

# Promoting social and emotional competence for Wisconsin's youngest children

## We know what works!

Early experiences lay the foundation for development, health, and well-being of our children. Enriching, responsive, educational settings provide infants and young children with necessary opportunities to learn about themselves and the world around them, gain fundamental social skills, develop early friendships and so much more. Yet, it is painfully clear that our babies, toddlers and preschoolers are often denied such experiences due to suspension and expulsion practices. What is worse and completely unacceptable is that there is a clear racial and gender bias in expulsion practices with Black boys expelled twice as often as a member of any other racial/ethnic group.

Wisconsin, like the rest of our nation, has been called by the United States Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to “[prevent, severely limit and work toward eventually eliminating the expulsion and suspension – and ensure the safety and well-being – of young children in early learning settings.](#)” Meeting this call will require collaborative, intentional, and strategic effort at the program and community level to employ effective solutions that provide adults with the support and tools they need.

Our Wisconsin Pyramid Model effort is an important solution to reducing and eliminating suspension and expulsion practices with proven success for our state and the nation. The Pyramid Model provides a framework for intentional implementation of practices that support social and emotional learning and address the distress that infants, toddlers and young children- and the adults who care about and for them-experience when there is challenging behavior. The primary reason young children are suspended and expelled from early care and education is the presence of challenging behavior. Limiting suspen-



sion and expulsion relies on increasing the capacity of adults, at the program and community level, to work to understand the meaning of a child’s behavior, to re-frame their thinking, and respond in ways that guide and support social and emotional learning.

Program-wide implementation of the Pyramid Model-intentional support for social and emotional competencies and the use of strategies to teach these skills - is work that has upheld as a solution for Wisconsin and others nationally and internationally. [In a 2016 Wisconsin study on the effectiveness of program-wide implementation](#), young children in classrooms in program wide implementation, young children in program wide implementation sites with challenging behavior in the Fall “were reported on average to no longer display challenging behaviors and to show expected social skills of four-year-old children at the conclusion of the school year.”

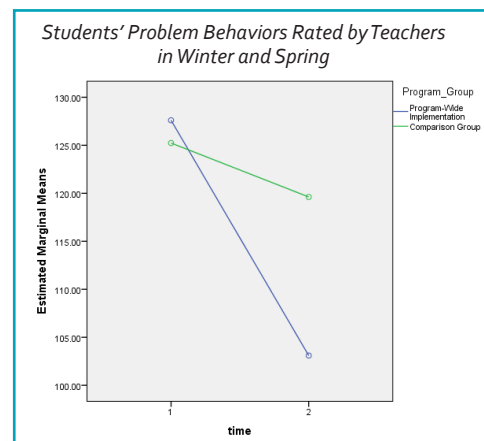


Figure 1 From the 2016 Wisconsin study on the effectiveness of program wide implementation.

There is a significant decrease in problem behaviors (blue line) within programs that implement the Pyramid Model with fidelity.

## Collective and collaborative implementation of the Pyramid Model requires an 'all hands on deck' approach

Team WI-AIMH holds hope that our statewide, collective Wisconsin Pyramid Model work will shine as a solution to elimination of the harsh discipline practices of suspension and expulsion of young children as the workforce is supported to promote social and emotional wellbeing of babies and young children.

State-wide implementation of the Pyramid Model requires commitment, collaboration, and resources. This implementation relies on solid infrastructure, state coordination, and regional support.

### Our PM Team at WI-AIMH: Connecting the dots at the regional level

In 2020, the 3 Regional Pyramid Model Leads reestablished connections with program-wide implementation sites, facilitated regional Community of Practice opportunities for trainers and served as a point of contact to provide information, support, coaching and community building during this challenging year.

