Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children

2955 N Meridian Street, Suite 120
Indianapolis, IN 46208
t (855) 484-2392 / o (317) 356-6884
f (317) 259-9489 / inaeyc.org

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Indiana AEYC
Hanan Osman, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer
855.484.2392
hosman@inaeyc.org

RELEASE DATE:
May 29, 2026

2026 INDIANA EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AWARDS

INDIANAPOLIS, IN – The Indiana Early Childhood Education Awards recognize the best in our profession. Indiana AEYC is proud to announce the following 2026 winners:

HOOSIER EDUCATOR AWARD (PRESCHOOL AND EARLY ELEMENTARY) WINNER

Austin Scales
Lead Teacher
United Day Care Center of Delaware County, Inc.

Austin Scales exemplifies the very best of early childhood education through his daily practice, professional leadership, and unwavering advocacy for young children, families, and educators. Austin creates a classroom environment rooted in respect, curiosity, and meaningful relationships as well as strong partnerships with families. He fosters open, respectful communication and builds authentic relationships that honor each child's home culture and experiences. Austin is a TEACH Early Childhood® Indiana scholarship recipient and is completing his master's degree in early childhood education.

HOOSIER EDUCATOR AWARD (UNIVERSITY OR HIGHER EDUCATION) WINNER

Penny Zellers,
Early Childhood Education Program Chair
Ivy Tech Community College-Kokomo

Penny Zellers is a dedicated leader and enthusiastic advocate for early childhood education. Through her role as Department Chair, she consistently supports students in achieving their educational and professional goals. She

works closely with community partners and scholarship programs to remove barriers and create pathways for educators to advance their degrees and strengthen their practice. Her leadership, commitment to student success, and deep dedication to the early childhood workforce have made a meaningful impact on educators and the communities they serve.

LEGISLATIVE AWARD WINNER

Liz Richards
Ole Miss Preschool Director
Westview Elementary, Mississinewa Community Schools

Liz Richards is a powerful and inspiring voice for young children, families, and educators. Her commitment to early childhood education is deep and transformative. Through her involvement in statewide initiatives, such as the INAEYC Advocacy & Leadership Academy and Early Childhood Education Day at the Statehouse, Liz has helped drive positive, lasting changes. She actively engages with research, policy, and practice, ensuring that the profession continues to grow stronger and more unified. Liz does not just talk about advocacy; she inspires others to step into it with confidence and purpose.

INDUSTRY/CORPORATE AWARD WINNER

Kristin Lopshire
Regional Manager – Indiana
Lakeshore Learning Materials

Kristin Lopshire, this year's Industry and Corporate Award Winner, has become a familiar, energizing presence at conferences and events around the state. She represents Lakeshore Learning Materials, a company with a mission to help all students experience the joy of learning and supporting learners from birth through higher education with materials and products designed by educators.

Kristen's dedication to equipping and uplifting educators has made her a beloved partner in the early learning community and a standout leader in the field.

INAEYC HOOSIER EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADER AWARD WINNER

Terri Kosik,
Director
Ready to Grow St. Joe Early Childhood Coalition

For more than fifty years, Terri has been an unwavering advocate for young children, families, and the early childhood professionals who serve them. Her career has been defined by a deep commitment to strengthening early childhood education and ensuring both children and educators have the support they need to thrive. Terri remains committed to the field, even in retirement, and now leads Ready to Grow St. Joe where she continues to make an extraordinary impact on the early childhood community in St. Joseph County and beyond. Terri embodies the CALL of leadership in every sense-through her commitment, advocacy, dedication to learning, and ability to lead and inspire others.

Through her vision, compassion, and decades of service, Terri has created lasting change that extends far beyond any single program or role. Her leadership has inspired countless educators, strengthened communities, and increased opportunities for young children and their families.

###