

Fulfilling the Public Mission of Arts Schools Through Early Childhood Music: Michigan State University Community Music School Collaborations in Detroit

This session will explore the transformative impact of music education for young children when thoughtfully integrated into community-centered early childhood initiatives. Community Music School Detroit's (CMS Detroit) Early Childhood programs represent a powerful intersection of arts education, family support, and neighborhood-based engagement designed to foster high-quality, sequential, developmentally appropriate music play classes for children ages 0–7.

CMS Detroit's early childhood offerings designed by Dr. Karen Salvador, director of the Michigan State University Early Childhood Music Play Laboratory, which envisions children and families thriving in and through music making by providing developmentally appropriate, sequential, and culturally responsive music play classes that reduce barriers to access and support children across musical, physical/sensory, social/emotional, cognitive, and communication domains.

CMS Detroit partners with Detroit Public Schools Community District, Head Start and GSRP providers, childcare centers, and community organizations—including shelters such as Alternatives for Girls—to deliver early childhood music classes. To illustrate the depth and effectiveness of these partnerships, this session focuses on CMS Detroit's collaboration with Brilliant Detroit, a network of neighborhood-based hubs that support children and families through integrated education, health, family support, and community-building initiatives. By offering free, accessible programming directly within the neighborhoods where families live, these hubs reduce barriers to participation and strengthen community engagement. This work is made possible through generous support from the Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation, whose investment enables CMS Detroit to sustain high-quality arts learning in community settings at no cost to Families.

This collaboration with Brilliant Detroit enables CMS Detroit to offer early childhood music classes that create joyful, inclusive spaces where young learners and caregivers come together through rhythm, movement, singing, and play. This work reflects research-informed practice that recognizes young children's innate musicality and recognizes how music play fosters engagement, communication, and well-being for both children and caregivers.

The MSU Early Childhood Music Play Laboratory model also prepares future educators to deliver these high-quality experiences and conducts research on music learning and its developmental benefits. Their emphasis on culturally sustaining and ability-responsive music environments underscores the importance of inclusivity.

This session will:

- Briefly outline the CMS Early Childhood ecosystem, which includes providing

music classes across the community, teacher education, and research guided by the Early Childhood Music Play Laboratory's mission to increase family well-being and child development across multiple domains.

- Highlight community-responsive curriculum design reflecting Detroit's cultural diversity and strengths. CMS Detroit emphasizes meeting children where they are and following their interests through musical play interactions such as singing, chanting, and moving.
- Address the critical role of sustained philanthropic support, emphasizing how ongoing funding is essential to maintaining program consistency, instructor continuity, and long-term family engagement. CMS Detroit's partnerships with local organizations which include Brilliant Detroit, Detroit Public Schools Community District, Alternatives for Girls and several others, demonstrate how collaborative investments expand access and deepen impact.
- Discuss challenges and lessons learned in sustaining arts programming within non-traditional educational spaces.

Attendees will leave with actionable strategies for leveraging arts education partnerships to support holistic child development and neighborhood empowerment, demonstrating how arts leaders and administrators can expand their impact beyond traditional institutional settings and foster inclusive environments where children and families thrive through music.

Presented by:

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