

# IGNITING CONNECTIONS SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

AUGUST 23, 2024





THE SYMPOSIUM IS PLANNED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR OTHER STARS:





## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INITIATIVES



The first Igniting Connections Symposium was launched in 2017 by the Alliance for Better Childcare Strategies (ABCs), a nonprofit organization committed to increasing the availability of quality child care in our region. With up to 200 annual attendees over three years, the event became an anticipated professional development day for early care and education professionals throughout the New River Valley.

In 2021, the Virginia Tech Early Childhood Education Initiatives (ECEI) assumed the Symposium's coordination using the foundation laid by ABCs. Underscoring Virginia Tech's commitment to accessible and high-quality professional development, the event remains free to attendees. **We aim to provide a space in which early childhood educators can access the knowledge, skills, and support they need to succeed in their roles as educators, as well as share experiences, gain new insights, be inspired, and feel valued as professionals.** Much like ABCs, we believe that by investing in the education and development of early childhood educators, we are investing in the future of the children, families, and communities of the New River Valley.

I am filled with immense gratitude for each of our planning team members and the organizations they represent. Their unwavering support, dedication and collaboration have been instrumental in bringing the Symposium to life. It is through a shared vision that we continue to deliver training that meets the needs of early care and education professionals in our region.

Thank you to educators and community members for your continued support of the Igniting Connections Symposium. I hope today is filled with growing awareness of best practices, connections to each other, and the many and varied resources of the NRV. You always reach for the stars, and I am thankful to be able to connect with you today as we re-ignite our passion for this work.

In appreciation of your time and talent,

**KIM THOMASON**

Early Childhood  
Education Initiatives  
Program Manager





# SCHEDULE



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7:15 AM - 8:15 AM: **Registration and Light Breakfast**

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8:15 AM - 9:15 AM: **Early Childhood Champions Award Ceremony** | Latham AB

The Annual Early Childhood Champions Awards is sponsored by the First Steps Initiative to recognize and celebrate amazing early educators, child development specialists, family service providers, librarians, leaders, advocates, and organizations who have positively impacted the lives of NRV's children. Join us to celebrate our champions and nominees!

**CDA COMPETENCY VI**

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9:15 AM - 9:30 AM: **Transition - Energizer by Wolf Trap** | Latham AB

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9:30 AM - 10:30 AM: **Workshops**

- **The Building Blocks of Communication | Drillfield**

**Kathleen Wright, TTAC at Virginia Tech**

Developing language and communication skills is critical for young children's overall school success as they relate to their ability to interact with others and their social-emotional development. Creating a language-rich environment provides children with opportunities to become active participants in activities and engage in communicative interactions with others. This session provides ideas for increasing teacher-child interactions with a focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Core Vocabulary, and communication development in mind.

**CDA COMPETENCY II**

- **Sing and Move! Engaging Young Children with Music | Duck Pond**

**Jennifer McDonel, Radford University**

We will learn about how young children learn music and make connections between music and other learning domains. Next we will engage in simple, developmentally appropriate music activities that can be easily incorporated in early childhood classrooms. Finally, we will discuss ways to incorporate music throughout the day in simple ways that require very little extra time and effort but create a learning environment rich in music that supports music learning and other learning domains.

**CDA COMPETENCY II**

- **The 3 A's of Effective ECE: Affordability, Accessibility, and Advocacy | Cascades B**

**Phillip Norman, Child Care Aware of Virginia**

Affordability, accessibility, and advocacy are three essential components underlying effective early childhood education programs. This workshop will introduce these components, their current state in Virginia, and opportunities available for providers to expand their programs. Interactive sessions will allow providers to share their experiences in affordability, accessibility, and advocacy and highlight the importance of networking together for the greater good of early childhood education.

**CDA COMPETENCY IV, V, VI**

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# SCHEDULE



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10:30 AM - 10:45 AM: **Transition**

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10:45 AM - 11:45 AM: **Workshops**

- **Supporting Emotional Development and Well-Being in Toddlers and Preschoolers | Drillfield Rosanna Breaux, Child Study Center at Virginia Tech**

This workshop will provide an overview of emotional development during toddlerhood and the preschool years. As part of this overview, information on screeners that can be used to assess when milestones in emotion awareness and regulation are not met will be discussed. The majority of this workshop will focus on offering and practicing coping strategies and sharing resources that can be used in the classroom to support children's emotional wellbeing during these developmental periods.

