

# Welcome!

## The 17<sup>th</sup> NAREA Winter Conference

The board and staff of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) warmly welcome you to New Orleans and to our 17<sup>th</sup> NAREA Winter Conference, *Creativity as a Collective Right: Learning in Relationship and Context*. Since 2008, NAREA and Reggio Children have partnered to bring professional development experiences across North America, gathering educators dedicated to honoring the rights and potential of all children.

At NAREA, we strive to build meaningful connections among educators, support ongoing professional learning, and advance the Reggio Emilia Approach. Each year, we engage in a rich array of activities that include conferences, webinars, traveling exhibitions + ateliers, publications, study groups to Reggio Emilia, global learning journeys, book sales, and new initiatives designed to elevate the rights of both children and adults. Through this work, we enter communities and foster relationships with educators who are shaping schools worthy of children's and adult's imagination, intelligence, and dignity.

New Orleans, like many communities, thrives because of people who work with vision, persistence, and a deep commitment to building a hopeful future. For more than 6 years, the New Orleans host community has worked tirelessly to bring the *Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material* exhibition + atelier and this conference to the city, which is a testament to the creativity, dedication, and resilience that defines this remarkable community.

We are honored to welcome Filippo Chieli and Valentina Violi, along with interpreter Jane McCall, from Reggio Emilia, Italy. Their presence enriches our shared understanding of the values and experiences embedded in Reggio Emilia's municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools. We also extend our gratitude to Louisiana Children's Museum, St. Martin's Episcopal School, and Agenda for Children for their generous support in making this gathering possible.

Across North America, we encounter schools at many points along their journeys—schools that open their doors, share their evolving work, and invite the participation of visitors. This generous approach to professional learning, modeled by the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, reminds us that each community can cultivate its own identity through ongoing study, research, innovation, and collaboration, rather than by following prescriptive models. We are deeply grateful to the children, families, and educators of New Orleans who will welcome us into their schools during the conference.

In Louisiana, people say, "Laissez les bons temps rouler!" or "Let the good times roll!" This joyful expression captures the spirit of the city and echoes the delight we share in exploring, imagining, and learning together. May these days in New Orleans spark new ideas, deepen connections, and awaken the creativity that resides in each of us.

With nostalgia for the future,

*NAREA Board and Staff*

