

Children's Champion - Amy Blanchard



Amy consistently demonstrates leadership and finds innovative ways to grow early childhood programs within Jasper, Marion, and Poweshiek counties. Thanks to her strong budgeting skills, ECI JMP is often able to provide end-of-year, mini, and sometimes competitive grants to contract recipients. Amy regularly goes above and beyond for ECI JMP, including devoting considerable time outside her official hours – including evenings and weekends – to ensure the success of the local area. This commitment has made her extremely knowledgeable concerning the ins and outs of the ECI local program. Amy is well known in the ECI world, and that speaks volumes about her.

Influencer Award - Kelsey Andersen



Kelsey has been a passionate advocate for early childhood education throughout her 11-year career as the Director of Bluff's Little Thinkers Child Care and Preschool in Sergeant Bluff, Iowa. Kelsey regularly engages with legislators, representatives, and senators by highlighting the urgent needs around childcare funding, workforce retention, and access to high-quality programs. She also holds a powerful voice on social media, using it as an educational tool to raise public awareness and understanding of early childhood education in Iowa. Kelsey has continually built strong relationships with local and statewide childhood education professionals. She understands that collective advocacy is powerful, and she uses her network to create and share resources, ideas, and support to strengthen the system for all.

Emerging Leader - Heather Bruno



For over 18 years, Heather has been dedicated to supporting the Lab School's mission and the families it serves. For her many years here, she has gone above and beyond in every role – most notably by stepping in to support the interim director and maintaining leadership stability. Heather's proactive communication has allowed for high team morale and productivity, while also giving her the ability to anticipate challenges and address them before they become obstacles.

Heather is a trusted mentor and resource for her colleagues, and as the Parent Coordinator, she actively seeks family feedback and advocates for their needs. Her steadfast leadership has been vital to the Lab School's continued success during uncertain times.

Educator of the Year - Dawn Johnson



With over 30 years of experience, Dawn exemplifies the highest standards of excellence, innovation, and unwavering commitment to her preschoolers and profession. Even following a cancer diagnosis, she showed remarkable resilience, continuing to write lesson plans and connect with her preschoolers via Zoom throughout her recovery. In the classroom, Dawn is a champion of developmentally appropriate practice, creating a vibrant space where child-led inquiry thrives. Several of

her innovative projects have been featured in professional publications and books, and her STEM-focused work has gained statewide recognition, including being part of the only preschool group to present at the Iowa STEM Day at the Capitol. Dawn inspires colleagues, engages families, and changes the lives of the children she teaches.

Commitment to Young Children - Katie Dreyer



Katie has had a passion for high-quality learning experiences for children for years. Working as the Youth Services Librarian in Pella, she has provided interactive story time and has helped children select books on any topic they are interested in. Katie has especially brought the energy to Pella's first Week of the Young Child by helping find community supporters, a meeting space, and facilitating the event. For the 2024 event, she was excited to do it all again and worked on promo-

tions in partnership with the schools, city, and local radio station. She helped contact family-centered agencies to help facilitate the event and made arrangements to host it at the library. Through virtual and in-person story time, creating safe spaces to explore at the library, Book Bash events, and in so many other community events she contributes to, Katie makes young children feel seen and excited about learning. Katie goes above and beyond her job description to create positive early learning experiences and community partnerships for children and their families.