**CDA COMPETENCY III**

- **Compassion Fatigue and Emotional Intelligence: How to Better Understand and Help Ourselves | Duck Pond**

**Corey Herd Cassidy, Radford University, and Patricia Eitemiller, Early Childhood Division, City of Alexandria**

Emotional intelligence plays a central role in overall wellness of those most likely to experience compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is an underestimated occupational hazard for those who provide care-based services and may result in severe consequences, including the inability to engage in productive relationships, increased anxiety, reduced empathy, and a diminished sense of personal safety. In this session, we will reflect and discuss strategies to lessen the impact of compassion fatigue by strengthening our emotional intelligence.

**CDA COMPETENCY VI**

- **Staff Appreciation: It's the Little Things | Cascades B Helen Wallace, Giles Health and Family Center**

Educator and directors will be able to recognize the importance of showing employees appreciation and gratitude for effort and jobs well done. This not only improves morale, work ethic, and effort invested, but potentially staff retention.

**CDA COMPETENCY V AND VI**

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# SCHEDULE



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11:45 AM - 12:30 AM: **Lunch** | Latham AB

Community Resource Exhibitors

## **CDA COMPETENCY VI**

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12:30 PM - 12:45 PM: **Transition - Energizer by Wolf Trap** | Latham AB

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12:45 PM - 1:45 PM: **Panel - Supporting Children's Social-Emotional Learning** | Latham AB

### **Moderator:**

- **Bryna Shindell, Wolf Trap**

### **Panelists:**

- **Jes Bookout, Education Consultant**
- **Valerie Branch, Wolf Trap**
- **Andi Golusky, NRV CARES**
- **Marjorie Quesenberry, Rainbow Riders Childcare Center**

Social emotional learning is a crucial aspect of children's development. This panel will explore strategies and resources for supporting children's social and emotional learning. Panelists will share useful community resources, performing arts strategies, and ways to support children experiencing trauma.

## **CDA COMPETENCY III**

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1:45 PM - 2:00 PM: **Transition - Energizer by Wolf Trap** | Latham AB

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2:00 PM - 3:30 PM: **CDCLR Tour** | 140 Wallace Hall (0416), 295 West Campus Drive, Blacksburg

The tour will provide opportunities for collaborating and sharing ideas and inspirations focused on meaningful play-based learning within indoor and outdoor classrooms. We look forward to learning from one another and discovering new ways to foster developmental domains and integrate academic content through child led approaches to learning.

## **CDA COMPETENCY I AND V**

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1:45 PM - 2:00 PM: **Closing and Certificates** | VT CDCLR

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# OUR SPEAKERS



**ROSANNA BREAUX**

Child Study Center,  
Virginia Tech

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Rosanna Breaux, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist, Director of the Child Study Center at Virginia Tech, and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Virginia Tech. Dr. Breaux's research focuses on the social-emotional and academic functioning of children and adolescents. She is also interested in understanding the role parents play in shaping children and adolescent's social-emotional development, with a focus on emotion regulation. Dr. Breaux received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Carnegie Mellon and her Master's and Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She has provided therapy and assessment services to children, adolescents, and families for the past 12 years, and is the mother to toddler twins.



**PATRICIA EITEMILLER**

Early Childhood Division,  
City of Alexandria, Virginia

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Patricia “Patty” Eitemiller is an Early Childhood Professional and Trainer for the City of Alexandria’s Early Childhood Division. She designs, develops, and facilitates professional development activities and trainings for the various programs and professionals within the City of Alexandria that serve and support children birth to age five. Prior to her current position, she served as a developmental therapist for the Infant and Toddler Connection of Alexandria. She is a certified trainer of the Zero to Three “The Growing Brain” curriculum, the Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3 & ASQ:SE-2), the Children’s Trust Alliance Protective Factors, the STREAMin3 curriculum, and the Mind in the Making. She is passionate about early intervention, the collaboration amongst the many colleagues with whom she has worked over the years, and learning the stories about the families and children with whom she has connected.

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# OUR SPEAKERS



**COREY HERD CASSIDY**

Department of  
Communication Sciences  
and Disorders,  
Radford University

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Corey Herd Cassidy is a Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Radford University. She also holds a secondary appointment as Professor in the Department of Health Systems and Implementation Science at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. Corey is a licensed speech-language pathologist who has provided services to young children and their families for more than 25 years in multiple states across the country. Her teaching and scholarship focus on addressing the needs of children between birth-five, although early intervention is her passion. She loves collaborating with and learning from colleagues across disciplines and educating students to do the same.



