



Early Education Conference Breakout Sessions

September 26, 2026

Our schedule consists of five (5) sessions. Sessions one (1) and five (5) are the opening and closing general sessions where we will be together as one group. We'll hear from **Carly Bedard** in our opening session who will help us explore a better understanding of how God created our little learners and how to meet their learning needs through play, curiosity and engagement. We'll close our day together with **Dr. June Hetzel** leading our final session, helping us understand that teaching is far more than a profession—it is a sacred calling to faithfully serve Christ in the classroom. Every Christian educator faces struggles in the trenches of day-to-day school life. We'll learn strategies to help us persevere in this work God has called us to.

8:00 **Session 1 – Heath Forum**
3:00 **Session 5 – Heath Forum**

The conference also includes three breakouts (Sessions 2 – 4) where we will have the opportunity to learn from additional engaging speakers in small groups.

10:30 **Session 2 – Breakouts**
11:30 **Break**
11:45 **Session 3 – Breakouts**
12:45 **Lunch – Heath Forum**
1:45 **Session 4 – Breakouts**
3:00 **Session 5 – Heath Forum**

***An abbreviated *Breakout Session Guide* will be provided for each participant.**

Session 1 – Heath Forum – The Power of Play: *Sparkling Wonder & Curiosity* - Carly Bedard

Play is not a break from learning; it is learning! As educators, leaders, and caregivers rooted in faith, we recognize that every child is created in the image of God: curious, creative, and capable. In this uplifting session, we'll explore the powerful role of play in nurturing the whole child, while sparking the wonder and curiosity that inspire children to explore, imagine, and learn. Through hands-on experience, reflection, and research, we'll reconnect with the wonder of play. This session will reignite your passion for what truly matters: unleashing joy, creativity, and limitless potential in every child's journey. You'll leave inspired not only to support play for children, but to make room for more play, wonder, joy and curiosity in your own life.

Session 2 - Breakouts – Choose one

	Breakout Choices	Session Description	Presenter	Room
2-1	Prioritizing Play: Exploring Ways to Support Play in Our Classrooms	In today's world of increasing academic expectations and hurried childhoods, play often gets pushed aside. Yet it remains one of the most powerful tools we have for supporting connection, resilience, and deep learning. In this session, we'll reflect on the barriers that have weakened our commitment to play and explore how we can respond with purpose and courage. Through practical strategies, we'll discover how loose parts can spark wonder, curiosity, creativity, and hands-on learning. We'll also explore meaningful ways to share the value and power of play with families, helping them understand how play supports learning and development. Whether in classrooms, programs, or communities, we are called to prioritize play and create spaces that reflect God's design for young children to experience joy-filled learning, exploration, and discovery. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development</i>	Carly Bedard	Heath 101
2-2	From Challenges to Connections: Supporting Student Success in the Classroom	<i>Supporting Student Success in the Classroom</i> is a teacher workshop focused on turning everyday classroom challenges into opportunities for stronger relationships and greater student success. Participants will explore practical strategies for understanding student needs, building trust, creating a positive classroom culture, and responding to challenges with empathy and purpose. Through reflection and real-world examples, educators will gain tools they can use right away to help students feel connected, supported, and ready to learn. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning</i>	Bree Tarbutton	Heath 102
2-3	Inspired Learning: Innovate Kingdom Approaches to Teaching and Discovery	How we teach matters as much as what we teach. This session explores innovative instructional practices that engage children's minds, hearts, and spirits through active learning, inquiry, project-based experiences, and meaningful exploration. Participants will discover how a Kingdom approach to teaching empowers children to become thinkers, problem-solvers, collaborators, and lifelong learners while connecting discovery to God's truth and purpose. Through examples and practical applications, educators will learn how to design engaging learning experiences that promote critical thinking, creativity, and deeper understanding while honoring each child's God-given potential. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning</i>	Dr. Debbi Keeler	Heath 103
2-4	Creating a Safe Haven: A Biblical Approach to Trauma-Responsive Early Childhood Education	Early childhood educators play a sacred role in shaping environments where young children feel safe, seen, and deeply valued. This session explores trauma-responsive teaching through a Biblical worldview, grounded in the belief that every child is created in the image of God and deserving of compassion, protection, and belonging. Learn how trauma affects early development, behavior, and attachment, and how scripture's themes of refuge, gentleness, and steadfast love can guide practical classroom responses. You'll leave with actionable tools and a personalized plan for creating trauma-responsive, spiritually grounded learning environments. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth, Development, and Learning</i>	Dr. Jocelyn Navarro	Heath 104

