

Delaware Early Childhood Council

2011 Annual Report

Submitted and Approved February 17, 2012

The mission of the Delaware Early Childhood Council (DECC) is to promote the development of a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system, birth to eight, which provides the highest quality services and environment for Delaware's children and their families. The major activities for 2011 are described below, each linked to one of the Council's strategic goals.

- **Goal 1.** Strengthen governance and alignment of early childhood policies, programs, practices, standards, and financing that enhance outcomes and uniform oversight across state agencies, and expand collaborations with private and nonprofit partners and federal agencies.

The Delaware Early Childhood Council and the Interagency Resource Management Committee (IRMC) are functioning as stipulated by the Delaware code. A status report was delivered to the Kids Caucus of the Delaware General Assembly on November 14, 2011.

Under guidance from the IRMC, an Interagency Early Childhood Work Group was formed that includes key members from the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF). This group reports directly to IRMC and DECC.

Proposals to carry out the statewide early childhood needs assessment and workforce study have been approved, with funding to be provided from the Council's planning grant from Head Start. Contracts between DOE and the University of Delaware are being processed for both projects. The needs assessment will include four existing data sources; Policy Matters; Fiscal Mapping; Common Indicators from the "Getting Ready" report; and OCCL data. The work force study data sources will include several items from the previous Delaware workforce study for comparison and in addition, qualifications data from personnel of centers, coursework of providers and demographic data. Two questionnaires (one for administrators/teachers and the other for family child care providers) are being finalized.

The planning phase for the issuance of a Policy Brief on Kindergarten Readiness is complete and the expected release date is spring 2012.

- **Goal 2.** Integrate service delivery across agencies and sectors to address the developmental needs of all young children and their families, especially those placed at risk because of developmental delays, poverty, neglect or abuse, and other risk factors.

The development of the Kindergarten Readiness Framework Pilot Phase is complete. The council will continue to work with the University of Delaware to complete the framework model. In the initial planning phase, the Teaching Strategies GOLD was chosen as the assessment system. The four pilot phase LEA's have completed Teaching Strategies training.

Several hundred Delaware kindergarten teachers were surveyed to identify the top skills they would like to see among incoming kindergarten students when they start school. The University of Delaware managed the survey which replicated a similar study completed in 2000. These survey results are currently being analyzed. A report is expected in spring 2012.

The ECC has established a standing Providers Committee to provide continuing input to the ECC and IRMC on needs, priorities and concerns of service providers.

The Council has initiated expanded collaboration and coordination with the Wilmington Early Care and Education Council, Sussex Early Childhood Council, Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children, Delaware Coalition for Early Learning, United Way of Delaware, Nemours Health and Prevention Services, Rodel Foundation, Delaware School Districts, and Vision 2015.

- **Goal 3.** Enhance the State's data and information system to fully incorporate early childhood, and use that system as well as periodic analysis of programs, policies, and outcomes to monitor and improve state services, inform and assist private service providers and schools, and enable policymakers to identify what is working and what is needed.

Essential questions for the data system were developed by the Interagency Early Childhood Strategic Planning Group. These essential questions were developed based on the work of the Early Childhood Data Collaborative. The Department of Education developed data image maps using the questions identifying existing data sources and data gaps. The essential questions and data maps were presented to the IRMC. These indicators will serve as the foundation for the integrated data system. Both Department of Health and Social Services and Department of Services for Children, Youth and Families gave permission to contact their data personnel in order to move forward with the project.

Presentations were conducted with the P-20 Council and the IRMC on strategic plans for the early childhood data system. Currently the K-12 longitudinal data system (LDS) is under development and dashboards are currently in design.

In addition, analysis of the Part B 619 Pre-kindergarten outcomes data has been conducted to improve the quality, validity and reliability of the data from the assessment process.

- **Goal 4.** Establish and coordinate a statewide, cross-sector early childhood professional development system that includes partnerships with K-12 education, higher education, business, and community institutions that enables all early childhood providers to participate in affordable, high quality professional development.

The ECC has established a new standing committee on Higher Education that provides coordination with the State's P-20 Council and represents all higher education institutions providing education and professional development programs for those entering or serving in the field of early childhood education. Delaware higher education institutions have committed that, by 2014, early childhood degree programs will be fully aligned to the Delaware Early Childhood Learning Foundations and the Delaware Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals.

The Governor, along with the General Assembly included funds to support professional development opportunities for practitioners. An additional \$500,000 was allocated for this effort. Funds will support additional opportunities for the TEACH program and funds were provided to the Institute to lower the price of training offered by the Center.

- **Goal 5.** Enable early childhood providers to achieve and sustain increasing levels of quality as defined by the appropriate early childhood standards, including the State's early learning guidelines, child care licensing regulations, Delaware Stars for Early Success, and the national accreditation standards.

Delaware's Quality Improvement System for early childhood programs, Stars for Early Success, underwent a comprehensive redesign that will enable more programs to participate and advance to higher levels of quality attainment. The Delaware Stars standards were reframed in a points system that allows programs greater flexibility in focusing their quality improvement efforts. Programs will continue to be assessed using the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) as a part of the determination of their Star Level. In the new design for Stars, programs will continue to have an assigned technical assistant who will work with them in making improvements to meet standards and achieve desired scores on the ERS assessment.

In July 2011, Governor Markell and the Delaware General Assembly allocated \$22 million dollars to increase Purchase of Care rates to 65% of the market rate, and to strengthen participation in Stars through a tiered reimbursement system. Programs serving children on Purchase of Care subsidy: Star 3 programs are eligible for up 80% of market rate; Star 4 programs are eligible for 90% of market rate; and, Star 5 programs are eligible for 100% of market rate. During the first six months after these changes, 92 new programs were accepted into the Stars system and 47 programs rose to new tiered reimbursement levels, with another 43 expected to obtain those levels by the spring. The tiered reimbursement

system and the redesign of Stars were instrumental to Delaware's application for a federal Early Learning Race-to-the-Top grant. The funding provided through that grant will further accelerate the expansion of program participation over the next four years, particularly for those programs serving high need children. Under the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant, Stars will be recognized and adopted as a framework for quality improvement across all sectors of the early learning and development system.

- **Goal 6.** Improve the alignment and efficient use of early childhood funding across agencies and increase public financing to meet the true cost of quality early childhood services for all families across all geographic locations, socio-economic groups, and child ability levels; this includes adequate compensation and tiered reimbursement to all qualified providers, the full financing of Delaware Stars, increasing subsidies to low-income families, and integrated funding of Delaware's early childhood programs with elementary education.

The Council actively supported Governor Markell's initiative to increase funding for Purchase of Care (POC) support, including tiered reimbursement linked to the Delaware Stars quality improvement system. The General Assembly approved an increase of \$22 million in funding. The largest share devoted to increased POC reimbursement rates and the remaining funds supporting the Stars infrastructure and tiered reimbursement linked to the top three levels of the Stars rating system.

The ECC was a partner with the State of Delaware in the development of Delaware's successful Early Learning Race-to-the-Top application, resulting in a grant of \$49,800 of the next four years. This funding will support all of the goals above and facilitate the development of a comprehensive statewide early childhood that serves all of Delaware's young children and their families. The grant will accelerate progress of key initiatives already underway and planned to strengthen and integrate early childhood services and support continuous quality improvement. These initiatives will have a particular focus on benefits for children from low-income families.

Other Relevant Activities

The homepage for a new DECC interactive website has been completed and the website will be launched in spring 2012.

A Policy and Procedures Workgroup was formed by the council to draft bylaws for the council to review. Bylaws have been reviewed and adopted by the Council.