**JENNIFER MCDONEL**

Music Education, Radford  
University

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Dr. Jennifer S. McDonel is Director of Music Education at Radford University, where she teaches early childhood and elementary music education courses and was the 2022 recipient of the Donald N. Dedmon Distinguished Teaching Professor award. She has spent over three decades teaching music and mentoring students from birth to adulthood. She co-developed the Harmony & Heart™ music program for Primrose Schools, a national early education and care franchise. Her early childhood music compositions and activities are featured in music teaching resources as well as in the Zero-To-Three.org “Problem Solvers” early childhood mathematics curriculum. Her album from that project, Little Beats: Counting, Shapes, and Sets is available on all streaming services and received Grammy award consideration.

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# OUR SPEAKERS



**PHILLIP NORMAN**

Child Care Aware of  
Virginia

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Phillip Norman currently serves as the Western Regional Manager for Child Care Aware of Virginia. He coordinates professional development opportunities and technical assistance for regional providers and advocates for child care expansion through outreach and workforce development. Phillip earned his master's degree from Liberty University and Ph.D. in Leadership Studies from Concordia University Chicago. He served a variety of roles in out-of-school programs for over 10 years, primarily in the New River Valley. Phillip is passionate about building relationships with child care leaders to support and expand child care opportunities in Virginia.



**HELEN WALLACE**

Giles Health and  
Family Center

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Helen Wallace is the Executive Director for Giles Health and Family Center. She has worked to develop teachers and staff for over 20 years through various mentoring, motivational and coaching methods. She is Co-Owner of The Training Resource, which provides CPR/First Aid/AED classes and other leadership and staff development topics. She has training in Mental Health First Aid, staff supervision, hiring, coaching and employee training, well-being and stress reduction. Helen holds a Master of Science degree in Education from Virginia Tech. She is passionate about helping her community and is a previous President of the Giles Animal Rescue.



**KATHLEEN WRIGHT**

T/TAC, Virginia Tech

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Kathleen Wright is Coordinator of Early Childhood Special Education at the Training and Technical Assistance Center (T/TAC) at Virginia Tech. Prior to joining T/TAC Kathleen worked as a speech language pathologist in the Virginia public schools for over 25 years. She has a passion for working with teams to develop high quality inclusive learning environments that support the language, early literacy, and social emotional development of young children. Kathleen is an ASHA certified Speech-Language Pathologist. She received a M.S. in Communication Sciences and Disorders, a M.S. in Educational Leadership and earned a Certificate in Autism Studies from Radford University.

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# FEATURING WOLF TRAP

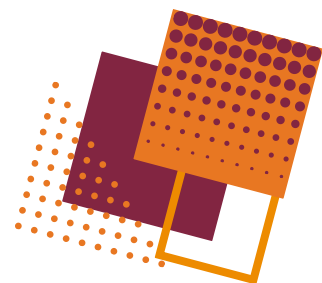
**WOLF TRAP** | INSTITUTE FOR  
EARLY LEARNING  
THROUGH THE ARTS

*Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts is a program of Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts.*

Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts leverages the power of the performing arts to provide early childhood educators with high-quality professional development to create joyful, active learning experiences for young children.

Through professional teaching artists, Wolf Trap Institute delivers customized, in-class professional development to early childhood educators using proven, arts-based strategies that reach across curricula and support development in key areas like language, literacy, math, science, and social-emotional skills. Wolf Trap Institute works through a network of affiliate organizations and partners that together impact nearly 100,000 children, educators, and families each year.

Wolf Trap Institute is the flagship education program of Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that produces and presents a full range of performance and education programs in the Greater Washington, D.C., area and nationally.





# OUR PANELISTS



**JES BOOKOUT**

Education Consultant

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Jes Bookout is an Early Education and Family Consultant in the Roanoke Valley. She has served as a preschool teacher in a variety of programs including family day homes, center-based, and Head Start. She is a community trainer with the Roanoke Valley Trauma Informed Community Network. Jes received her bachelor's degree from Portland State University and is currently completing her master's degree in Family and Community Services through Oklahoma State University. Jes is passionate about advocating for children through community engagement with families and work within the field of early childhood education.



**VALERIE BRANCH**

Wolf Trap

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Valerie Branch became a Wolf Trap artist in 2014 and provides residencies in early childhood classrooms. She has experience touring as a performing and teaching artist both nationally and internationally and has taught as an independent artist and with different organizations such as WPAS, and is a teaching artist with Young Audiences of Maryland. As a teaching artist, she brought dance into schools in South Africa and St. George's, Grenada and received an invitation from the Danish Embassy to participate in a Cultural Arts Program Exchange Visit to Denmark, and graduated magna cum laude from the University of Maryland College Park with a BA in Dance. Valerie is the founder and artistic director of VB Dance Ensemble, a professional contemporary company that brings social and cultural awareness through the power of dance.



