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## President's Message...

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*Michigan Reading Association*

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# President's Message...

by Leah van Belle, MRA President

Sending a warm hello to each of you, beloved community!

It feels like only last week that many of us were gathering for the Annual Conference, spilling over with our excitement to be in person. The smiles, the hugs, the delight at being together again! We rolled up sleeves in the powerful work of learning from and with one another about how we each grow in centering equity and justice in our work. We opened not just our minds, but our hearts. After all, teaching is intellectual work, but it is also heart work—this we know.



**Leah van Belle, Ph.D.**

Across the many individuals, organizations, and community programs that come together to be Michigan Reading Association, we are committed to literacy as access, equity, and justice. We have continued to mobilize and grow this by continuing our collective learning through the *Michigan Reading Journal (MRJ)* and issuing a joint statement on *The Freedom to Read* in Michigan with Michigan Association for Media in Education and Michigan Council of Teachers of English, published in the Spring issue of *MRJ*. Further building strategic partnerships, we co-convened webinars with other educational equity-focused organizations, including the Autism Alliance of Michigan, The Education Trust Midwest, National Parents Union, National Center on Improving Literacy, We Shall Read, Bookshare, Michigan State University, and 313Reads, among others. We co-convened a five-part professional learning series on dyslexia diagnosis, supports, and policy through evidence-based and culturally sustaining approaches. (If you didn't catch the series live, you can view the recordings on our Facebook page and the accompanying resources on our website!)

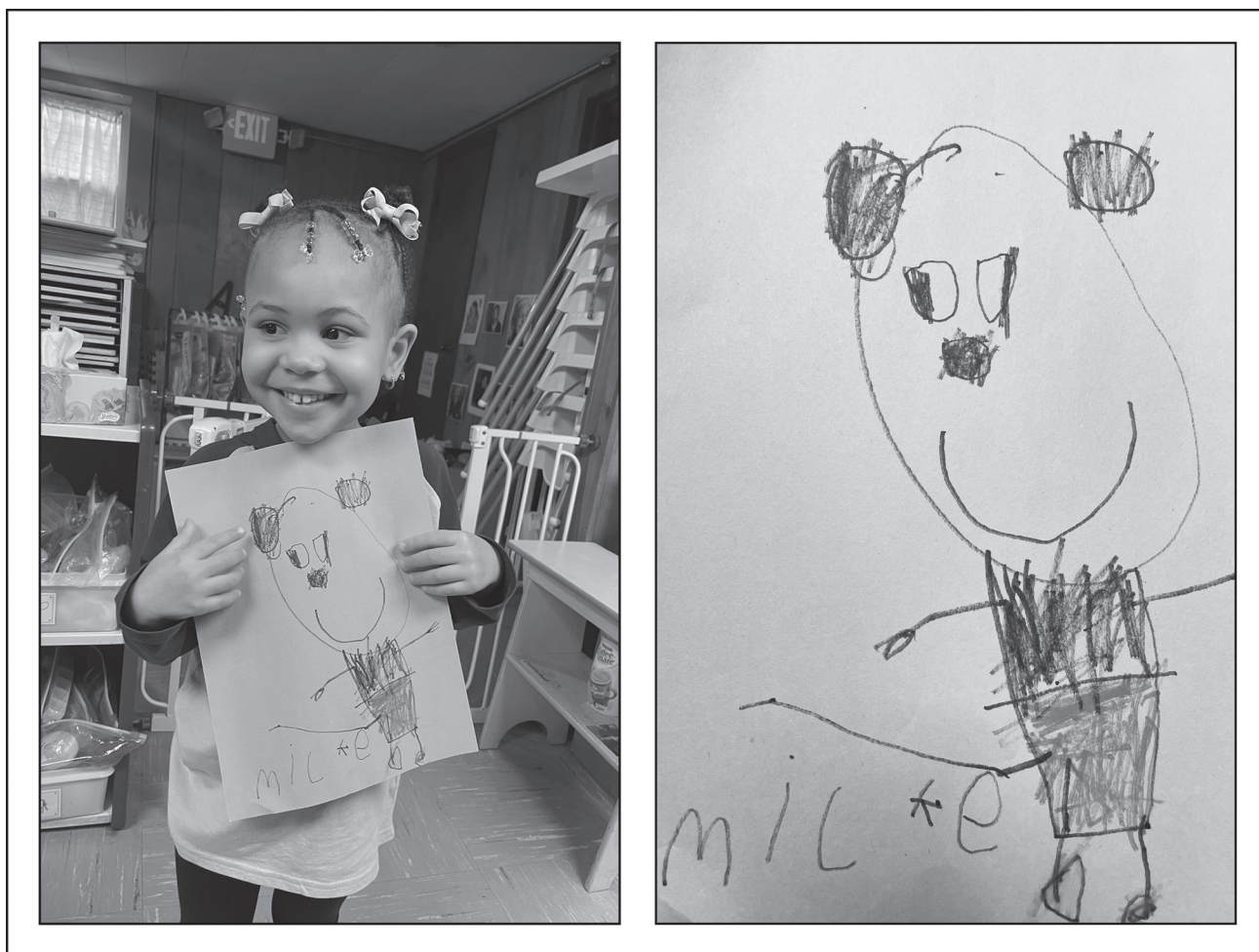
As we continue to grow in community and aligned, coordinated efforts for literacy policy that ensures equitable access and opportunity for all learners, we are honored and excited to have been invited to sit on the Michigan Policy for Equity and Opportunity coalition and Michigan Department of Education's Special Education Advisory Committee. MRA has much to contribute to these state systems level spaces—our members are the literacy experts, voices, and perspectives that need to be heard. YOUR voices need to be amplified! MRA is eager to continue growing partnerships and opportunities to center MRA voices.

I can't wait to see all of you in March in Grand Rapids for the 2023 Annual Conference, RISE: Embracing and Celebrating a Beloved Community of Literacy! YOUR voices are what will make this a powerful convening and one the ripples of which will not stop when the conference ends. We are building together in a beloved community, and each of you has so much that will make the collective work better. If you're interested in learning about opportunities to serve on the MRA Board or as a regional representative, I would love to connect with you. Please reach out! Michigan Reading Association is YOUR community!

In solidarity,  
Leah

Dr. Leah van Belle is a proud Detroitier and first-generation high school and college graduate. She serves

as the Executive Director of 313Reads, a community coalition for grade level reading and literacy equity. She serves as a member of the Early Literacy Task Force of Michigan and as the President of the Michigan Reading Association. Passionate about the need for diverse educators, she serves as the Vice-Chair of the Board of the Black Male Educators Alliance and on the Diversity and Equity in the Educator Workforce Advisory Group for MDE. As the mama of a neurodiverse child, she is an advocate and co-conspirator for educational equity for exceptional learners, and proudly serves on MDE's Special Education Advisory Committee. Her son is a third grader in a Detroit public school and is teaching her how to build with LEGO. In turn, she is teaching him about the power of old school jazz. Family read aloud is one of their favorite parts of the day!



Demi Grandison is a preschool student at Just Imagine Child Development Center in Redford.