



2023 Special Category Award Winners



The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation (DPWF) supports a broad spectrum of worthy organizations benefiting at-risk youth, economically and socially disadvantaged individuals and families, and those with special needs. We enthusiastically celebrate the Foundation for decades of outstanding contributions dedicated to promoting high-quality early childhood education practices through the support of research, programming, and community outreach. The DPWF recently funded another three years of a research-practice partnership between UM and MCPS. The 2.6 million in funding will have a significant impact on early childhood education, literacy, health and wellness, and arts integration.

For nearly a decade Anna has worked to improve outcomes for young children and families as the coordinator for the Healthy Start Missoula Coalition. Her work has been instrumental in supporting one on one support for new families in our community through pregnancy, birth, and postpartum services, and she worked tirelessly to uplift the early childhood community by coordinating and hosting the State of the Young Child Conference and Early Childhood Champion Awards. Her colleagues highlight many favorite memories of working with Anna that include community projects to preschool and childcare playgrounds. Anna's inclusive facilitation and endless ability to pivot to respond to community needs and challenges have made her an asset to our community.





Award Winners



2023 Excellence in Early Childhood Education



Leigh Ann Courville, Early Childhood Chair

Dr. Amy Burland, Early Childhood Partnerships Coordinator

Janet Jolley, Salish Kootenai College Early Learning Center Director

Dr. Heather Bleecker, Student Support and Grant Coordinator

Eric Hogenson, Head Start Advisor, and Technology Specialist

Dr. Tammy Elser, Master's Chair for Language & Literacy

The Early Childhood Team at Salish Kootenai College has ambitiously pursued multiple scholarly grants from national funders with direct an impact on early childhood education professional development for pre-service teachers, as well as integrated early childhood curriculum practices. The funded Tribal College – Head Start Partnership grant works to mitigate barriers for Tribal program Head Start and Early Head Start teachers who pursue ECE degrees. Entitled Jump Start Head Start, the funding provides tuition, books, fees, and incentives for local ECE educators across the Flathead Reservation to pursue ECE Associate, Bachelor, and Master's degrees.

The funding secured from the Early Educators Investment Collaborative (EEIC) Initiative and WWK Kellogg supports a focus on addressing equity in the ECE Workforce, especially for minority populations. Specifically, the funding helped to launch the first SKC Curriculum and Instruction Master's Program in the summer of 2022 with a starting cohort of 18 to complete in August 2023. The program has two options, one in integrated Indigenous Education and the other in Language and Literacy for Equity and Excellence.

Other notable achievements include the highlighted SKC Early Learning Center (ELC) by the National Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC). The BPC featured the ELC in a webinar entitled Tribal Childcare, the Salish Kootenai Childcare Center that focused on the challenges of tribal communities regarding early childcare and education. The BPC profiled the SKC Early Learning Center as an example of a high-quality tribal childcare center.

In March of 2023, Leigh Ann Courville, SKC Early Childhood Chair, was a guest on Minnesota Public Radio's Native Roots with Barb Farb of Indigenous Visioning. She shared the team's Early Childhood work at Salish Kootenai College. Leigh Ann also sat on the 2022 Early EdU Conference Leveraging Policy to Build Equitable Pathways for the ECE Workforce Panel in Washington State. Together with Dr. Amy Burland, former Dean of Education, they have presented at the 2022 BUILD Conference and showcased the work of initiatives for various National Early Educator Investment Collaborative webinars. The University of Montana Institute for Early Childhood Education is delighted to award the Salish Kootenai College Early Childhood team for their considerable scholarly contributions to the field of early childhood.



Award Winners

2023 Excellence in Early Childhood Education



Barbara Frank, Director
P-12 Academic and Community Services
Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS)
Former Principal of Lowell Elementary School

Barbara Frank, Director of P-12 Academic and Community Services for Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) and former Principal of Lowell Elementary School regularly tells others, "equity isn't giving a child a bike, it is knowing the conditions that led to the lack of bikes and mitigating them." Notably, Barbara was able to engineer a major renovation of the Lowell learning environment and outcomes with the support of students, staff, parents, and a broad spectrum of community partners. She has had considerable success championing multiple initiatives focusing on wellness in her school communities that include the start of the Leader in Me Program (2018), Kindergarten Home Visits, and partnerships with Dan Fox Youth Homesn 2019, Barbara organized a successful Community School Model for Lowell Elementary with key community partners such as the Missoula Food Bank, Missoula Parks and Recreation, United Way of Missoula, Northside-Westside Corporation, two parents who were members of the Missoula City Council, Partnership Health, Missoula Community Foundation, and Garden City Harvest. Most recently Barbara was instrumental in securing a research-practice partnership grant in collaboration with the Institute for Early Childhood Education and other community partners such as SPARK! Arts. She is a founding Board Member of Friends of the Children and continues to sustain partnerships with Zero to Five Missoula, Head Start, and is a member of the University of Montana Institute for Early Childhood Education Advisory Council. There truly is not enough room in this program to highlight her incredible passion and commitment to community outreach. The Institute for Early Childhood Education honors Barbara Frank for her dedication to our community and is grateful for her collaborative partnership.



Award Winners

2023 Excellence in Early Childhood Education



Danielle Bailey

Early Childhood Clinical Specialist
Learning and Belonging (LAB) School

ECE Adjunct Faculty

The University of Montana PJW College of Ed

For the past two years, Danielle has taught a mixed-aged preschool classroom at the University of Montana LAB School. Prior to LAB Danielle was a toddler teacher for Clark Fork School and worked in early elementary grades for MCPS. Danielle's passion and commitment to implementing current, research-based, developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom are outstanding. In addition to engaging children in purposeful ways, Danielle teaches and supervises students in the UM P-3 teacher education program. Beyond working directly with children, her day is spent coaching pre-service candidates on Project Based Learning, gentle guidance, and family engagement.

Danielle also demonstrates a commitment through her engagement with the Missoula Early Learning Fellows. Now finishing her second year, she is a true emerging leader not only at LAB but in our community. She is an enthusiastic and thoughtful collaborator, regularly bringing insights and sparking valuable discussions with her colleagues about how to strengthen learning opportunities for children. She is reflective, thoughtful, and always seeking ways to enhance her practice as a true model for others. Danielle exemplifies a model for the demonstration of high-quality early childhood practice in our field.

