learners in Baltimore City and similar urban communities. In this issue of the Sherman Center newsletter, we do just that. We begin with an update on partnership activities written by Melissa Bailey, Sherman Center program coordinator. Our featured article by pre-K educator, Ms. Kayon Depina, describes how she is creating pathways for learning for young children in Baltimore and Haiti through "on the go" backpacks and other resources including her new children's book, *The Metaphorical Moon*. Next, Louise Corwin, Visiting Executive in Residence at the Sherman Center, shares updates from the Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program and its evolving plans for expanding leadership for early learning in the state. In addition, Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon and colleagues report findings from their study on the dual language program at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School, underscoring the value of second language learning for students from all backgrounds. Finally, Ms. Sarah Aguda at Bay Brook, describes how she used *They All Saw a Cat* by Brendan Wenzel to encourage students to look at their worlds from different perspectives. We hope you enjoy the newsletter, which will be my last as Sherman Center Director. It has been a wonderful experience to work with all the Sherman Center partners. Thank you for moving us closer to the vision!

*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

Spring 2021 marks the fourth year that Sherman Center has partnered with schools, families, and early learners in South Baltimore. We have adapted our programming to respond to the needs of our partners and participants during COVID-19. These adaptations include a virtual book nook, online tutoring, and continued partnership events with the Enoch Pratt Library and Judy Centers at Curtis Bay and Lakeland Elementary/Middle Schools (EMS). To ensure that early childhood teachers at our [five partner schools](#) have access to high quality multicultural children's literature during on-line instruction, we transformed our [Diverse Books Project](#) to a virtual platform. Through our "virtual book nook," teachers can review 15 books each grading period and select up to two books, which are mailed to their homes for classroom use. To date, we have provided over 200 books to 50 teachers at our partner schools.

In spite of ongoing challenges presented by the transition to virtual learning, Bay Brook and Curtis Bay EMS' first and second grade classrooms received academic support in reading, vocabulary, and writing from UMBC volunteers participating in the [Literacy Fellows Project \(LFP\)](#). In addition to volunteering, these

undergraduate students also attended fall and spring professional development (PD) sessions facilitated by Sherman Center faculty member, [Dr. Karrie Godwin](#). In the fall, Dr. Godwin facilitated a PD entitled, "Maintaining Attention in the Virtual Classroom: Emerging Strategies for Young and Adult Learners." Our LFP volunteers learned how to capture and cultivate students' attention and maintain their own concentration during on-line instruction. During the spring PD, Dr. Godwin introduced LFP volunteers to key features of effective virtual read-alouds. Afterwards, volunteers applied what they learned by selecting books from the [Diverse Books Collection](#) and creating virtual read-alouds to share with early learners in their host classrooms. The LFP epitomizes UMBC's continuing commitment to community service and creating leaders in education.

As we wrap up the 2020-2021 school year, our [Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Project \(ELP\)](#) will host its fourth event in June with about 30 Lakeland and Curtis Bay Judy Center families. Since November 2020, this quarterly program has provided families with over 220 books, food, and resources to promote early literacy and kindergarten readiness. We look forward to continuing this collaboration in the fall!

## Featured Article: Building a Strong Foundation for Lifelong Learning Among Young Children

by Kayon DePina, Pre-Kindergarten Teacher at Curtis Bay Elementary/Middle School

As an educator, being told that my classroom doors were going to be closed indefinitely due to COVID-19 sent me into overdrive to find a way to ensure that my scholars knew that I loved them and will stop at nothing to stay connected and support their needs. My goal was to create a safe space for teaching, learning, and socializing with peers--virtually. Around this time, I was a newly inducted iFellow with [Improving Education \(IE\)](#). IE is a non-profit organization focused on empowering teachers to lead change at schools and in the community, seeding new ideas for improving student outcomes. Within IE's collaborative space, we quickly

began brainstorming tangible resources (e.g., stamp kits, foam letters and numbers, and dry erase boards to help scholars with letter and number recognition and writing) that we could use to facilitate teaching and learning for the remainder of the school year (March to June 2020)--with the possibility of continued development for the upcoming school year.

**"My goal was to create a safe space for teaching, learning, and socializing with peers--virtually."**

As the distribution of these materials began, limited updates were being provided on what the upcoming school year would look like. I quickly began to update my yearly classroom wishlist preparing to remain in a virtual world. This sparked the idea to create learning spaces for home and "on the go." To provide my scholars with resources and materials for the upcoming school year, I donated personal funds and began to solicit additional funds from my friends, family members, and the UMBC Sherman Center. I used the materials to create individual learning spaces and "on the go" backpacks for my incoming scholars that they could use at home or at school once





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## Research Notes:

### Making the Case for Bilingual Education in Baltimore City Public Schools

by [Jennifer Mata-McMahon](#)

