



Early Childhood Cabinet Adopts Proposals to Better Serve Families with Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

In late October, the Early Childhood Cabinet moved to accept proposals presented by Cabinet co-chair and OEC Commissioner, Myra Jones-Taylor, to better serve families with young children experiencing homelessness.

The proposals were the result of the work of the Cabinet’s subcommittee focusing on families with young children experiencing homelessness. The subcommittee was charged with identifying high-priority policy shifts within state agencies that can better support the needs of families with young children experiencing homelessness. Subcommittee members represented a number of state agencies and community organizations including the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), Departments of Public Health, Social Services (DSS), Education, Housing (DOH) and Children and Families as well as the Interagency Coordinating Council for Birth to Three, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, The Connection, Inc., New Reach, Inc., Education Connection, Community Renewal Team, LULAC Head Start, Inc., Yale Child Study Center and the Connecticut Commission on Children.

The approved proposals highlight three policy areas: health care, early care and education and housing.

- Health care: DSS will explore Medicaid options to introduce an intensive care coordination model and provide evidence-based community and home models with community health workers, intensive care management and care coordination, infant mental health services and

family-oriented mental health services for homeless families, families at-risk of homelessness and recently homeless families.

- Early care and education: The OEC will provide families with young children experiencing homelessness priority access to early care and education.
- Housing: DOH will create a preference for homeless families for turnover units in the state-administered Section 8 program.

In addition, state agencies will collaborate to accomplish the three main policy goals including:

- Identifying and connecting families and their young children experiencing homelessness.
- Training program staff on serving families with young children experiencing homelessness.
- Seeking new sources of funding and realigning existing resources to better serve families with young children experiencing homelessness.

Over the coming months, those who have worked together to create this initial plan will join with the Connecticut Opening Doors campaign to create a Families with Young Children Work Group. This work group will continue the work begun through the Early Childhood Cabinet through a more robust network of resources.

For more information, visit the Cabinet website at www.ctearlychildhood.org.

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Revised Kindergarten Entrance Inventory Pilot Takes Place in 18 Districts Across the State

"It is so exciting to know that we are really rethinking this crucial piece - expectations for our young learners when they enter kindergarten, how we collect this information and then what happens to the information after. The work, thus far, is remarkable. It is comprehensive and professional, yet respectful of and appropriate for our young learners. Being part of this process gave me that same feeling I got from taking college classes - motivated and eager to learn. I believe we are headed in the right direction!" - CT Kindergarten Teacher

The quote above was from one of the 63 teachers involved in the pilot of the Revised Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (Revised KEI) that took place in October across 18 Connecticut school districts. The purpose of the Revised KEI will be to provide information about children's preparedness for kindergarten to schools, communities and the state.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood and the Connecticut State Department of Education are working with the University of Connecticut, as well as several national partners, through an Enhanced Assessment Grant (the states of Maryland and Ohio, West Ed, Johns Hopkins University and the Council of Chief State School Officers) to develop a tool that gathers information about young children during the first weeks of kindergarten.

The teachers involved in the pilot each used a portion of the Revised KEI with several students from their classrooms. They also had the opportunity to review the entire current working version of the Revised KEI. They provided input about each item they reviewed and about the overall use of the tool. Their expertise regarding young children and input on the use of such a tool in kindergarten classrooms will provide valuable information to improve and refine the tool in collaboration with our partners.

The new instrument will be field tested in Fall 2016 and will be available for statewide use in Fall 2017. It is anticipated that the new KEI will provide more useful information for teachers and schools so they can make informed decisions about how to support students in their classrooms and communities. Below is additional information about the purpose and use of this new tool.

Kindergarten Entrance Inventory Purpose

The purpose of the Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (KEI) is to provide information about children's preparedness for kindergarten to schools, communities and the state.

Utility for schools, communities and the state:

- The KEI will establish a common understanding about preparedness for kindergarten.
- Results from the KEI will facilitate cross-sector community conversations with families, educators, pediatricians, librarians, social services, local government and funding agencies.
- Results from the KEI will help prioritize resources for targeted professional development and technical assistance to close preparation gaps.

Utility for kindergarten teachers:

- The KEI is a framework for understanding the early learning and development of kindergarten students across multiple domains.
- The KEI allows teachers to gather and summarize evidence about children's preparedness for kindergarten.
- The KEI is a tool for teachers to engage families about individual children's early learning and development.

