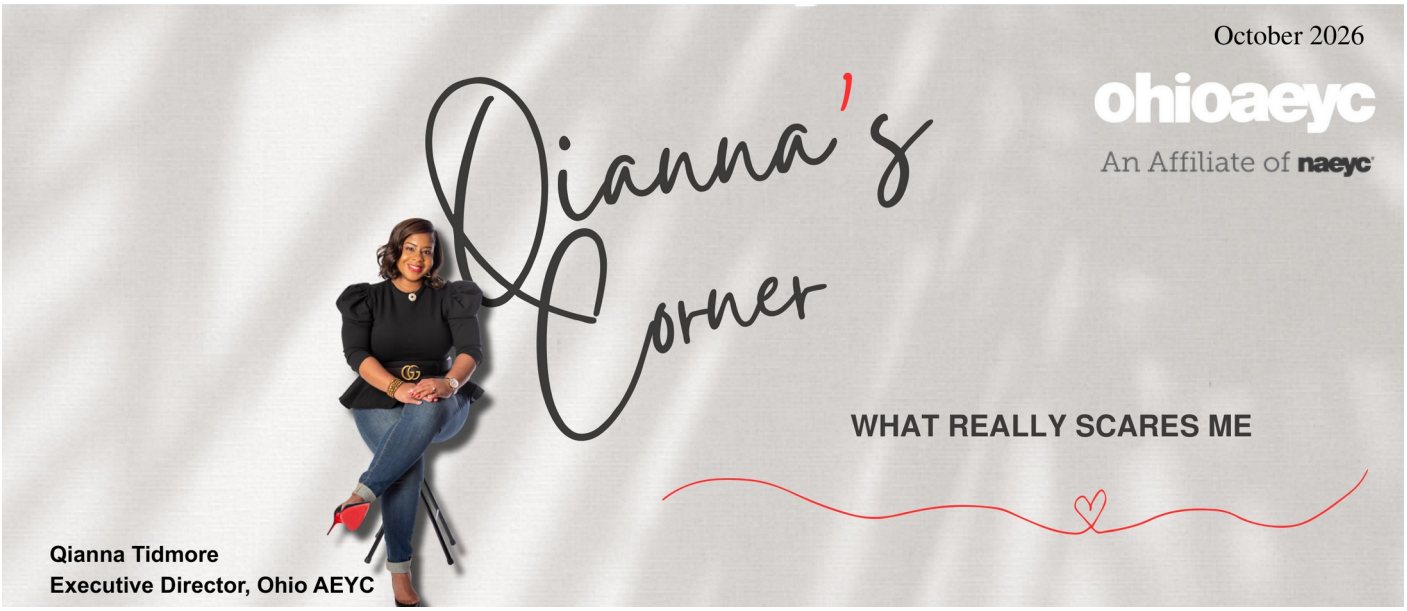


What Really Scares Me

October is here, and suddenly there are ghosts in the windows, skeletons on the doors, and plastic spiders in places plastic spiders have no business being.

I work in early childhood. You're going to have to try harder than that to scare me.



A room full of children suddenly going quiet? Now you have my attention.

Someone announcing, "I did it myself!" from the bathroom? My heart stops.

But Halloween has me thinking about the things that actually scare me in this work—the ones that tend to follow us home after everyone else has been picked up.

I'm scared I'll miss something.

A child is having a hard time, and I'm trying to understand why. Are they overwhelmed? Frustrated? Looking for connection? There are other children who need me, a transition to manage, and a dozen things competing for my attention.

Later, I wonder: Did I slow down enough? Did I notice what mattered?

It's a vulnerable feeling to be someone a child depends on while knowing you're still figuring things out yourself.

The fears we carry home

I'm scared I'll say the wrong thing.

Some conversations with families take courage before the first word comes out.

You want to share a concern honestly. You want the family to feel respected. You want to make it clear that you see everything wonderful about their child, even as you talk about something difficult.

That is a lot to ask of one opening sentence.

And sometimes the fear of getting it wrong makes us put off a conversation that could help.

I'm scared of running out of patience.

There. I said it.

I can understand child development and still have a day when the noise feels louder, my energy feels lower, and one more spilled cup feels like a personal challenge.

Those are the days when I need to recognize my own limits early enough to ask for support. The children need an adult who can react thoughtfully. I need people I can be honest with when that's getting harder.

Pretending I'm endlessly patient doesn't help either of us.

I'm scared I won't be able to pay my bills.

That one doesn't wait until Halloween.



It shows up at the grocery store. When the rent is due. When the car makes a noise you absolutely cannot afford for it to be making.

We're trusted to keep children safe, understand their development, support their families, and make decisions that matter every day. That responsibility should come with a paycheck we can live on.

If I can earn the same amount at a fast-food counter, it's fair to ask why the knowledge, skill, and responsibility required to educate young children aren't reflected in my pay.

And "you do it because you love the children" is a painful answer when the question is how to keep the electricity on.

Of course we love the children. We also need groceries.

I'm scared of having to choose between work I care deeply about and work that allows me to support myself and my family. Educators deserve to be able to do both.

Making room for honest conversations

And I'm scared of losing the joy.

I want to keep noticing the funny things children say. Their pride when something finally works. The elaborate explanation for why there is a rock in their pocket—and why, apparently, it needs a name.

I'm scared of becoming so consumed by everything that has to get done that I stop enjoying the people I'm doing it for.

That fear deserves attention. Educators need time, resources, adequate pay, and colleagues who can share the load. We shouldn't have to squeeze every bit of renewal into whatever is left of us at the end of the day.

Maybe you recognize one of these fears. Maybe yours is different.

Either way, I hope there's someone you can tell.

Someone who will listen when you say, "I'm worried about this child," or "I need help with this conversation," or simply, "Today was a lot."

There's courage in those words. They give someone else a chance to step closer, offer another perspective, or help you find a way forward.

Some fears need a colleague who will listen. Others need employers, policymakers, and communities to act. Being honest about what scares us helps make those needs visible.

This October, that's what I want to make room for: honest conversations about the parts of this work that scare us, and enough trust to work through them together.

The plastic spiders can stay outside.

Fall Fantabulous

And if you could use some time with people who understand, join us at Fall Fantabulous on October 30 in Columbus. Five presenters will explore play, challenging behaviors, and teamwork, with opportunities to earn up to 5.5 Ohio Approved credit hours. Bring your questions—we'll make room for learning and laughter, too. But speaking of room, there is little left, so act fast!

With Love and Empowerment,

♡ Qianna