



SHERMAN CENTER

for Early Learning
in Urban Communities

Director's Message

After a year of conducting all our initiatives remotely, I am excited to announce we are fully present on campus this fall. I began my first year as the newly appointed Director of the Sherman Center with the news of the passing of Mr. George M. Sherman. In this issue, we pay tribute to his legacy with a remarkable piece written by Rehana Shafi, Director of the Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program, as our featured article. You will find that even though remotely, we did not diminish our impact to early childhood education, by reading about all our accomplishments in our Assistant Director's, Dr. Shana E. Rochester, Sherman Center Update. Our Research Notes section provides a good window into how research conducted by Dr. Karrie Godwin, transfers over to one of our initiatives, the Literacy Fellows Program (LFP), as professional development for our fellows working with teachers and students in our partners schools. You can also read about this Research to Practice connection, in the piece on our Early Literacy Program (ELP) through which we support families of children zero to three in learning about language and literacy development, and kindergarten readiness, and delight in a newly recorded promotional video designed by our Communications Intern, Sravanti Vitta Sanjay. Finally, Louise Corwin, the Co-chair for the MECLP Advisory Committee, recounts the many accomplishments this program has advanced this fall for the promotion of leadership in early childhood. It is my hope you enjoy this issue of the Sherman Center newsletter as we continue to make significant strides in supporting diverse students, teachers, and families in urban communities.

Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon is associate professor of early childhood education and director of Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities at UMBC.

Sherman Center Update

by Dr. Shana E. Rochester, Assistant Director and Research Associate

Alongside our efforts to resume in-person learning, the Sherman Center experienced several leadership changes. We said farewell to the inaugural Sherman Center director, Dr. Mavis G. Sanders, and two inaugural [Campus Advisory Committee](#) members, Drs. James Bemby and Anita Komlodi, after four years of service. We welcomed Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon as the new Sherman Center director and Dr. Patricia A. Young as a new advisory committee member.

Our hybrid [Teacher Summer Institute \(TSI\)](#) included four days of professional development and presentations related to the teacher-recommended theme, *Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Differentiated Instruction*. Dr. Zetta Elliott, our virtual keynote speaker, discussed the importance of inclusivity in children's book publishing and highlighted how she shares inclusive stories through a community-based approach to publishing. She also demonstrated how her book *Benny Doesn't Like to Be Hugged*, which is featured in our [Diverse Books Collection](#), depicts children with disabilities as active and thoughtfully includes representations of children from different backgrounds. Dr. Michele Stites, associate professor of early childhood education at UMBC, virtually presented effective strategies to support

children with special needs across various content areas and collaborate with families and special educators. Fifty participating teachers attended the TSI Maker Day—either virtually or in person—and created instructional materials for their classrooms.

Our existing programs and projects have continued to flourish as we strive to support our partner schools. UMBC undergraduate students participating in the [Literacy Fellows Program](#) are working alongside teachers at Bay-Brook Elementary/Middle School and Curtis Bay Elementary School to provide instructional support for students. Dr. Karrie Godwin hosted a professional development session in November on strategies to promote reading fluency informed by the layout of children's books.

Given that students returned to in-person learning this school year, the theme of our first quarter Diverse Books Project book nook list was "inclusivity, managing your emotions, and exploring one's community/the outdoors." This is the second year that educators from all [five partner schools](#) requested books for their classroom libraries.

Finally, the Sherman Center launched two new initiatives: [Breathe2Think](#) and the [Sherman Center Research Conference](#). Visit our website to learn more about our Sherman Center programs and projects!

Featured Article: The Immeasurable Impact of George Michael Sherman

by Rehana Shafi, Director of Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program

George Sherman left indelible marks in the many roles and titles he held. I primarily knew him as philanthropist, father and grandfather, and husband to Betsy, with whom he partnered to support UMBC's efforts to improve educational outcomes for Baltimore's students, families, and communities. They are champions

"Since 2016 we have provided math professional development and coaching for 80 educators across 12 schools serving over 5,000 students."

for a countless many who would never know all they are doing to effect positive change. In this brief space I attempt to describe George Sherman's impact, which includes the ripple effects of his financial gifts and the mark he made through individual relationships. With generous gifts from the Sherman Family Foundation, UMBC established the [Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program](#) in 2006, the Lakeland Elementary/Middle School



partnership in 2012, and the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities in 2017. Across these initiatives, we support pre-service teachers, preparing them for underserved, urban, and diverse schools, and in-service teachers working in Baltimore City Public Schools. Additionally, through after school and co-curricular offerings for youth and programming for adults, we serve the students, families, and communities of five partner schools. We have graduated 150 Sherman Program alumni. In AY21-22, about 4,000 students benefit from these culturally competent, highly qualified teachers. Since 2016 we have provided math professional development and coaching for 80 educators across 12 schools serving over 5,000 students. Since 2017 we have provided professional



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Research Note

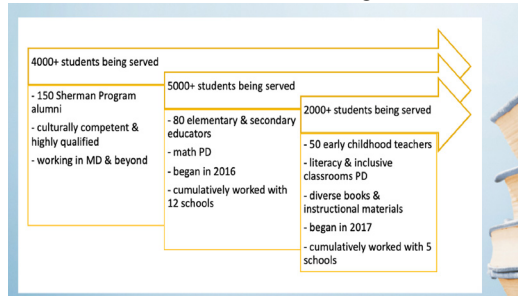
Classroom Design: Keeping Children's Attention in Mind

by [Dr. Karrie Godwin](#)

