



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## MINNESOTA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS RECOGNIZE

### LARISSA KIEL

#### The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) presents the Emerging Leader Award

St. Cloud, Minn., April 10, 2025 – **Larissa Kiel was honored with a Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education 2025 Emerging Leader Award on April 10, 2025.** The award identifies rising leaders employed under five years in the fields of parent education, Early Childhood Family Education and/or early childhood programming in public schools in Minnesota. Ms. Kiel is a rising leader in the field of early childhood education, serving as a licensed Early Childhood teacher in St. Paul Public Schools ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education).

Ms. Kiel, a former theatre artist, became interested in early childhood education when she began to have children especially after she moved to Minnesota and a friend recommended that she join ECFE. To quote Ms. Kiel, "I was blown away by ECFE. It changed my life as a parent, helped me to truly support my children's growth and gave me community."

She began subbing as an ECFE assistant, and after that temporary job turned into a job she couldn't seem to leave, she realized that ECFE is what she wanted to devote her life's work to. She got her Early Childhood license and three years ago became an Early Childhood teacher in ECFE in St. Paul Public Schools.

Ms. Kiel was instrumental in initiating and fostering a Grow Our Own school garden program. It began with a few window boxes near her classroom's exterior door which turned into a fully realized community and educational garden. The project's scope was enhanced when it earned a substantial contribution from the Ecolab Teacher Grant Program, and more trees are to be planted through work with the nonprofit Tree Trust.

Ms. Kiel sees each child as an individual and strives to always center on the needs of children and families. She has become a trusted colleague amongst Early Childhood Special Education staff. Ms. Kiel is continuing her professional growth by pursuing her M.A. focusing on trauma-informed practices. She shares her resources with peers thus advancing practice across the program.

Sometimes we wonder what impact we are having through our work. At the Minnesota State Fair this last year, there was a place where families could write a postcard to a teacher telling them the impact that they have had on their lives. Ms. Kiel received one of these postcards from a parent which said, "You helped us help our child to grow and learn. I was lost and confused as a parent and you made me feel comfort."

We are so pleased that she is part of our future. Ms. Kiel was recognized at the MNAFEE Annual Conference in St. Cloud on April 10, 2025.

**About MNAFEE:** The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) is a non-profit association promoting parent education, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and early childhood programming in public schools.

**About the Emerging Leader Award:** This Award identifies rising leaders employed under five years in the fields of parent education, Early Childhood Family Education and/or early childhood programming in public schools in Minnesota. It recognizes and cultivates the talent of champions who have the potential to influence the field of early learning for years to come. The selected honoree will have demonstrated contributions that have started to influence beyond individual programs to organizations and communities, a proven passion for developing themselves and others, active engagement in efforts to elevate the early childhood field, and demonstrated persistence in their work to grow as leaders.

**Nominees for the Emerging Leader Award must:**

- Demonstrate contributions that have started to influence the lives of young children, parents, and/or families or other professionals beyond individual programs to organizations and communities
- Have a proven passion for developing themselves and others
- Show active engagement in efforts to elevate the the fields of parent education, Early Childhood Family Education and/or early childhood programming in public schools
- Demonstrate persistence in their work to grow as leader
- Have been employed for under five years in the field of parent education, Early Childhood Family Education and/or early childhood programming in public schools in Minnesota