



Pennsylvania Association for the
Education of Young Children

For Immediate Release

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Pittsburgh Area Early Care and Education Legends Honored at Statewide Gala in Hershey

**Linda D. Grinage and Dr. Rae Ann Hirsch (awarded in memoriam) receive Voice for
Children Award from the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children**

HERSHEY, PA (March 31, 2023)— Two Pittsburgh area early care and education professionals Linda D. Grinage and Dr. Rae Ann Hirsch (awarded posthumously) received the Voice for Children Award at the annual statewide gala of the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC).

PennAEYC's Voice for Children Award is the only statewide award in Pennsylvania recognizing the grassroots leaders whose work impacts the quality of care for young children in diverse settings. The "Voice" Award celebrates not only the individual award recipients, but the early childhood profession.

"With our Voice for Children Award, PennAEYC recognizes the critical role advocacy plays in high-quality early care and education settings and celebrates those who speak on behalf of Pennsylvania's children," said Jen DeBell, Executive Director of PennAEYC. "As the "Voice" for early childhood care and learning, community advocates are an invaluable component to assuring all Pennsylvania's children get the start they deserve in school and life."

Linda D. Grinage is the founder and chief servant officer of Blessed Assurance Christian Child Care and Early Learning Center in Rankin. Grinage has over twenty years of teaching experience in early childhood care and education and holds a bachelor's degree in child development and family relations from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She also holds a Pennsylvania State Teaching Certification in both Nursery and Kindergarten.

Grinage's work as an educator and community leader has inspired reform and change in the early childhood care and education field. She has dedicated herself to providing affordable and accessible child care services to families who might otherwise struggle to find quality care for their children. Her commitment to helping these families has helped to break down barriers and provide a path for children from underserved communities to reach their full potential.

"Linda's love for children and her strong faith have driven her to create a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow and learn. Her child care philosophy is educating the whole child: body, mind, and spirit. For decades, Linda has used her voice to lift up children and her community and tonight we honor that voice," said Cara Ciminillo, Executive Director of Trying Together, whose organization supports the Southwestern PA Chapter of PennAEYC and nominated Grinage.



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PennAEYC also honored Dr. Rae Ann Hirsh with a Voice for Children Award in memoriam. Dr. Hirsh served as program director of Carlow University's Early Childhood Education Department and was an educator there for 12 years.

Dr. Hirsch published a book about early childhood education titled *Early Childhood Curriculum: Incorporating Multiple Intelligences, Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Play* and worked to help influence and guide new teachers. Her scholarly work has been published in many different periodicals and has been presented at conferences all over the United States.

Most recently, Dr. Hirsh served as the architect of Pennsylvania's first four-year apprenticeship program, which was named in her memory, as the "Dr. Rae Ann Hirsh Apprenticeship Hub for Early Childhood Education." This achievement included securing the largest endowment in Carlow University's history to establish the apprenticeship hub in perpetuity.

"Rae's accomplishments are a result of her passion for early childhood and, with the remarkable generosity of state and local funders, will inspire future early care and education professionals for years to come," said Susan Polojac, Director of the Apprenticeship Hub.

The evening also featured a keynote address from Michelle Kang, chief executive officer of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, a global association dedicated to high-quality early learning for all children, who stressed the importance of the work early care and education professionals do each and every day and its positive impact on children and families and our communities.

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The Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children is a statewide, nonprofit membership organization of over 3,500 early childhood care and education professionals. As the Pennsylvania affiliate of NAEYC, we are part of a network that includes 52 affiliates and nearly 60,000 individual members nationwide. Through policy development, advocacy and professional development and supports for early childhood professionals we work to achieve the vision that each and every Pennsylvania family will have access to high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education opportunities for their children provided by a profession that is valued, well-compensated and supported. PennAEYC is a proud principal partner of the Start Strong PA and Pre-K for PA nonpartisan, statewide advocacy campaigns to increase access to high-quality, affordable child care and pre-k.