

## **Tina R. Sykes Personal Statement**

If you shake my family tree, you will find social workers, public school teachers, college professors, psychologists, community board members, and social justice activists. My passion for early childhood education is rooted in this family legacy. As the unexpected blessing to teen parents, I grew up surrounded by extended family members who instilled in me the importance of quality education. My first experience was as a Head Start student at my neighborhood elementary school in a low-income community in the west end of Louisville, KY. In partnership with my family, my teacher, Ms. Davis, was influential in my understanding of not only academics, but also self-love and self-acceptance. This foundation led me to the field of education where I have been a professional for over 25 years. I believe all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that meet their individual needs and circumstances. For this to be a reality, adults must educate themselves and adapt their practices, policies, and ways of being to help ensure all children succeed. I firmly believe this is essential for the advancement of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB).

My professional experience includes work in various sectors of the education system including the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Unit at the Arizona Department of Education, Region 9 Head Start, private childcare, faith-based education programs, the Arizona Quality Rating and Improvement System, Early Head Start, a foster care and adoption program, Arizona State University and the Lastinger Center for Early Learning at the University of Florida. Within these organizations, my roles included ECE mentor, professional development creator and facilitator, infant/toddler and preschool teacher, assistant childcare director, home visitor, program manager, and lead and assistant university academic associate.

I have had the honor to be a member of the educational leadership team at my church as well as serve on various committees within the organizations in which I have worked. The work of these committees focused on DEIB, Early Language and Literacy, Social Emotional Development, ECE Business Practices and Family Engagement. I am currently a member of the HUB Planning Team for a Developmentally Appropriate Practice ECHO Project sponsored and led by the Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children and Arizona State University. My participation on these committees gives me the opportunity to enhance my collaboration and leadership skills while working for positive outcomes for children.

Facilitating and creating professional development has been a huge part of my professional career. I have had the privilege to present at local ECE conferences (Head Start, Expulsion Prevention, Family Engagement) and national conferences including NAEYC PLI and the QRIS Build Institute. This year I am scheduled to facilitate sessions at the National Black Child Development Institute, National Head Start Association Family Engagement Conference, the NAEYC Annual Conference and the Southern Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference in Tucson, Arizona.

Professionally, the experiences I am most proud of are those that directly impact children and families. One example is my successful management of Quality First Academy. This program creates and provides professional development to Technical Assistance Professionals within the Arizona QRIS system. In my role as program manager, I worked hard to harness the collective power and knowledge of my team to facilitate intentional and thoughtful PD content to our participants.

An additional example is my work as a home visitor with teen parents in an Early Head Start program. The teens in this program were often overlooked and underestimated because of their age and socioeconomic status. Although on paper my role was to provide resources and information connected to parenting, child development and health care, I made it my mission to mentor these young parents and help them cultivate a strong sense of self.

Personally, I am in a constant state of learning, unlearning, and relearning as I engage in the work of DEIB. Many of my friends, family, and colleagues, lean on me to help them navigate the waters and try to make sense of all that equity entails. I do not take this for granted. I understand that advancing equity starts with self and then moves to others and then the system.

The process of working to ensure equitable outcomes for all children is my mission and that mission is made more meaningful through collaborative efforts. I believe my personal and professional experience as well as my knowledge and understanding of ECE make me an asset to the work of the NAEYC governing board. It is my goal to both learn from and contribute to the membership in ways that enhance learning opportunities and life experiences for all children.

Thank you for your consideration and for the work you do on behalf children and families.

*Tina R Sykes*

Tina Sykes, M.Ed

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