

Dear Friends,

As we look forward to a new year and take a look back at 2014, we are very grateful for the exciting year we had.

The legislative session started with a bang, as the Governor announced in his State of the State address a five-year plan to expand state-funded preschool to an additional 4,010 children by 2019. This expansion would allow access to high-quality early education for children in our state's most vulnerable communities, allowing 1,020 more 3- and 4-year-olds to attend preschool this fall. Our state's leaders took note of this bold move and proposed Smart Start, which would provide additional funding to local and regional boards of education to make high-quality preschool available through the state's public school system.

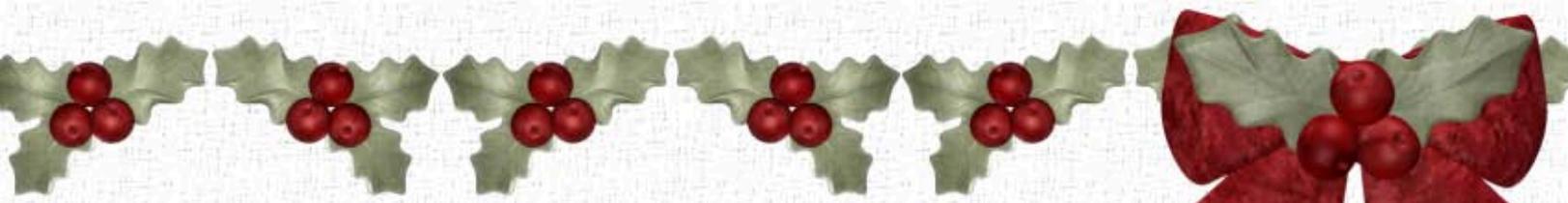
The legislative session proved to be a big win for Connecticut's children. In addition to the legislature's approval of the expansion of state-funded preschool and Smart Start, bills were passed codifying the Office of Early Childhood in statute, approving the state's agreement with the family child care union which increased provider rates and provided for professional development, requiring annual inspections of licensed child care facilities and approving rate increases for state-funded preschool. Grants-in-aid for facility improvements and minor capital repairs for School Readiness and Child Day Care Center programs were also approved by the legislature, as well as additional staffing for the Office of Early Childhood.

In April, we were excited to host the Governor's Pre-K to 3 Symposium at the Mark Twain House as part of the National Governor's Association Policy Academy: Building a Foundation for Student Success: State Strategies to Improve Learning Outcomes from Early Childhood through 3rd Grade. Key stakeholders from school districts, boards of education, state and local elected officials, union officials, business leaders, elementary principals, community early childhood leaders, policy leaders and philanthropy attended.

The Office of Early Childhood was proud to finalize and publish the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards, which were developed to help families, communities and schools work together to support children's early learning and growth. The document is a product of years of work by the Early Childhood Education Cabinet (now the Early Childhood Cabinet) and its Early Learning Standards Workgroup. In addition to the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), we also developed Action Guides, posters and a document for providers aligning the new ELDS with the existing Preschool Assessment Framework, to help support the use of the ELDS in all settings. The full standards, Action Guides and posters were printed and distributed statewide to a number of providers and stakeholders including licensed child care providers, Care 4 Kids family providers, pediatricians, libraries, schools of higher education and Family Resource Centers.

In July, we were thrilled to welcome a new addition to our OEC family, the Division of Licensing. The Child Care and Youth Camp Licensing Programs transitioned from the Department of Public Health to the Office of Early Childhood on July 1. Although still located at 410 Capitol Avenue, we are happy to finally have them officially on board. On more than a few occasions this fall, child care and early childhood technical assistance (TA) providers stopped me to thank me for changes they are seeing in licensing. One TA provider in Bridgeport told me, "Lately, every encounter we have had throughout the licensing process





has been pleasant and helpful. And getting my providers licensed is happening so much faster! It feels very different now.” You have no idea how good these comments make me feel! It is so reassuring to have members of our provider community say, “This change is a good thing.” It really affirms that we are moving in the right direction as an agency, and that feels great!

And three months later, we welcomed the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) from the Department of Public Health. This time, we were able to make some room so they could physically join us at 165 Capitol Avenue.

We helped spread the word about our new agency and its programs with our The More You Know, The Better They Grow campaign and launched the CT Triple P website, a website promoting the Triple P Program, an international, evidence-based parenting and family support system that helps parents and families deal with challenging behaviors and the stresses of everyday parenting. The OEC, working with many community partners, trained 140 practitioners to provide the Triple P program to parents in Hartford and five communities in northeastern Connecticut. In addition, the OEC, along with the Departments of Social Services and Children and Families and the Hartford and Grossman Family Foundations is funding a study to determine if an expansion of Triple P using social financing would be feasible.

This summer, we wrapped up our highly successful Help Me Grow campaign, which worked to increase awareness of the critical need for universal developmental screening of children birth to five years of age and linkage of at-risk children to supports and services they need to be ready for school through Community Cafes and free screening events in Bridgeport, Danbury, the Lower Naugatuck Valley, Hartford, Killingly, Putnam, Sterling, Plainfield, Middletown, New Britain, Norwalk and Stamford. As a backdrop to campaign activities, 23 Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) trainings were conducted in campaign communities. As a result, 349 users were trained in the ASQ and more than 800 children were registered with Help Me Grow for ASQ screenings.

The holidays came a little early for the OEC, young children of Connecticut and their families as the US Departments of Education and Health and Human Services announced that the state would be receiving \$12.5 million to expand and improve high-quality preschool in 14 communities throughout the state. The funding is for the first year of a four-year competitive grant to expand high-quality early care and education. Connecticut is one of thirteen states that received an award (and we submitted it early!) With this funding, over 700 Connecticut 4-year-olds will benefit from high-quality education and comprehensive services. Teachers for classrooms of this grant will also benefit from the grant, and will receive enhanced professional development and salaries comparable to K-12 grade teachers. We were also excited to hear that three community-based Connecticut programs will be receiving funding as part of the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grants. Thanks to these grants, nearly 200 infants and toddlers in low-income families will receive high-quality infant-toddler early care and education. We were happy to support these programs in submitting their applications. Congratulations to TEAM, Inc. in Derby and LULAC Head Start and United Way of Greater New Haven in New Haven!

This last year was a great year for children and families in Connecticut. We look ahead to 2015 with excitement and can't wait to see what the new year brings!

Happy holidays!

Commissioner Jones-Taylor