*Jenny Durand*  
Regional Lead  
South



*Becky Buck*  
Regional Lead  
Northwest

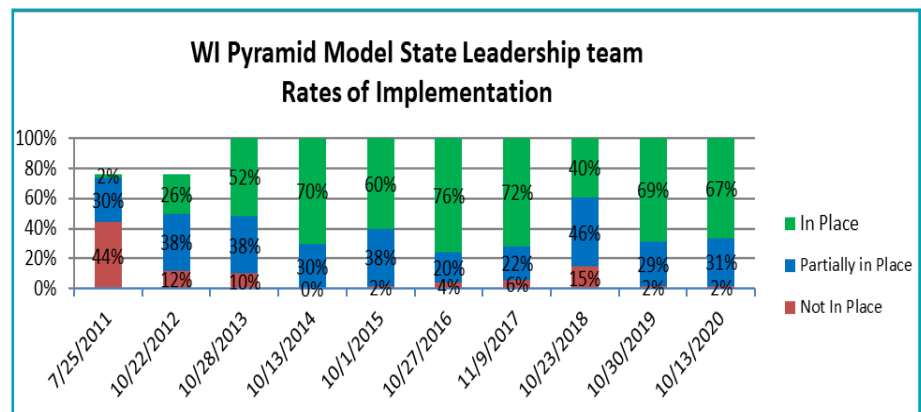


*Tina Ruckdashel*  
Regional Lead  
Northeast



### Our Cross-sector State Core Leadership Team: Creating and guiding Wisconsin's Pyramid Model infrastructure

Since 2001, the Core Team has used the State Benchmarks of Quality annually to assess growth of the Pyramid Model across Wisconsin. Data gathered from this annual self-assessment has guided continuous improvement and expansion of the Pyramid Model work. The uncertainty of COVID and increased intentional consideration of equity resulted in a small decrease on the 2020 State Benchmarks of Quality rating.



### Our State Advisory Team: Sharing advisement from early care and education leadership organizations

Our new Advisory Team used the national [Guide for Preventing the Use of Suspension and Expulsion and Promoting Equitable, Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Practice](#) to frame feedback on the degree of alignment of Wisconsin's Pyramid Model effort with national recommendations for state actions that increase inclusive opportunities, ensure equitable access to high quality early care and education

and the eliminate harsh and disproportionate discipline practices. Our Advisory Team acknowledged these Wisconsin Pyramid Model elements align with national recommendations:

- ▲ Pyramid Model representation in policy and quality improvement workgroups at the community, regional and state level.
- ▲ Development and dissemination of social and

emotional learning resources that meet the needs of providers, parents, and community partners.

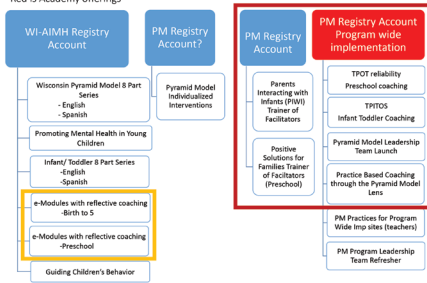
- ▲ Program-level policy guidance to address equitable access to high quality practices that ensure development of social and emotional competence.
- ▲ Use of data to highlight success and guide Pyramid Model implementation decisions at all levels.
- ▲ Multi-faceted support including training and coaching at the classroom and program level and professional development for Pyramid Model trainers and coaches.
- ▲ Promotion of family engagement as integral to program quality.

- ▲ Integration and alignment between Wisconsin’s Pyramid Model work and other quality improvement initiatives.



## Our Pyramid Model approved trainers: Providing high quality training for varying early care and education providers

Where does WI-AIMH report the training?  
Gold is practitioner training  
Red is Academy offerings

