



Michigan Association for the
Education of Young Children

Candidate Name: Karen Ong

Employment Information: Lead Infant Teacher

1) Why are you interested in serving on the Michigan AEYC Governing Board?

I am interested in serving on the Michigan AEYC Governing Board because as a current Infant Teacher, I hope to be able to provide a unique perspective in our approach, practice, and policies regarding high-quality learning that keeps in mind the needs of all children, including infants, as well as the needs of the families that we serve and the staff that we work with. I hope to be able to work alongside others to offer a deeper insight and a greater voice into the role (and importance) of care within the early childhood field, whether it's caring for the very young, or caring for the families we serve, or caring for the well-being of each other, while also bringing into greater discussion and higher advocacy in regards to infant mental health, parental mental health, and staff mental health.

2) Please share any relevant professional and/or volunteer experiences within the past five years that would be applicable for this role.

In the last five years, I have had to transition from the role of preschool teacher to infant teacher. This change has allowed me to take a considerable look into how I approached early childhood education from the perspective of care and what it means to be a caregiver within a teaching role. At the same time, I have also been advocating for a deeper understanding and awareness of infant mental health and parental mental health, as well as a stronger presence of collaborative teaching and practices across other infant teaching teams within our center.

3) Please share your knowledge, skills and abilities that would contribute to serving on the Michigan AEYC Governing Board.

I come into the early childhood education field through a psychology background. I believe that having a background in psychology has influenced me to approach social-emotional development, mental health, and relationship building as essential and nonnegotiable in our early childhood teaching practices. I have also been able to use this as a teaching point for new teachers to act as observers, listeners, collaborators, and relationship builders in order for us to be more effective educators.

4) Please share your experience related to governance and leadership that would be applicable to this role.

Within the early childhood education field, I've had the wonderful experience of being a lead teacher in all age groups, from infants, to toddlers, to young preschool, and older preschool. I believe that it might be uncommon for most early childhood professionals to be able to lead classrooms along multiple age groups. However, I am grateful for having been through this journey as it has allowed me to be able to both relate and discuss issues and insights with others on their teaching journey, through my own personal and professional experiences.

Along the way, changes and transitions in teaching teams has also placed me in settings in which I have had the opportunity to take on a leadership role in training new teachers who may not have had much experience in the early childhood field. I approach this role with great care because new teachers are the future of this field. We all know the struggle of being able to retain teachers in our field. I believe this starts with how we approach the way we introduce them to early childhood teaching and how we show that we care for what we do.

In between my two different seasons of early childhood teaching, I was a supervisor for a Foster Care department for the South Carolina Department of Social Services. While it was a difficult and often heart wrenching work, I will forever remember the lessons I've learned through that experience. It serves as a reminder that child development involves all—family, culture, community, and society—and it cannot function to its highest potential without one or the other.