Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health

at Montclair State University

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY | **Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health**



Who we are

The Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health (CAECMH) within the College for Education and Engaged Learning at Montclair State University provides support and services to families, professional development to in-service professionals, and coursework for students in the broad areas of early relational health and developmental education. The CAECMH also promotes the connection and collaboration of the state systems and community organizations that support the well being of families.

Established in September 2011, the CAECMH is rooted in the knowledge that our earliest relationships are critical for healthy development. Our work is informed by the multidisciplinary sciences, including the fields of infant and early childhood mental health, early relational health, maternal-infant health, developmental approaches to autism services, and inclusive education practices. Our programs focus on the impacts of safety and stress on healthy development. We support adults with knowledge and techniques to promote relational, emotional, and social health and wellness, and to utilize strategies to intervene when problems arise.

The CAECMH is regarded as expert in infant and early childhood mental health, early relational health, maternal-infant health, developmental approaches to autism services, and inclusive education practices. We are uniquely positioned to promote and enhance relational health and developmental education locally and nationally.

Many thanks to The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation for their support of this report.

Why our work is important

We all deserve to feel safe, form relationships, learn and grow, and pursue our dreams. Sustaining these conditions requires a foundation of early relational health from the very beginning of family formation. Yet, we know there are obstacles that challenge this reality for too many families.

Caregivers around the country are stressed, isolated and under-resourced.[1] New Jersey has one of the highest rates of maternal morbidity and infant mortality for women and children of color in the country.[2] Nationally, infants, toddlers and preschoolers are being expelled, suspended, and limited from childcare and preschool at three times the rate of students in K-12 schools combined, rates that are exacerbated for children of color.[3] New Jersey is ranked last in including children with special needs in general education classrooms.[4]

These challenges and more threaten the formation of healthy relationships that we know result in positive development, health and success.
We envision a world where all families thrive!

What we envision for our world

All expectant families, infants, young children, and their families are surrounded by loving relationships and supportive systems that promote their optimal development and health.

How our work meets this vision

We build and sustain networks of adults who are relational, regulated, reflective, and resourceful.

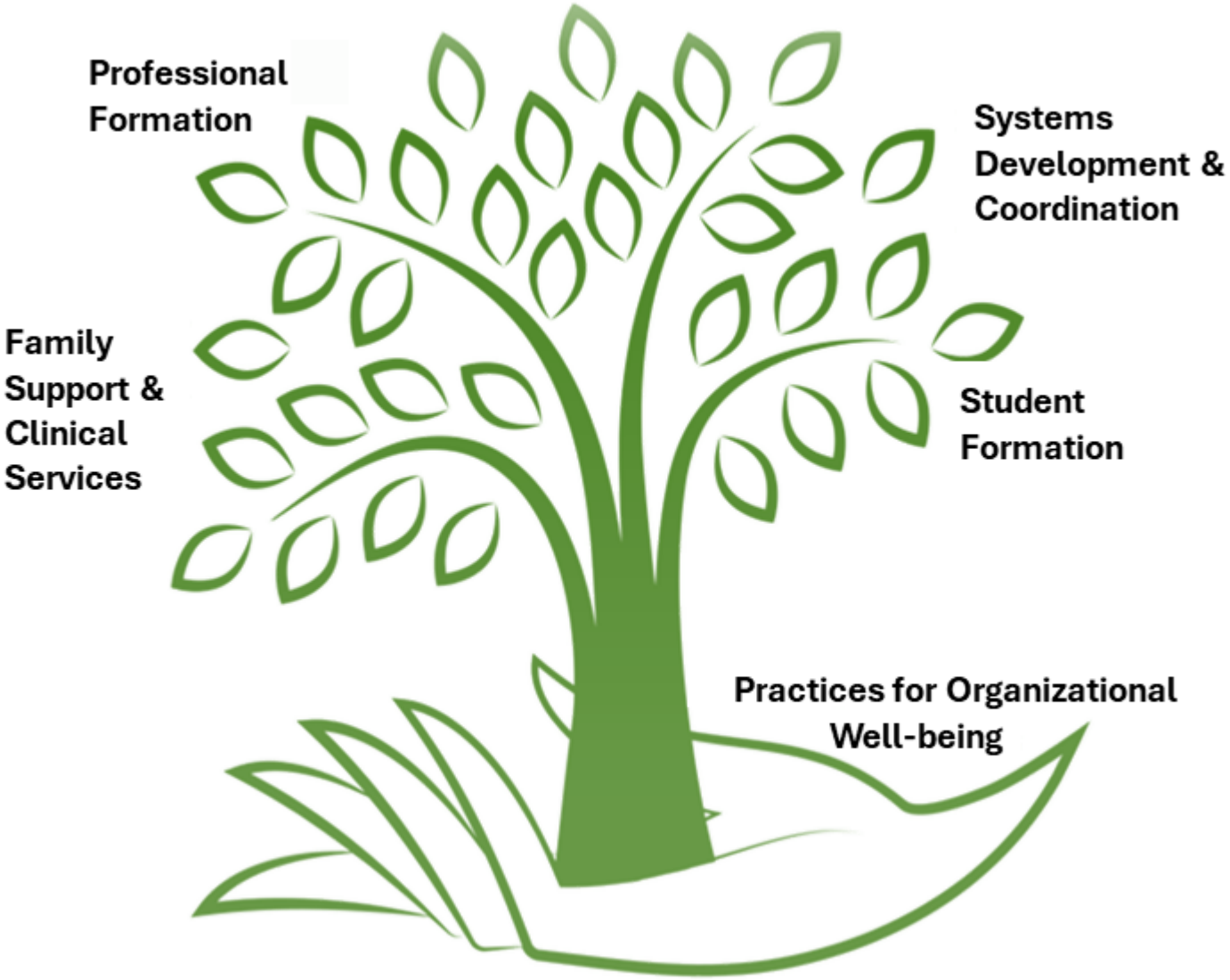
We transform multidisciplinary research into effective policies and practices.