**ANDI GOLUSKY**

NRV CARES

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Andi Golusky, LCSW, has been the Executive Director of NRV CARES for over five years. She is the chair of the NRV Resiliency Network, our area's trauma informed community network. Prior, Andi worked at NRVCs for over ten years in child and family mental and behavioral health services. A proud VT graduate, Andi fell in love with the New River Valley and has called it home since 2006. Also, a happy Highlander, she graduated from RU with a master's degree in social work and later attained her license in clinical social work. She has been part-time adjunct faculty in the Master of Social Work program at Radford University since 2018.

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# OUR PANELISTS



**MARJORIE  
QUESENBERRY**

Rainbow Riders  
Childcare Center

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Marjorie Quesenberry has been the Director at Rainbow Riders Childcare Center's Early Head Start Partnership Program for more than two years. She has been with Rainbow Riders for fifteen years in various classrooms with children ranging in age from infants to preschoolers. She received two associate degrees from New River Community College including an Associate of Applied Science in Human Services and an Early Childhood Development Specialization. Marjorie also earned child development certificates in Early Child Development and Child Development - Infant and Toddler. Over the years, she shared her knowledge as a presenter at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children (VaAEYC) Conferences. Marjorie's passion for quality early childhood education has flourished during her career at Rainbow Riders. She feels that every child deserves equal access to quality education and is grateful to partner with Early Head Start to deliver quality and affordable care within the Montgomery County Community.



**BRYNA SHINDELL**

Wolf Trap

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Bryna Shindell is the Assistant Director, Program Services for Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts. In her role she oversees Wolf Trap Institute program service implementation in the D.C. area, nationally, and internationally, including all Wolf Trap Institute affiliates. Ms. Shindell onboards new Wolf Trap Institute Affiliates through building relationships with arts organizations and school partners around the country. She manages the implementation of Wolf Trap Institute symposia in Virginia and nationally, which discuss the value of arts integration in early learning with local community members. Prior to joining Wolf Trap in 2010, Ms. Shindell worked as a freelance stagehand for Round House Theatre. She holds a BA in Theatre from Brandeis University and a certificate in Project Management from Georgetown University.

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# VTCDCLR TOUR

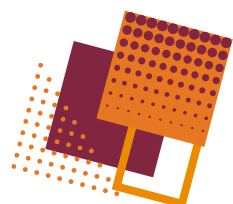


The Virginia Tech Child Development Center for Learning and Research (VTCDCLR) is a full-time, full-year program serving approximately 48 children from the New River Valley. The mission of the VTCDCLR is to:

- Provide high-quality early care and learning to young children during the most critical years of their brain development.
- Provide onsite mentorship and experiential learning to aspiring early childhood education professionals.
- Advocate for child directed, play-based and social-constructivist learning.

