

HOSTED BY



Minnesota
North College
A Member of Minnesota State

FRIDAY 02.20.26
@ MESABI VIRGINIA

1001 W Chestnut St Virginia, MN

8:30AM-2:00PM*

REGISTRATION
IS FREE!

GROW NORTH EARLY CHILDHOOD 2026 CONFERENCE

MOVE
GROOVE
BLOOM!

Join us for an energizing early childhood conference highlighting the power of music, connection, and belonging in early learning. Designed for early childhood professionals, childcare providers, and students exploring the field, this event features dynamic breakout sessions on responsive caregiving, creativity, inclusive environments, and whole-child development.

Experience engaging, research-based workshops with practical strategies to support young children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth. Don't miss this opportunity to learn, connect, and be inspired!

THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE IS FUNDED BY A GENEROUS GRANT FROM


DEPARTMENT OF IRON RANGE
RESOURCES & REHABILITATION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

 Minnesota
North College
Early Childhood



From Beats to Belonging: HipHop and the Power of Early Learning

Hip Hop reminds us that music, stories, and art can rise from any place and connect us all. Through the lens of Hip Hop Pedagogy, educators will discover how rhythm, creativity, and storytelling can inspire children to lift their voices, grow in confidence, and build a joyful sense of belonging and community.

Kelly Thelen is an Assistant Professor of Education at Southwest Minnesota State University and Coordinator of the Southwest Teacher Preparation Partnership (SWTPP) in Worthington, MN. With more than two decades of experience as an educator, leader, and advocate, she is dedicated to preparing and supporting teachers to serve all learners and diversify the teaching workforce. Her work centers on culturally sustaining pedagogy, arts-integrated learning, and Hip Hop education as pathways to agency, joy, and belonging in the classroom. A recognized speaker and community collaborator, Kelly designs creative professional learning that elevates teacher voice, honors student identity, and sparks imagination. Known for her innovative and inclusive approach, Kelly inspires educators to reimagine what's possible when culture, creativity, and compassion take center stage in early learning.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

KELLY THELEN



Conference Schedule:

8:30-9:00am	Welcome & Register for breakout sessions <i>Coffee & donuts provided by Super One Foods</i>
9:00-10:00am	Keynote Speaker: Kelly Theilen
10:00-11:00am	Breakout Session 1
11:00am-Noon	Lunch & Networking <i>Lunch is generously provided by Northland Foundation & catered by The Sugar Shack!</i>
Noon-1:00pm	Breakout Session 2
1:00-2:00pm*	Breakout Session 3

Free CPR/First Aid Certification or Recertification!

Sign up for this course when you register!

*CPR/FIRST AID COURSE WILL CONTINUE UNTIL 3:00PM

CLICK [HERE](#) OR SCAN THE QR CODE.

PLEASE NOTE THAT SPACE IS LIMITED AND PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. YOU WILL SIGN UP FOR BREAKOUT SESSIONS UPON ARRIVAL.



TO REGISTER

BREAKOUT SESSIONS:

CEUs Available!

SESSION	DESCRIPTION
CPR/First Aid <i>Pre-registration required.</i>	Obtain your certification in CPR & First Aid (Pediatric + Heart Saver). Space is limited to 18 participants. Note that this FREE course will be offered in lieu of all breakout sessions and will extend to 3:00pm.
Early Childhood Career Panel <i>Various Contributors</i>	Considering a career in early childhood or a shift in your career focus? Hear from professionals in a variety of early childhood settings during our career panel. Guests include a center owner/manager, licenser, parent educator, special education teacher and more! *Session 1 only; high school students are required to attend!*
Honoring Place Together: An Introduction to Land-Based Teaching <i>Claire Underwood</i>	How can we help young children learn about the land in ways that honor Indigenous peoples and knowledge? This introductory session explores respectful, nature-based practices and invites participants to reflect on their roles as educators on Indigenous land while contributing to a collaborative map of questions, insights, and next steps.
Using Visuals as Behavior Tools in the Classroom <i>Angie Miscovich</i>	Learn multiple ways to use visuals to support young children of all abilities in your classroom. This session will explore practical strategies for creating and implementing visual tools that help children understand routines, follow directions, and manage their behavior. Participants will leave with easy-to-use ideas that make learning and daily transitions smoother, while promoting independence and confidence for every child.
Conscious Discipline Highlights <i>Illegh Gorham</i>	Conscious Discipline isn't just a set of strategies; it is a comprehensive, trauma-informed approach that empowers both educators and children to foster safety, connection, and problem-solving skills, emphasizing the importance of self-regulation and emotional intelligence. Learn to create a safe space where children feel valued, understood, and capable through mindfulness & intentional practices.
Understanding & Teaching Young Children with ASD <i>Amy Fitzsimmons</i>	This session gives early childhood educators a clear, practical overview of early signs of autism and how they may show up in young children. Participants will learn ways to partner with families, connect them to supportive resources, and use developmentally appropriate strategies that help children with ASD thrive in inclusive settings.
The Magic of Music <i>Michelle Anderson</i>	Teach young children to sing in tune with vocal exploration, practicing the four voices. Rhythm and rhymes, circle dances, and incorporate music in literacy.
The Power of Connection & Mindfulness <i>Sarah Hanson</i>	Join us for playful practices as we consider the power of connection & mindfulness as we regulate ourselves and help support the little people in our lives. We will consider the brain, trauma informed strategies, breathing practices, and other calming strategies.
Process Art in Early Childhood <i>Susan Melgeorge</i>	Come ready to roll up your sleeves and try out simple, open-ended art activities that kids actually love. We'll play with different materials—many you already have in your classroom—to show how art can be about exploring, not making something "just right." This session is all about keeping things easy, creative, and fun while helping children learn through doing.
Stupendous Storytimes! <i>Jessica Dunn</i>	Make your reading time stupendous! Hear tips and tricks on how to engage one or two children in "lap-sit" stories and a larger group for a more formal storytime (including how to choose the best books for each audience). Learn fingerplays and silly move around songs to get some wiggles out before settling in for a good book.
All Things Licensing <i>DCYF Staff</i>	Join the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Child Care Center Licensing and Family Child Care Units for a presentation on how to become a licensed center or family child care, as well as Special Family Child Care options and time for Questions and Answers. Session 2 only.



FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT REGISTRATION OR TO REGISTER BY PHONE:

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FOR GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

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The following vendors will be joining us (and maybe more)!

International Bear Center
AEOA Head Start
Soudan State Park
Paulucci Space Theater
Soroptomists
Northland Foundation
Paper Pie
Soudan State Park

T-shirt Bar from Doncha Kno
Arrowhead Library System
Children's First Finance
Child Care Aware
MN DCYF
Range Mental Health
St. Louis County Licensing
MN North College
Southwest State University

These sponsors have helped to make this conference possible:



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