We advance justice, equity, diversity, and belonging for all infants, children and families.

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How we are structured

A strong trunk of organizational well-being supports four branches of services: Family Support & Clinical Services, Professional Formation, Systems Development & Coordination, and Student Formation.



Our programs

Increase reflective capacity in adults to reduce the stress that can derail relationships.

Advance early relational health and inclusion as the core policies and practices in all systems that serve families.

What we accomplished in FY2024

- ✓ Offered over 1,300 workshops for over 17,700 state-wide participants.
- ✓ Provided over 4,000 hours of coaching/consultation for professionals.
- ✓ Engaged over 575 support visits with families of newborns.
- ✓ Supported policy and practice development for maternal-infant health.
- ✓ Held an average of 75 outpatient mental health appointments per week.
- ✓ Billed over 300 hours of embedded school-based mental health services.
- ✓ Taught three graduate courses in autism inclusion and intervention.
- ✓ Mentored six graduate students in clinical internships and assistantships.
- ✓ Educated 36 professionals in year-long fellowship programs.

☆ **Earned $6,500,000 to support 35 programs and 80 personnel.** ☆

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Our strategic goals

1. **Provide** critical support to the statewide systems that ensure the health and wellbeing of families, providers, and communities.
2. **Support** transdisciplinary professional formation of the early relational health and developmental education workforce.
3. **Deliver** quality and equitable promotional, prevention, and clinical support to families.
4. **Offer** expertise to the Montclair State University community in the areas of early relational health and developmental education.
5. **Advance** policies and practices to promote early relational health across all family-serving disciplines.
6. **Produce** research and publication to advance our fields of study.
7. **Maintain** a strong and thriving organization.

Beliefs that drive our work

All people deserve to feel a sense of safety and belonging.

Culture, context and conditions organize relationships.

Relationships promote development.

Reflection produces change.

Inclusion is a right.

Authenticity and accountability breed success.

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These actions will ensure our continued success in serving families, communities, and related systems.

1. Increase access to quality promotion, prevention, and treatment services for infants, children, and families.

2. Enhance professional formation programs for multidisciplinary in-service professionals.

3. Grow credit-bearing and continuing education academic offerings.

4. Develop additional collaborations across family-serving systems.

5. Expand policy promotion for early relational health and inclusive education.

6. Cultivate confident, competent, connected, and culturally responsive professionals who center families' lived experience.

These actions will ensure our organizational health and sustainability.

1. Nurture confident, competent, connected, and culturally responsive personnel.

2. Diversify the funding portfolio and enhance sustainability planning.

3. Promote quality and standardized processes and operations.

4. Improve connection and coordination between CAECMH & MSU



5. Produce rigorous, high-quality, and ethical research publications.

6. Enhance data and information management systems.

7. Bolster administrative efficiency of programs and services.

8. Increase marketing and communications capabilities.

Our plans for growth

Seeding promising ideas that will take root

Research:

Create a position focused on research and evaluation efforts of the CAECMH to better demonstrate impact of services and programs and share efficacy data with other providers so as to share lessons learned and best practices.