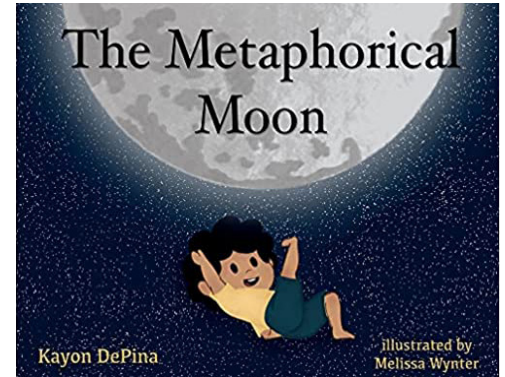
In 2019, Laurel Burggraf-Bassett, graduate research assistant, and I partnered with Ms. Ana Gabriela Salas at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School to evaluate the Dual Language Program (DLP) she spearheaded as the first bilingual program offered in a Baltimore City Public School. The DLP was designed to meet the needs of Lakeland's linguistically diverse Latinx and African American students. We conducted a [mixed methods case study](#) to better understand how the program was conceived, designed, and implemented. We also wanted to determine the program's impact on learning outcomes; thus, we partnered with Joshua Michaels, doctoral student in the public policy program at UMBC and assistant director of the Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program, to conduct statistical analysis of three cohorts of students' Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC) assessment scores from 2016-17 to 2018-19. The study's findings suggested that in kindergarten and first grade, while the DLP's instructional model was 70-30 and 80-20 (Spanish-English), emergent bilinguals performed below their counterparts in the mainstream program. But once they reached second grade and the instructional model was 50-50, they caught up to their counterparts with no statistically significant negative effect on English reading comprehension for these students. To confirm and extend these findings, Adebola Daramola, graduate research assistant, and I have continued phase two of the study this school year. As Lakeland's program continues to grow, our goal is to examine implementation challenges and successes to identify "promising practices" for DLP programs in urban schools serving diverse communities.

reopened. These backpacks were equipped with alarm clocks to encourage scholars to get into the routine of learning, dry erase boards and markers, journals and pencils, name plates, and more to ensure scholars could take ownership of their own learning and spaces.

These learning tools were a hit and I further developed my idea into a business model and founded [Kayon Kreates](#). Kayon Kreates is a holistic approach to learning that focuses on coaching and supporting learning partners, educators, and scholars on how to use the materials in the backpack while also helping them to create a physical space wherever the scholar is to ensure that purposeful learning is taking place. I have also written a book titled, [The Metaphorical Moon](#), to inspire scholars to dream big whether the dream seems attainable at the moment or not.

The global pandemic birthed Kayon Kreates. I am continuing to grow it by creating online circle times, recorded lessons, and companion materials and resources to help develop

foundational skills for young scholars and support their learning partners and educators. I am also currently [fundraising](#) to purchase a smartboard to expand my business and support a class of 27 scholars in Haiti ([Kingdom Goals](#)) to provide them with dual language materials in "on the go" backpacks. Like the Sherman Center, my goal is to "build a strong foundation for lifelong learning among young children." I will continue to do so as an educator, leader, and entrepreneur!



## The Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP) Update

by [Louise Corwin](#), Sherman Center Visiting Executive in Residence

[MECLP](#) is delighted to welcome [Liran Laor](#) as its Program Director. Liran has an 18-year career working in early childhood with children, families, and educators. She holds a bachelor's degree in social work, a master's degree in early childhood education (ECE), and an early intervention certificate. Liran joined the MECLP team with a shared passion to empower educators to assume leadership positions and promote change to strengthen early childhood education.

In spring 2021, MECLP released findings from the Early [Childhood Leadership Gap Survey](#) it conducted in late 2020, highlighting transitions among seasoned ECE leaders in the state. It also released [How Maryland Can Mitigate Its ECE Leadership Gap](#), a policy brief outlining how MECLP's structure and curricula are designed to develop a broad and diverse network of early childhood professionals capable of becoming transformative agents of change.

A new two-year grant from the Maryland State Department of Education will enable MECLP to develop a two-tiered early childhood leadership pathway, one of which will culminate in a UMBC Endorsement in Early Childhood Leadership. The endorsement will require the completion of MECLP's current course, SHER 601, and a second three-credit graduate course under development, SHER 602, which will focus on the application of leadership skills through research and field experiences. Additionally, a robust Community of Practice will actively provide one-on-one mentoring for SHER 601 graduates; host 'Leadership in Action' Conversations; convene Leadership Institutes; and coordinate quarterly webinars for MECLP Fellows and Advisory Committee members, UMBC ECE students and faculty, and Maryland's early childhood leaders, positioning MECLP as Maryland's Early Childhood Leadership Hub.

For more information, please visit <https://meclp.umbc.edu>, or email Louise Corwin ([lcorwin@umbc.edu](mailto:lcorwin@umbc.edu)), Visiting Executive in Residence, or Liran Laor ([liranlaor@umbc.edu](mailto:liranlaor@umbc.edu)), MECLP Program Director.

## Research to Practice

Ms. Sara Aguda, first grade English/Language Arts teacher at Bay Brook Elementary/Middle School, discusses how she used the book, *They All Saw a Cat*, in an arts-integrated lesson on the unique features of specific animals. Through this blended lesson, Ms. Aguda taught her young students literacy, science, art, and about individual differences in perception. To learn more about the Diverse Books Project and view [teacher videos](#) featuring books from the Collection, please visit our website.