2-5	Kingdom Builders: Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Young Children	How do young children begin to understand God, faith, love, worship, and their identity in Christ? Together, we will connect biblical truth with developmentally appropriate practices, considering how everyday moments—play, stories, conversations, routines, relationships, and wonder—can become opportunities to help children know and experience God’s love. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development: Spiritual</i>	Julia Chandler	Heath 105
2-6	Fresh From His Face: Teaching and Discipling Preschoolers Through Love, Joy and Peace	Preschoolers are uniquely positioned to encounter God in ways adults often overlook. Fresh from His presence, they carry an uncluttered faith and a natural openness to His voice. This session explores how Christian educators can build and steward deep spiritual connections with toddlers and preschoolers by cultivating the Kingdom atmosphere of love, joy, and peace. We will unpack how respect for a child's God-given spirit, joy-filled engagement, and peace-centered presence can create an environment where discipleship happens naturally. With practical strategies rooted in Scripture, you'll learn how to avoid unintentionally hindering children's access to Jesus and instead help them remain in the Kingdom reality they so easily inhabit. <i>Core Competency: Learning Environment and Curriculum (Social Emotional); Relationships</i>	Kerri Shepard	Heath 106
2-7	Prayer: The Heartbeat of a Christ-Centered Preschool	Let's discover together what scriptures to stand on, and how we can pray with power and faith over our centers and classrooms. Our time together will focus on three core principles: 1. Prayer has power (James 5:16); 2. We can pray scriptures over our centers and children (I John 5:14-15); 3. Be assured that God cares about what we care about and we can go to Him about everything (I Peter 5:7). <i>Core Competency: Personal Leadership</i>	Lindsay Tolman	Heath 107
2-8	More Than a Read-aloud (Part 1): The Amazing Brain	We'll be introduced to interactive activities to help us learn and understand what research says about early brain development and early literacy. The focus is on how God has created our brains and how they develop. Through hands-on activities, we'll experience, connect, and learn how and why interactive read-alouds can be used to strengthen learning. We'll also identify how specific activities trigger memories for us personally, and how we can create similar strategies to use with read-alouds in our classroom. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development: Literacy</i>	Dr. Lisa Bernier	Heath 108
2-9	Mini Minds Matter	Recent findings in neuroscience establish what those in early childhood education have known for years. Cognitive, emotional, and social capacities are intertwined throughout life and those who establish strong foundations early on will increase the likelihood of success as adults. In our short time together, we will explore the topics of brain research for the early education classroom & executive functioning skills. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth & Development; Relationships</i>	Royce Nelsestuen	Scott 130
2-10	Beyond the Lesson Plan: What If We Taught Differently?	Intentional & Responsive Teaching for Every Child, Every Learner, Every Moment: A lesson plan tells us where we hope to go—but the child tells us what may need to happen next. God uniquely creates every child and brings different strengths, experiences, needs, and ways of learning. This interactive session invites early educators to move beyond simply following a lesson plan and toward teaching that is intentional, responsive, and flexible. Participants will explore how observation, relationships, differentiation, and thoughtful responses to challenging behavior can help teachers adjust their approach so children can successfully engage and learn. Participants will leave with practical strategies and a	Eman Metri	Scott 131

		guiding question for everyday teaching: “What can I change in my teaching so this child can be successful?” <i>Core Competency: Learning Environment and Curriculum</i>		
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Session 3 Breakouts - Choose one

	Breakout Choices	Session Description	Presenter	Room
3-1	Sing, Move, and Connect! Using Music to Build Language, Literacy & Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood	This interactive workshop explores the powerful connection between music and movement, language and literacy, and social-emotional development in early childhood. Participants will discover how intentional use of songs, rhythms, and movement activities can support children’s vocabulary, listening comprehension, self-regulation, and social connection. Participants will leave with a repertoire of songs and movement ideas for integrating music across the daily routine to foster joyful, meaningful learning. <i>Core Competency: Learning Environment and Curriculum</i>	Carly Bedard	Heath 101
3-2	From Challenges to Connections: Supporting Student Success in the Classroom	<i>Supporting Student Success in the Classroom</i> is a teacher workshop focused on turning everyday classroom challenges into opportunities for stronger relationships and greater student success. Participants will explore practical strategies for understanding student needs, building trust, creating a positive classroom culture, and responding to challenges with empathy and purpose. Through reflection and real-world examples, educators will gain tools they can use right away to help students feel connected, supported, and ready to learn. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning (Repeated)</i>	Bree Tarbutton	Heath 102
3-3	Kingdom Imagination: Awakening the God-Given Desire for Relationship with God	God designed imagination as more than a creative skill- it is a sacred gift that allows children to envision possibilities, engage with biblical truths, and deepen their relationship with Him as His image bearers. This session explores the role of imagination in spiritual development and how intentional planning, storytelling, play, reflection, and creative expression can help children encounter God in meaningful ways. Participants will discover how nurturing imagination cultivates faith, identity, purpose, and a lifelong capacity to hear and respond to God’s invitation. Through a Kingdom lens, educators will learn to create experiences that help children connect their hearts, minds, and imaginations to the reality of God’s presence and His redemptive story. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development</i>	Dr. Debbi Keeler	Heath 103
3-4	Teaching the Developing Brain: Understanding the Neurological Impact of Trauma in Early Childhood	We’ll explore how trauma impacts neurological development in young children through a Biblical worldview. Grounded in the belief that every child is created in the image of God, we will examine how early experiences shape the brain’s architecture, stress response systems, and capacity for learning. Scripture’s themes of refuge, comfort, and steadfast presence will guide practical strategies for supporting healthy brain development in trauma-impacted children. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development: Social Emotional</i>	Dr. Jocelyn Navarro	Heath 104