Professional Development:

Partner with LENA Grow, an evidence-based professional development program for early childhood educators that has demonstrated high efficacy at making improvements in language, literacy and social-emotional outcomes.

Community Development:

Establish the first Early Relational Health Community in the nation where all services that support all families from expectancy to Kindergarten centralize the importance of relationships in their services on behalf of families, and coordinate with each other in a connected system of support.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:

Expand Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, an evidence-informed model to address caregiver stress and child need, to our Early Intervention/Part C and Evidence-based Home Visiting programs.

Clinical Services:

Develop an evidence-based infant mental health home visiting program to service families of newborns and infants in their home when relational or developmental concerns arise.

Develop an expanded service for adolescents diagnosed with autism/Autistic adolescents to support post-secondary transitions.

Our plans for growth

Growing our successful programs to scale

Professional Development:

Increase no-cost professional development workshops and reflective practice offerings of the CAECMH to the broad early relational health, maternal-infant health, and developmental education workforce by 10-20%, reaching over 1,500-3,000 additional professionals.

Family Support Services:

Scale up our Enhancing Relationships program that pairs an infant-family specialist with hospital maternity floor staff to support the emerging relationship between new caregivers and their newborns in the first hours after birth. Enhancing Relationships builds parental competence and confidence to ensure a strong start as a family.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:

Expand Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, an evidence-informed model to address caregiver stress and child need, in an additional 80 sites per year to achieve scale in our state.

Teaching Practice Facilitation:

Expand quality inclusive teaching practices in public preschool education to an additional 5% of public preschool programs, or an additional 25 programs.

Pyramid Model Program-wide Implementation Coaching:

Scale up Pyramid Model coaching implementation, an evidence-informed framework to reduce expulsion and suspension from early care and education settings, to up to 10 additional early care and education programs. This growth would allow us to establish one fidelity site per county in the state.

Our plans for growth

Nurturing the strong roots of our programs to maintain stability

Family Support Services:

Continue the direct promotional services to families to support developmental and relational health in families of newborns, infants, toddlers, and young children. These services occur in community, and on campus at Montclair State University.

Clinical Services:

Grow the outpatient clinical service at Montclair State University including individual psychotherapy, dyadic, family and group therapy, to families with children from expectancy through age 12 years. Funding will allow continued access to clinical services for vulnerable families through reduced fees.

Student Formation:

Provide scholarships for our graduate and continuing education Fellowships in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, Early Relational Health, Developmental Models of Autism Intervention, and Inclusive Education.

Professional Formation and Systems Coordination:

Sustain the educational services, professional development, reflective practice, coaching/consultation, and systems coordination work of the Professional Formation Center for the Early Relational Health Workforce, an entity that promotes early relational health as the core practice and common ground for all family-serving and educational systems.

Policy Promotion:

Support the policy promotion work done within maternal-infant health, infant and early childhood mental health, autism treatment and education services, and inclusive education practices.

Our thanks

We offer gratitude for:

- Our shared ancestors, on whose shoulders we stand.
- The prior generation of professionals, whose mentoring and guidance illuminated the path forward.
- The infants and children, whose courage and tenacity compel us.
- The parents and caregivers, whose trust and confidence we carry.
- The array of professionals across the prenatal through early childhood workforce, whose unwavering commitment charts our course ahead.
- The leaders of Montclair State University, whose support we value.
- Our colleagues and educators within the College for Education and Engaged Learning at Montclair State University, and within the many other colleges, with whom we collaborate.
- The students and interns, whose intention and passion inspires.
- The public and private funders, who fuel our progress.

Special thanks to Dr. Gerard Costa, the heart of our Center.



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Appendix A: Strategic Goals and Objectives 2025-2028

Strategic Goal #1: Provide critical support to the state systems that ensure the health and wellbeing of families, providers, and communities.

- Strategic Objective 1.1: Enhance capacity across systems in NJ: CAECMH will continue to promote infant and early childhood mental health, early relational health, and inclusive practices as the common ground and core practice across the practitioners and professionals we serve.
- Strategic Objective 1.2: Enhance coordination across systems in NJ: CAECMH will continue to support the connection and coordination of the multidisciplinary statewide system and community partners that serve families.

Strategic Goal #2: Support transdisciplinary professional formation of the early relational health and developmental education workforce.