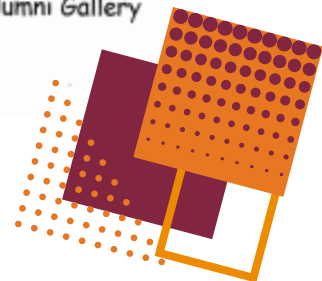
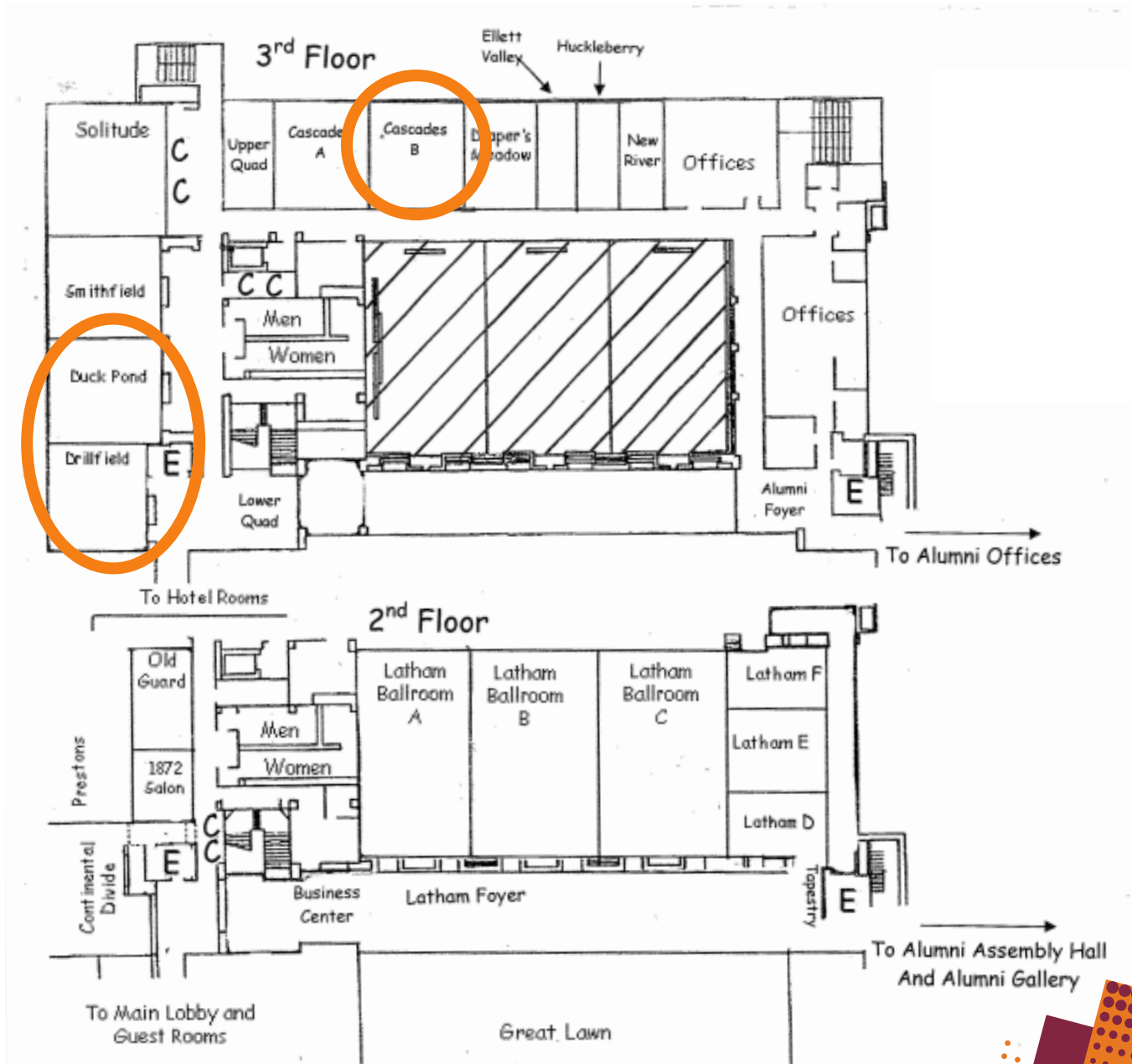
**Ensuring a healthy, safe and respectful early learning environment is a priority while also striving to foster autonomy, empathy, self-regulation, conflict resolution and critical thinking skills.** Our approach empowers children to co-construct their knowledge collaboratively, create their own learning objectives, connect what is known and unknown while experiencing joy and success through play.

**The CDCLR is located at 140 Wallace Hall (0416), 295 West Campus Drive, Blacksburg, a 6 minute drive (parking available) or a 16 minute walk through the Virginia Tech campus.**



# BREAKOUT ROOMS MAP

## SECOND FLOOR



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Join us at the **VCOM Coffee Chat with Early Childhood Educators**. Led by VCOM physicians, these 30-minute chats provide information and a space to discuss medical and health situations that are encountered regularly when working with infants, toddlers, and children. Pre-registration is now open!



The **NRV Director's Network Meetings** are monthly gatherings of directors across the NRV to share experiences, learn, and support each other. If you are interested in attending, send an email to Kim Thomason to kimbe74@vt.edu.

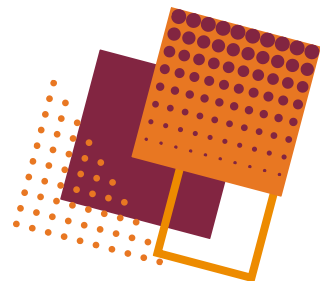


No matter where you are in your career, there are resources to support your education in southwest Virginia.

Find information about scholarships and more by scanning the QR code.

## COMING FALL 2025

PLEASE STAY TUNED FOR DETAILS ABOUT THE 8TH ANNUAL  
IGNITING CONNECTIONS SYMPOSIUM.  
WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEENG YOU THERE!



# A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR RESOURCE TABLE SPONSORS



Child Care Aware of VA

Community Foundation of the NRV First Steps

EO - Endless Opportunity

New River Community College

New River Creative Reuse Center

NRV Cares

NRV Chapter of Virginia Association for

Education of Young Children

Radford University

Virginia Tech Training and Technical Assistance

Center