Attention regulation develops gradually. Children often struggle to maintain attention, particularly during instruction. Given the connection between attention and learning, it is important to identify ways to support attention regulation. Our research suggests that by paying attention to attention, we can create learning environments and materials that are sensitive to children's unique developmental needs, bolstering learning. For example, classrooms are often decorated with charts, posters, and artwork to create stimulating spaces to learn. This well-intentioned approach to design may have unintended consequences. We found children spent more time off-task and had lower learning scores in highly-decorated environments; however, by reducing display quantity, children were better able to attend to the lessons and learning was enhanced.¹ This work also has implications for virtual classrooms; educators can utilize these design insights and select streamlined backgrounds to reduce visual noise. As Sherman Center Research Faculty, I work to conduct relevant and timely research that benefits educators and their students. I share our research with the Literacy Fellows through biannual PD workshops. Our inaugural workshop focused on developing a deeper understanding of cognitive development to inform instructional design in physical and virtual classrooms. I look forward to collaborating with our partners on the important work occurring in the [Child Development Lab](#) and Sherman Center. For information, email [Dr. Godwin](#).

¹ This work was supported by Grant R305A11044 from the Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences and Grant R305B090023 from the Department of Education. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views of the Institute of Education Sciences or Department of Education.

development, instructional materials, and diverse books for classroom libraries to 50 educators across five schools serving over 2,000 students. Each year we connect 90 UMBC students to serve in math and literacy applied learning placements, and this year we are the largest provider of math tutoring in BCPSS with 75 UMBC students serving 350 2nd-8th graders. Because we know of the impact just one caring teacher can make in a child's life, these numbers are significant.



Mr. Sherman's impact is also seen in the relationships he built with people from all areas of his life. People who knew Mr. Sherman, whether for a brief time or a lifetime, unhesitatingly and resoundingly describe him as intelligent, hard-working, competitive,

The Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP) Update

by [Louise Corwin](#), Co-Chair of MECLP Advisory Committee

In the past six months, MECLP has focused its efforts on raising awareness of social justice, and exploring ways to increase equity in underserved populations. Dr. Shana E. Rochester, the Sherman Center's Assistant Director and Karen Karten, Early Learning Supervisor and Judy Center Coordinator in Somerset County, joined a summer zoom class of [Cohort II Fellows](#) providing insights on the impact of equity and social justice in early childhood offering examples of equity-focused work in research and practice. MECLP and the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) hosted two Leadership in Action Conversations illuminating ways to intentionally integrate equity into early childhood settings. To continue its focus on equity, MECLP's virtual Leadership Institute featured *Factuality*, a facilitated dialogue and interactive experience that illuminates structural inequality in the U.S.

honest, respectful, warm, empathetic, and family-oriented. These characteristics were evident in all he did. Whether reviewing outcome data and strategizing with him over lunch or joining him in a spin class, his zest for life – and desire to do his best and be his best – was contagious. I am grateful to have experienced George Sherman as I did: a man who was sharp in mind and wit; who was driven and didn't expect more from you than he himself would give; and who was always certain we could do better and should do more. The George Sherman I experienced believed in a person's capacity to step into their fullest potential, when given the appropriate support, mentoring, and opportunity. I am grateful to know people like Betsy and George, who place humanity, dignity, hope, and heart at the center of their philanthropy.

Visit Mr. Sherman's [obituary](#) on Everloved to read more about the remarkable professional journey that allowed him, with Betsy, to establish the Sherman Family Foundation, which has also financially established and/or supported the Center for Urban Families, Family Tree, Judy Centers, Teach for America, and so much more.

In late summer, MECLP carefully selected 15 Cohort III Fellows representing the ethnic, geographic, and affiliation diversity of Maryland's early childhood community and welcomed the Fellows at a November Orientation inviting them to join the growing community of Maryland early childhood leaders.

As the year ends, MECLP's Cohort II Fellows presented their Capstone Projects and shared their experiences of participating in MECLP during the past year. It was exciting to welcome the Fellows, Advisory Committee and community members to a face-to-face event that showcased their efforts and dedication. We were inspired by their innovative ideas, creative approaches, and determination to elevate the quality of early childhood in Maryland. They are truly early childhood *change agents*.

For more information, please visit <https://meclp.umbc.edu>, or email Louise Corwin (lcorwin@umbc.edu), Co-Chair of MECLP Advisory Committee, or Liran Laor (liranlaor@umbc.edu), MECLP Program Director.

Research to Practice

The [Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Project \(ELP\)](#) promotes early literacy and kindergarten readiness with our Lakeland and Curtis Bay Judy Center families. The October ELP stemmed from research on how mindfulness and emotional wellness can optimize learning. Families engaged in strategies to raise their child's awareness of their emotions (e.g., breathing exercises) and learned how these strategies are related to kindergarten readiness.

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. Our ELP video highlights the activities, presentations, and materials used to support families' efforts to encourage learning opportunities at home. Visit [our website](#) to learn more about ELP.