3-5	Family Engagement: Building Partnerships Through Relationships and Communication	Strong family engagement in the early education program begins with building trusting partnerships with parents and caregivers, recognizing families as valued and essential partners in a child's growth and learning. We will explore practical strategies for communicating effectively with families, navigating challenging conversations with grace, and creating meaningful opportunities for parents to participate in and contribute to their child's learning environment. <i>Core Competency: Relationships</i>	Julia Chandler	Heath 105
3-6	Helping Children Know God Experientially for Themselves	God's heart is for children to know Him personally and experientially—right now, not just when they are older. Too often, we unintentionally introduce children to the system of God rather than the Person of God, leaving them with secondhand faith instead of a firsthand relationship. In this workshop, we'll explore practical, Spirit-led strategies for helping children engage directly with the Lord through hearing His voice, sensing His presence, and responding to His love. You'll learn how to prepare yourself, shape the atmosphere, and guide activities that create space for the Holy Spirit to meet with children. Together, we'll move beyond simply telling them about God and instead lead them into an ongoing, intimate relationship with Him—one they will carry for life. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development: Spiritual</i>	Kerri Shepard	Heath 106
3-7	Leading With Emotional Intelligence (EQ)	What is emotional intelligence and why does it matter? How does it help me lead? We'll discuss how the "soft skills" of social/emotional development that we teach children also apply to us as adults. We'll identify areas of personal strength and/or weakness regarding our own Emotional Intelligence to better understand ourselves better so we can improve how we connect with those we lead and serve. <i>Core Competency: Learning Environment and Leadership</i>	Lindsay Tolman	Heath 107
3-8	More Than a Read-Aloud (Part 2): Where A Book Can Lead You	A good book's potential far outreaches the enjoyment of its story. It is a tool that can lead a learning community into the arena of cooperative higher-level thinking, effective social-emotional integration, and hands-on activities customized for all subjects. The extent of creative projects one book can generate is limitless. The "Read Aloud" is only the beginning. Utilizing two books, we'll experience the far-reaching effects that can be extracted from a single story capable of marrying contrasting educational domains into a vibrant learning outcome. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning Environment; Literacy</i>	Dr. Lisa Bernier	Heath 108
3-9	Building Blocks of Behavior and Self-Regulation	Let's explain the brain – and see what's really happening when behavior escalates. Then, let's talk about real strategies to help our youngest learners self-regulate and help teachers de-escalate power struggles. This session will help the teacher be prepared to address meltdowns and unplanned behaviors. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning Environment; Social/Emotional Learning</i>	Royce Nelsestuen	Scott 130
3-10	What's the Big Deal about Open Ended Questions?	Unlock the power of open-ended questions to spark curiosity, conversation, and discovery! Explore how thoughtful questions build critical thinking, learn simple strategies for guiding meaningful discussions, and practice practical ways to bring this engaging approach into your classroom. <i>Core Competency: Instructional Planning</i>	Sarah Pate	Scott 131

LUNCH – Heath Forum Building

Session 4 Breakouts – Choose one

	Breakout Choices	Session Description	Presenter	
4-1	Biblical Integration Lab	What if every lesson, activity, and routine in your early childhood classroom could build both academic foundations and a biblical worldview? This interactive session will explore how intentional curriculum planning can make learning accessible and meaningful for even our youngest students. We'll discover practical ways to move beyond simply adding Bible verses to lessons and instead weave biblical truth naturally throughout the day. Using real classroom examples from literacy, science, math, and play, we'll practice identifying play, academic goals, future foundations, and biblical connection and explore how intentional communication with families can help parents become active partners in their child's learning and spiritual growth. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development: Spiritual Development</i>	Tiffani Djeu	Heath 101
4-2	From Challenges to Connections: Supporting Student Success in the Classroom	<i>Supporting Student Success in the Classroom</i> is a teacher workshop focused on turning everyday classroom challenges into opportunities for stronger relationships and greater student success. Participants will explore practical strategies for understanding student needs, building trust, creating a positive classroom culture, and responding to challenges with empathy and purpose. Through reflection and real-world examples, educators will gain tools they can use right away to help students feel connected, supported, and ready to learn. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning (Repeated)</i>	Bree Tarbutton	Heath 102
4-3	Sacred Spaces for Learning: Fostering Wonder, Joy, and Spiritual Growth in Young Children	The environments we create communicate powerful messages about God, belonging, and learning. This session explores how educators can intentionally design Kingdom-centered spaces that nurture joy, peace, connection, and spiritual growth. Participants will examine the role of relationships, classroom culture, routines, and physical environments in creating spaces where children feel valued, safe, and known. Through practical examples, attendees will learn strategies for fostering a sense of wonder, encouraging meaningful interactions, and cultivating communities where children experience God's love and presence daily. Participants will leave with tools for creating learning environments that support the whole child—spiritually, emotionally, socially, and cognitively. <i>Core Competency: Relationships, Interactions and Child Development: Spiritual</i>	Dr. Debbi Keeler	Heath 103