- Strategic Objective 2.1: Enhance and expand access to professional formation opportunities: CAECMH will continue to enhance and expand equitable access to professional development and formation. This includes a variety of considerations and actions from promotion of our offerings, to the content, modality, and language of offerings.
- Strategic Objective 2.2: Maintain and enhance transdisciplinary professional formation activities: CAECMH will continue to offer its portfolio of frameworks and products from across a variety of disciplines in order to best support the multi-disciplinary sectors we serve. This include materials developed by our team as well as nationally recognized curricula.
- Strategic Objective 2.3: Maintain and enhance cadre of facilitators and coaches: CAECMH will continue to cultivate its teams of facilitators and coaches who represent our organization's mission to form networks of relational, regulated, and reflective adults who provide nurturing and responsive care and education in the home, school, and community.
- Strategic Objective 2.4: Enhance administrative functioning and program support: CAECMH will continue to maintain and enhance identified target areas of growth within the management and administrative of professional formation activities for the multidisciplinary state-wide professional network.

Strategic Goal #3: Deliver quality and equitable promotional, prevention, and clinical support to families.

- Strategic Objective 3.1: Maintain and enhance promotion offerings for families: CAECMH will continue to offer promotion services and programs that are available for all caregivers. These workshops and supports are universal for all parents and relatives who promote relational and emotional development and health.
- Strategic Objective 3.2: Maintain and expand prevention offerings for families: CAECMH will continue to offer prevention services and programs to provide targeted supports for parents and caregivers and families in moments of hardship or struggle.
- Strategic Objective 3.3: Maintain and expand intervention offerings for families: CAECMH will continue to offer clinical intervention and other intensive support, including assessment and evaluation services, interventions for families of children with neurodivergence, play-based family therapy for toddlers,

preschoolers, and early elementary aged children and their families, and comprehensive infant-parent dyadic services.

- Strategic Objective 3.4: Increase access to all clinical services for all families: CAECMH will increase access to high-quality developmental and mental health services for all families seeking services.
- Strategic Objective 3.5: Maintain and enhance clinical capabilities: CAECMH will maintain existing cadre of clinicians and programs and also seek additional opportunities to enhance staffing and clinical offerings.
- Strategic Objective 1.6: Bolster administrative functioning/efficiency of services: CAECMH will continue to maintain and enhance its management and administration of all promotion, prevention, and intervention IECMH services and programs for children and families.

Strategic Goal #4: Offer expertise to the Montclair State University community in the areas of early relational health and developmental education.

- Strategic Objective 4.1: Upgrade and expand matriculated-related academics Offerings: CAECMH will continue to provide coursework that best meets the educational needs of the academic community at the college and university in our areas of expertise.
- Strategic Objective 4.2: Maintain and expand non-matriculated educational offerings: CAECMH will continue to provide opportunities for continuing education to enhance participants understanding of theory and practice in infant and early childhood mental health, early relational health, and inclusion, and in the education of neurodivergent children.
- Strategic Objective 4.3: Increase access to early relational health education: CAECMH will continue to promote access to academic and educational opportunities for all students who are exploring careers that will involve families between pregnancy through early childhood.
- Strategic Objective 4.4: Maintain opportunities for practical work experience: CAECMH will continue to provide volunteer, work-study, internship, and graduate assistantship opportunities for students at Montclair State University and the local community.

Strategic Goal #5: Advance policies and practices to support early relational health across all family-serving disciplines.

- Strategic Objective 5.1: Maintain and expand policy promotion for maternal-infant health: CAECMH will continue to promote policies for maternal health and maternal-infant health. At the systems level, this involves advocacy for legislation, regulations and funding that is done in conjunction with state and national partners. At the organizational level, this aspect of our work involves promotion of relevant relationship-based policies and practices for communities and organizations.
- Strategic Objective 5.2: Maintain and expand policy promotion for relational health and developmental education: CAECMH will continue to promote policies for relational health and developmental education and well-being. At the systems level, this involves advocacy for legislation, regulations and funding that is done in conjunction with state and national partners. At the organizational level, this aspect of our work involves promotion of relevant relationship-based policies and practices for communities and organizations.

Strategic Goal #6: Produce research and publication to evolve the field.

- Strategic Objective 6.1: Enhance capabilities for research and publications: The CAECMH will continue to translate and integrate the multidisciplinary sciences about human development and early relational health into applied practices and policies in support of sustainable promotion, prevention, and intervention services and programs.

Strategic Goal #7: Maintain a strong and thriving organization.