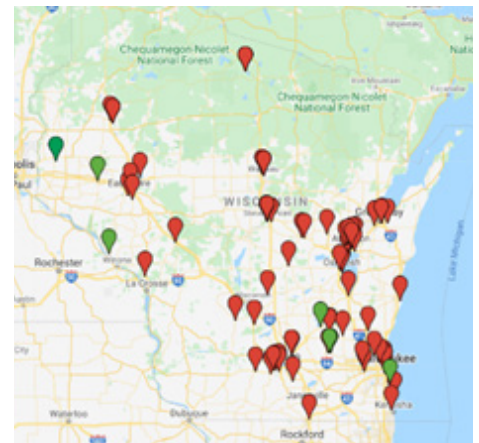


Currently, our [training cadre](#) consists of 92 trainers selected and mentored as a trainer for one or more of Wisconsin’s provider content options. This year, in response to COVID-19, our trainers shifted and stretched to increase our e-Modules with Reflective Coaching training option. We are grateful for their quick action. While unable to provide face to face training, the Pyramid Model Team created virtual versions of the six “Implementation Academy” trainings highlighted in red to the left.

## Our program-wide sites: Working to build and sustain practices that ensure social and emotional competence

The primary goal of [program-wide implementation](#) is building capacity of program teams to review and adjust their practices, together, by creating a climate of continuous improvement. Program-wide implementation affords the opportunity to change our deep rooted and systemic belief in the effectiveness of suspension and expulsion. This change requires collective, community level commitment to building alternatives that ensure all adults are provided with supports and practices they need to ensure children and families thrive. This means there is:

- ▲ Practice Based Coaching
- ▲ Shared Leadership
- ▲ Data that guides decision making



We are grateful to our 7 newest program-wide sites for their willingness to join us in our first ever virtual Pyramid Model Implementation Academy!

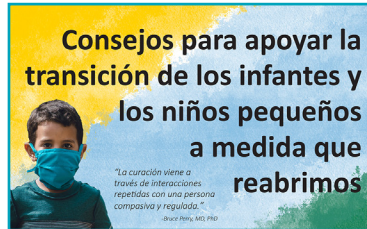
Community Child Care – Beaver Dam  
Grace Lutheran – Oak Creek  
Milestones – Menomonie  
Gingerbread – Watertown

Mary Linsmeier – Watertown  
Sonshine – New Richmond  
Western Dairyland Head Start – Cochrane-Fountain City

## Wisconsin Pyramid Model Accomplishments of 2020

### Promoting awareness of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health as a priority:

- ▲ Created *As We Re-open*, during the earliest weeks of COVID. Available in English and Spanish, the document was shared and used nationally.
- ▲ Outlined key elements of a foundational Social and Emotional course.
- ▲ Pivoted plans for a social and emotional “traveling exhibit” to an engaging and information digital option to be released in 2021.
- ▲ Launched new [Wisconsin Pyramid Model state web pages](#).
- ▲ Collaborated with the Wisconsin Office of the First Lady, Kathy Evers, to select books for the Holiday Children’s Book Drive project focused on distribution of social and emotional themed books to young children in Wisconsin.
- ▲ Contributed to the Wisconsin Office of Children’s Mental Health [Supporting Child Well-Being through Building Social and Emotional Skills](#) fact sheet.
- ▲ Presented “Community-based Conversations about Reducing Disparities and Expulsions through Pyramid Model Implementation” sectional for the 2020 Wisconsin Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Conference.



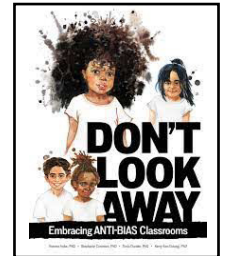
### Ensured continued access to high quality training in Infant and Early Childhood Social and Emotional Competence:

- ▲ Shifted 9 [Wisconsin Pyramid Model trainings](#) to virtual format, including e-Modules Reflective Coaching, Implementation Academy, and Individualized Interventions.
- ▲ Supported approved trainers to provide 51 Pyramid Model Content trainings to over 409 participants
- ▲ Created regular updates for Wisconsin Pyramid Model trainers through the “Pyramid Model Buzz Newsletter.”