4-4	Partnering With Families: A Biblical Approach to Family Engagement for Students Impacted by Trauma	Early educators need to build strong, compassionate partnerships with families whose children have experienced trauma. Grounded in the belief that families are created by God for connection, nurture, and belonging, we will explore how trauma affects family dynamics and how educators can serve as bridge builders who model Christ-like empathy, patience, and relational safety. Participants will learn practical strategies for communication, trust building, and collaborative problem solving that honor families' experiences while supporting children's healing and growth. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning</i>	Dr. Jocelyn Navarro	Heath 104
4-5	Typical, Challenging, Concerning, or Unsafe?	How do we know when a child's behavior is simply typical for their age, when it has become challenging, and when it crosses the line into concerning or unsafe behavior? This seminar will explore practical methods of classroom management and discipline that create a positive, predictable, and well-managed learning environment, focusing on teaching appropriate behavior rather than simply reacting to inappropriate behaviors. <i>Core Competency: Learning Environment; Relationships</i>	Julia Chandler	Heath 105
4-6	Playing with God: Innovative Ways to Teach Spiritual Development to Young Children	Come gain some practical, developmentally appropriate strategies to nurture young children's spiritual awareness and help them build a genuine relationship with God. We'll re-discover how preschoolers are naturally hard-wired to sense God, believe, and respond to Him—and how God faithfully draws them near, just as He promises in Scripture. Young children form relationships through play, imagination, and sensory experiences, making these the ideal pathways for spiritual formation. We'll discuss how to guide children to wait on God and hear from Him following a brief teaching, using engaging methods such as play-based activities, hand motions, simple props, crafts, games, and multi-sensory experiences. <i>Core Competency: Relationships, Interactions and Child Development; Learning Environment</i>	Kerri Shepard	Heath 106
4-7	From Families to Partners: Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms	Every child and family is uniquely created by God, bringing diverse cultures, languages, traditions, values, and strengths to the early learning environment. This session examines how authentic family partnerships can strengthen educators' understanding of children and inform culturally responsive practice. <i>Core Competency: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity</i>	Eman Metri	Heath 107
4-8	More Than a Read-Aloud (Part 3): Applying Brain-Based Strategies to a Book	This interactive session will provide an opportunity to choose a book from a selection and, with a pair or small group, develop a brain-based activity for the book. This activity should lead a learning community into cooperative higher-level thinking, effective social-emotional integration, and hands-on activities. Each participant will have a chance to see and discuss others' activities and leave with a teacher toolbox of ideas for use in their classrooms that can be customized for all levels and types of literature. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth and Development: Literacy</i>	Dr. Lisa Bernier	Heath 108

4-9	Music, Movement and Management	Managing a group of young children is what we live for! Being well-equipped with strategies and best practices is what gives us confidence and endurance. Music is the language of learning in early education, and when used alongside practical principles and strategies for management, our classrooms become places of beauty and routine for the youngest among us. This workshop can be especially helpful for the “non-singer” teachers. <i>Core Competency: Child Growth & Development</i>	Royce Nelsestuen	Scott 130
4-10	The Architecture of Art: Process vs. Project	Discover the joy and value of Process Art and Project Art in early childhood! Learn how these two approaches support the whole child, when to use each, and how to create engaging art experiences that balance structure, creativity, and child-led exploration. <i>Core Competency: Child Development and Learning Environment</i>	Sarah Pate	Scott 131

Session 5 – Heath Forum – *Don’t Lose Your Why: Spiritual Practices for Teachers in the Trenches* – Dr. June Hetzel

In this session, we’ll examine teacher perspectives regarding their spiritual lives. We’ll consider the spiritual temptations and vulnerabilities with which teachers struggle, review the spiritual disciplines that can undergird our relationship with Christ, and discuss practical, biblical ways to handle sensitive areas of our walk with Christ.



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