- Strategic Objective 7.1: Continue with internal initiatives to promote equity and belonging: The CAECMH will maintain key internal initiatives that promote anti-racist, inclusive, belonging-centered reflection, practices, and capacities that put into place in ever-evolving just practice for our organization.
- Strategic Objective #7.2: Diversify funding portfolio and enhance sustainability planning: CAECMH will continue to seek funding from a variety of private and public sources while simultaneously enhancing diversification in order to promote sustainability and resiliency.
- Strategic Objective 7.3: Enhance public relations, marketing and communications capabilities: CAECMH will enhance the marketing and communications capabilities identified as crucial for increasing awareness and access to our programs and services. Our team will continue to explore new opportunities to bolster outreach to and collaboration with families, professionals, and communities.
- Strategic Objective 7.4: Promote quality, standardized processes and operations: CAECMH will enhance consistency of protocols and procedures to maintain a standardized structure for communication, coordination, and data collection across projects and programs.
- Strategic Objective 7.5: Enhance leadership and professional development: CAECMH will continue to make investments in developing our team of personnel who implement our services and programs, including promoting leadership skills, and personal and professional development.
- Strategic Objective 7.6: Refine data and information management: CAECMH will continue to develop, implement, and revise processes for internal information management in order to efficiently gather and analyze data for effective reporting of outputs and outcomes that are critical to our services and programs.

Appendix B: CAECMH Programs and Services

FAMILY SUPPORT AND CLINICAL SERVICES

Enhancing Relationships in the First 1,000 Days

The Enhancing Relationships in the First 1,000 Days (ER) program promotes healthy relationships between caregivers and newborns in Passaic County through three programs. The first program offers Lamaze Childbirth Education to expectant families, recognizing that the relationship begins with the idea of welcoming a child into a family. The second program partners infant-family specialists with hospital maternity floor staff to support the emerging relationship between new caregivers and their newborns directly after birth. The Newborn Behavioral Observation (NBO) tool is used to strengthen the parent-infant relationship through a shared observation which enhances parent's understanding and appreciation of their newborn's competencies and sensitivities. The third program is the offering of caregiver-baby groups known as the ABC's of Caregiving to support families as they grow and develop.

Family Support Groups

The CAECMH offers groups for family support using two evidence-informed curricula: The Circle of Security-Parenting framework and the Positive Solutions for Families framework**.** Both curricula hope to support families as they care for the health and well-being of their children.

Outpatient Clinical and Assessment Services for Families

The CAECMH aims to foster the developmental and psychological well-being of children and families, and to support and enhance the relationship between infants/children and their caregivers. CAECMH provides a continuum of coordinated developmental support and psychotherapeutic services to children ages birth through 12 and their families, including: play-based family therapy for toddlers, preschool and early elementary aged children and their families; comprehensive infant-parent (dyadic) services; interventions for children with developmental difficulties and children diagnosed on the autism spectrum; support for pregnant mothers; therapeutic groups including the original MindCrafters group curriculum.

The School-based Emotional Education and Developmental Services (SEEDS) Program

The SEEDS program is a mental health residency program offered to school districts that embeds licensed clinicians to provide psychotherapeutic services to students on-site during the school day, and can include the extension of family support or family therapy within the home or community. The SEEDS program also partners with district and school staff to ensure coordinated services for students within the school day. The SEEDS program follows the New Jersey Department of Education Multitiered System of Support guidance by offering promotional professional development and student and parent education; preventative therapeutic supports and developmental and psychological assessments, as needed, and intensive crisis intervention and evaluation with accompanying family therapeutic intervention when intensive services are required.

The In-Home Recovery Program of New Jersey

The In-Home Recovery Program (IHRP) is an evidence-informed treatment protocol for families of infants and young children impacted by parental substance use. IHRP integrates in-home positive reinforcement-based substance use treatment, intensive psychotherapy, attachment-based parent-child therapy, and linkage to community resources that support recovery. The CAECMH is funded by the NJ Department of Children and Families to serve as the fidelity holders of this model and provide consultation to all implementation grantees in the state.