#### The Pyramid Model Buzz



- ▲ Edited the Wisconsin Pyramid Model Infant Toddler 8 Part Series to enhance connections between Pyramid Model and Infant Mental Health.
- ▲ Expanded our trainer Community of Practice opportunities to include coaches and Infant Mental Health Consultants to collectively:
  - View and reflect using the Culturally Responsive Practices to Address Implicit Bias e-Modules.
  - Engaged in a statewide book study using the *Don't Look Away: Embracing Anti-Bias Classroom*.



### Program and community-wide systems work:

- ▲ Surveyed all program-wide implementation sites in preparation for a data review.
- ▲ Launched monthly virtual Pyramid Model Coaches networking to support coaches who work within programs to build and sustain Practice Based Coaching.
- ▲ Partnered with Supporting Families Together Association to pilot intentional technical assistance, e-Modules training and coaching, classroom resources and policy feedback.
- ▲ Provided intentional support to seven new program-wide sites to launch internal coaches. Provided additional coaching support for current implementation sites and three community level teams working together to support community-wide implementation
- ▲ Held a virtual Pyramid Model Academy with content designed for program and community-level Pyramid Model implementation. Five events were attended by 115 participants representing 55 programs.
- ▲ Coordinated a regional pilot of a discipline policy review and feedback tool designed to explore key elements of program policy that reduce suspension and expulsion.

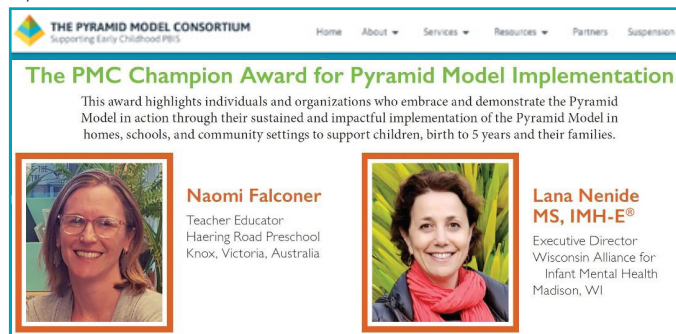




## State and National Leadership:

- ▲ WI-AIMH's Lana Shklyar Nenide was recognized as a 2020 Pyramid Model Champion by national Pyramid Model Consortium.
- ▲ Participated as an appointed member on the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council and its associated [Reducing Suspension and Expulsion](#) workgroup.
- ▲ Showcased Wisconsin's efforts as a member of the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations: Sustaining & Scaling up High Fidelity Pyramid Model Efforts in State Systems Community of Practice.

- ▲ Nominated by national Pyramid Model leadership to pilot the new Pyramid Model Implementation Data system.



## What's Next:

### Our State's Core Leadership and Advisory Teams defined these key priorities for 2021 & beyond

#### Build Capacity

Examine access to training and implementation support, including support for Pyramid Model implementation at the program level, as part of a multi-pronged approach aimed at building capacity to promote social and emotional competence in babies and young children. This approach includes:

- ▲ Program and classroom delivery of high quality, equitable and multi-leveled teaching and support.
- ▲ Community based intervention support for crisis situations that may result in expulsion.
- ▲ Access to Infant Mental Health Consultation that supports adults.

#### Decrease Suspension/Expulsion

Continue collaboration between Pyramid Model Leadership and state policy decision makers with priority participation and the DCF Suspension/Expulsion group.

- ▲ Advise on statewide policy related to the decrease/elimination of suspension and expulsion of babies, toddlers and young children.

- ▲ Uphold intentional support of social and emotional learning as an indicator of quality and badge of excellence.

#### Spread the Word

Promote Pyramid Model via a statewide informational campaign that shares the positive results of program-wide implementation with intentional messaging to families of young children.

- ▲ Use the Pyramid Model Implementation Data System and other data to identify and address gaps and highlight improved outcomes for children and families.
- ▲ Expand support for the Southeast area of Wisconsin.

*We are pleased to announce that Delechia Johnson was hired in March 2021 as Pyramid Model Team Lead for the Milwaukee Area. Delechia brings a wealth of Pyramid Model knowledge and experience to our work.*



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