Qi Gong Sensory Training

Qigong Sensory Therapy (QST) is a touch-based program that parents perform for children in their homes. Certified therapists provide hands-on support and coaching throughout this process. Children receiving QST often experience improved engagement, receptivity, awareness, and bonding. These are the foundation for easy, natural social-emotional reciprocity, verbal and non-verbal communication, and more satisfying relationships immediately and throughout life. On average, caregivers participating in QST report nearly 50% reduced parenting stress within the first six months. https://www.qsti.org/

PROFESSIONAL FORMATION

Professional Development

The Professional Formation Center for the Early Relational Health Workforce

The Professional Formation Center for the Early Relational Health Workforce at the Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health at Montclair State University (PFC) is the first of its kind in the nation, state-wide system of access to professional formation, coaching, and consultation in early relational and developmental health, combined with systems coordination aimed at centralizing early relational health across all prenatal through Kindergarten serving systems in New Jersey. All services of the PFC are also offered in Spanish.

Funded by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, the professional development component of the PFC develops and disseminates educational workshops, professional formation communities (i.e. communities of practice), reflective practice groups, and reflective consultation activities in the areas of early relational health, infant and early childhood mental health, and social-emotional development and learning. Workshops include the signature early relational health training program, Keeping Babies and Children in Mind, Pyramid Model Module training, topics in early childhood inclusive practices, information to address behaviors that challenge, ideas for self-compassion and energy restoration, strategies for responsive relationships, and many specialized techniques for promoting positive relationships and developmental education. Professional Formation Communities that blend learning and reflection are also offered, including racial affinity communities and discipline-specific communities.

Additional training in national frameworks are available to state-wide professionals including Brazelton Touchpoints Approach, a train-the-trainer curriculum for Positive Solutions for Families, and training in the DC:0–5™ Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood Version 2.0.

Seminars in Pyramid Model Coaching Practices/Parents Interacting with Infants

The CAECMH offers continuing education seminars in Pyramid Model Coaching practices to early educators and Early Intervention providers throughout the state. For example, the CAECMH provides mandatory training for all newly hired Preschool Intervention and Referral Specialists (PIRS) who work as coaches within the publicly funded preschools in the state, as well as a Community of Practice to the experienced PIRS in the state. The CAECMH also provides a Practitioner Coach Seminar in Pyramid Model Practices to Head Start/Early Head Start and private child care coaches. Early Intervention providers engage in a seminar on Pyramid Model practices for infants and toddlers through the Parents Interacting with Infants curriculum.

Clinical Practice Series in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

This continuing education program offers mental health clinicians and specialists the opportunity to reinforce and enhance the knowledge, techniques, and perspective used when working with the 0-6 years population, within their particular socio-political-historical-cultural-contextual context. The Clinical Practice Series provides education in theoretical knowledge in the IECMH field, preparation in evidence-informed techniques for clinical practice, and the experience of reflective consultation for clinicians to improve and enhance their current practice. The Clinical

Practice Series is offered to multiple sectors throughout New Jersey, including the Mental Health Specialists within Head Start/Early Head Start grantees through the state. The Clinical Practice Series is also a part of the Birth to Five: Helping Families Thrive initiative from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

Community Doula Training

The CAECMH partners with organizations to offer the nationally recognized and evidence-based model of community-based doula training from HealthConnect One. According to HealthConnect One, Community-Based Doulas are a mitigating factor for maternal mortality and for many other risks to birthing families, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color, bridging language and cultural barriers for optimal health and well-being.

Consultation, Coaching, Inclusion Facilitation and Technical Assistance

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Supported by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, the PFC serves as a resource for New Jersey's early childhood system and diverse infant and early childhood workforce to better work towards the promotion and enhancement of early relational and developmental health for expectant families and families of young children through coaching and consultation. This takes many forms from direct service consultation on practice to public policy consultation on proposed legislation. Consultation and technical assistance occurs in many sectors of the early relational health field, including maternal-infant health, education, mental health, Part C/Early Intervention, the legal and justice systems, our evidence-based home visiting services, and family support services.

New Jersey Preschool Inclusive Education Project (NJPIEP)

The NJPIEP project is a collaborative effort between the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education (DOE OSE). The goals of NJPIEP are to (a) support and increase the knowledge and skills of interdisciplinary early childhood educational professionals, pre-service teachers and advocacy group members & (b) develop, expand, and improve inclusive practices within early childhood and preschool environments across the state of New Jersey. To accomplish these goals, our project works closely with participating school districts, including work to establish preschool systemic change sites, as well as preschool technical assistance sites, as part of the New Jersey Inclusive Education Technical Assistance

Socio-Emotional Formation and Inclusive Support (SEFI Support)

SEFI Support is a collaborative, culturally-responsive, relationship-based service for the childcare community that promotes reflective, responsive, and nurturing relationships that enhance development. SEFI Support provides short-term infant and early childhood mental health consultation services for private childcare settings through funding from the NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development. SEFI Support helps to reduce the stress of caregivers to better understand and meet the needs of the children in their care.

Pyramid Model Coaching

The Pyramid Model for Supporting the Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children is an adult-directed framework that builds skills for professionals and caregivers of children aged birth through eight including

early intervention personnel, early educators, families, and other professionals who support young children (mental health, physical therapy, speech pathology, occupational therapy, etc.) to provide nurturing and responsive caregiving, create learning environments that communicate a climate of safety, provide targeted teaching practices that promote social-emotional skills, and support children with challenging behavior (also known as stress behavior). Pyramid Model Coaches help caregivers and professionals to embed these practices through the use of practice-based coaching. Coaching can also focus on program or system-wide practices to promote a systemic effort to use Pyramid Model evidence-based practices, organizational structure, and program climate to fidelity.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation is an equity-focused, collaborative service that partners qualified infant and early childhood mental health professionals with adults who have caregiving responsibility for children. These caregiving adults could include parents, early care and education providers, home visitors, and other supportive adults. The provision of service could include any combination of the following activities: classroom observation, classroom staff support, guidance for administrators, child observation, professional formation and development, provision of reflective practice, crisis-based therapeutic intervention, resource sharing and referrals, and supportive partnerships with families who provide care for the child. The CAECMH provides IECMH Consultation to Head Start/Early Head Start programs and other community agencies throughout the state.

LENA Grow

The CAECMH is pursuing partnership with LENA (Language ENvironment Analysis), a national nonprofit on a mission to transform children's futures through early talk technology and data-driven programs, to help implement the evidence-informed professional development program for early childhood educators called LENA Grow. Through coaching and consultation focused on early language/literacy and social-emotional development, LENA Grow has demonstrated high efficacy at making improvements in language, literacy and social-emotional outcomes in short 5-week cycles. Prior results from LENA Grow demonstrate that children in isolation at the start of the program experienced a significant 34% increase in conversational turns, those in the lowest talk environments saw a 56% increase, and nearly all participating teachers reported greater confidence in their instruction and higher job satisfaction.

Reflective Practice and Consultation

Reflective Practice Groups: Conversations for Comfort, Calm, and Connection (3C's) and Reflect and Restore Groups

Reflective Practice Groups are typically short-term (6 session), closed groups that promote reflectivity as a professional skill. Conversations for Comfort, Calm, and Connection (known as 3C's groups) are facilitated groups made up of multidisciplinary professionals from around the state to gather for reflective conversations meant to bring about comfort, calm, and/or connection. Reflect and Restore Groups are facilitated groups of professionals who work within the same organization to support conversations aimed at fostering reflection and allowing for self-care and restoration.

Reflective Consultation

Reflective Consultation is a collaborative, relationship-based practice that helps multidisciplinary professionals reflect on their work with young children and families so as to provide equitable and quality services. Reflective Consultation can be provided individually or in a group format. Reflective Consultation has been demonstrated to improve self-awareness in professionals, reduce professional stress, decrease burnout, improve cultural humility and equitable practice, and enhance the quality of service.

Reflective Leadership and Reflective Organization Support

Reflective leadership involves self-awareness, reflection, and continuous learning and growth to make better decisions, enhance leadership skills, and improve team performance. Reflective organizations encourage and support their personnel to reflect on their work and the organization as a whole. Reflective practice can help organizations improve, adapt to change, and identify areas for growth. Reflective Leadership and/or Reflective Organization groups review and reflect upon personal and organizational aspects of leadership and collaborate on action planning to enhance their personal and collective leadership skills within the organization.

SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATON

The Professional Formation Center for the Early Relational Health Workforce

The Professional Formation Center for the Early Relational Health Workforce at the Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health at Montclair State University (PFC) is the first of its kind in the nation, state-wide system of access to professional formation, coaching, and consultation in early relational and developmental health, combined with systems coordination aimed at centralizing early relational health across all prenatal through Kindergarten serving systems in New Jersey. All services of the PFC are also offered in Spanish.

Supported by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, the PFC serves as a resource for New Jersey's early childhood system and diverse infant and early childhood workforce to better work towards the promotion and enhancement of early relational and developmental health for expectant families and families of young children. The PFC is the operationalization of two beliefs: 1) early relational health is the core practice of the early childhood educational and family support services; and 2) early relational health is the common ground shared by all early childhood educational and family support services in New Jersey. The PFC envisions an effective, efficient, and empathic workforce, competent in relational and emotional developmental knowledge, skills, and reflective practice, and an equitable, unified system that promotes the early relational and emotional health necessary for optimal learning and school readiness for all children in New Jersey.

Under the auspices of the PFC, CAECMH personnel participate in local, state, and national workgroups, committees and Boards. A selection of these include the State Interagency Coordinating Council for New Jersey Early Intervention; The Governor's Council for Young Children, The Task Force for Child Abuse and Neglect, the Advocates for Children of New Jersey Unlocking Potential Leadership Committee; the New Jersey Association for Infant Mental Health; the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health; the New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition; the Division of Early Childhood, and many more.

The Pyramid Model Partnership: The State Leadership Team of New Jersey

The CAECMH is funded by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development to serve as the organizing entity of the New Jersey Pyramid Model State Leadership Team. Known as The Pyramid Model Partnership, the Pyramid Model State Leadership Team is a multi-disciplinary, cross-sector team of engaged stakeholders who prioritize equity while collaborating across systems, departments, and initiatives to coordinate and leverage the statewide implementation of the practices of the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children, so as to promote evidence-based relational, emotional, and social development in the infant/early childhood community in New Jersey. The New Jersey Pyramid Model State Leadership Team uses data-based decision making to promote equity, inclusion, and trauma-informed consciousness and practices throughout the infant/early childhood community; determine the effectiveness of the Pyramid Model in supporting the development of multi-disciplinary, high quality infant and early childhood practices and programs; oversee professional development activities, including training, coaching and reflective practice; grow awareness for and implementation of the Pyramid Model framework for families and professionals

STUDENT FORMATION

Graduate Coursework within the College for Education and Engaged Learning at Montclair State University

Conceptual Foundations of Autism Spectrum Disorders: Bio-Psych-Social Perspectives (ECSE 580). This course introduces students to the core features and core developmental profile of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Students examine the nature of human attachment and the interpersonal nature of human development and neurobiology. They review historical and contemporary perspectives on the origins and interventions for ASD, including a comparative analysis of the models of human development underlying major educational and therapeutic approaches. Students explore the central role of affect in organizing development along multiple lines and the affective and relational precursors of communication. Using a bio-psycho-social perspective, they examine the field of sensory processing disorders (SPD), regulatory disorders and language development, so they are informed about the critical importance of developing a child's unique profile. Students also examine the socio-cultural context of autism, and understand the role of educators as change agents.

Fellowships in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and Early Relational Health

The *10-month Intensive Fellowship in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and Early Relational Health* is a 120-hour cohort model continuing education program in infant and early childhood mental health and early relational health that offers multidisciplinary professionals the opportunity to examine the optimal physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of infants, toddlers and young children within the relational context of the family. The *Advanced Fellowship (Year 2)* is a 60-hour program designed for multidisciplinary professionals to learn advanced topics in infancy and early childhood development, emotional and relational health, assessment and intervention strategies, and systems working to support infants, children, and families in the first years of life. The *Applied Fellowship (Year 3)* is a 30-hour program meant to apply the lessons learned in the previous two Fellowships into leadership and organizational practice.

Internships, Field Work, Student Worker positions, and Graduate Assistantships

The CAECMH provides opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to experience the fields of early relational health, infant and early childhood mental health, inclusive practices and maternal-infant health in real time by participating in internships, field work experiences, student worker positions, and Graduate Assistantships throughout our organization.

Appendix C: References

[1] Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). Parents Under Pressure: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Mental Health & Well-Being of Parents [Internet]. Washington (DC): US Department of Health and Human Services (US); 2024. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK606667/

[2] Hogan, V. K., Lee, E., Asare, L. A., Banks, B., Benitez Delgado, L. E., Bingham, D., Brooks, P. E, Culhane, J., Lallo, M., Nieves, E., Rowley, D. L., Karimi Taleghani, P. H., Whitaker, S., Williams, T. D. & Madden-Wilson, J. The Nurture NJ 2021 Strategic Plan. The State of New Jersey, Trenton, NJ. 2021. Available from: https:// nurturenj.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210120-Nurture-NJ-Strategic-Plan.pdf

[3] Gilliam, W.S. (2005). Prekindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Systems. Available from: https://www.fcd-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ExpulsionCompleteReport.pdf

[4] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, 45th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2023, Washington, D.C. 2024. Available from: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/2023-individuals-with-disabilities-education-act-annual-report-to-congress/