The KEI will *not* be designed as a tool for teacher evaluation, program evaluation or to determine an individual child's eligibility for kindergarten.

Kindergarten Entrance Inventory Structure

The KEI will address the domains of Social Foundations, Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Physical Development through a set of selected response items, performance tasks and an observational rubric for teachers.

For more information about the KEI, contact Harriet Feldlaufer at harriet.feldlaufer@ct.gov.

New Preschool Classrooms Open Across State

Thanks to Smart Start and the federal Preschool Development Grant, more than 1,000 preschoolers in communities across the state had the opportunity to attend high-quality preschool this fall.

For more information about the programs, including communities and the number of children served in each community, go to www.ct.gov/oec/smartstart and www.ct.gov/oec/pdg.

HRSA Visits MIECHV Program

On November 5, 2015, our Division of Family Support Services completed a three-day onsite visit from staff and a contractor of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) that funds our Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. As part of their visit, they included a day in Meriden visiting the local community health center that hosts a home visiting program. In Meriden, they also met with other home visiting program staff from across the state.

At the exit conference, HRSA was very complimentary of Connecticut's efforts. The local providers told them the transfer of the program from the Department of Public Health to the Office of Early Childhood was seamless to them and the families they serve. HRSA staff were impressed that the local programs they spoke with make many efforts to refer families to appropriate services when they need something in addition to or other than what the local program can offer.

HRSA staff and the consultants added that they felt Connecticut's fathering home visiting initiative is innovative and an important aspect of the Connecticut program. They also noted that the training offered across all of the evidence-based models to the local program sites is strong. The fiscal portion of the review also went well and HRSA staff were satisfied with the fiscal management and appropriate use of funds. All in all, they concluded the OEC has established a good foundation to move forward with home visiting in Connecticut.

Home Visiting Consortium

The Home Visitation Program Consortium is tasked with advising the Office of Early Childhood, Department of Children and Families, Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Education regarding the implementation of the recommendations for the coordination of home visitation programs within the early childhood system. It was created by Public Act 15-45.

The Consortium has met twice, in July and September. The next meeting is scheduled for December 2, 2015 from 9:30-11:30AM at United Way in Rocky Hill. There will be presentations connected to the topic areas from the Home Visiting Report that was presented to the legislature last year to better inform the Consortium members. Meetings are open to the public and all are welcome to attend.

For more information, visit our website: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?A=4547&Q=568464>.

Early Childhood Information System (ECIS)

The first phase of the Early Childhood Information System (ECIS) is preparing to launch for publicly funded early care and education programs across the state.

To prepare for the launch, the OEC and the State Department of Education (SDE) Bureau of Information Technology held a series of web-based trainings as well as hands-on, computer-based trainings. The trainings were a success with 132 attendees during the web-based trainings and 119 attendees in the hands-on trainings.

All OEC funded programs, including School Readiness, Child Day Care contracts, State Head Start, Smart Start and Preschool Development Grant, are the primary users for this first phase of ECIS with data collection about children enrolled in publicly funded spaces. Data is stored in the ECIS's secure and confidential database. Unique State Assigned Student Identification (SASID) numbers are assigned in the ECIS through the SDE SASID Manager. The SASID Manager was further enhanced as part of ECIS, allowing access to the same tool used by school districts for unique identification numbers to publicly funded community-based early care and education providers.

OEC Legal Office Hits the Ground Running

The new OEC Legal Office, made up of the OEC's Chief Legal Counsel, staff attorney, two paralegals, a health program associate and three office assistants is responsible for providing legal guidance to the agency and handling ongoing agency legal matters. This includes background checks for child care providers and staff and Care4Kids parent appeals. The Office is also in the process of taking over child care licensing enforcement matters.

The new legal team processes the background check applications upon receipt, helping to expedite the process. The fingerprint cards are sent to the Connecticut State Police once a week where it takes

an average of 45 days to return the results. The process may take longer if there is a problem processing the cards (e.g., incorrect fee, unsigned card, etc.). OEC Legal has begun tracking pending background checks for follow up with state police and/or the applicant when a matter is pending too long. If you have questions about background checks, please call (860) 509-8303.

The Legal Office holds approximately nine fair hearings for Care4Kids parent appeals per month. The hearings are requested for a number of reasons including denial of benefits. To improve access, families are given the option of coming to Hartford for the hearing or having their hearing held over the phone.

Strategic Planning Forums Held Statewide This Summer

The OEC hosted six public forums across the state in July and August to seek input from the public on its strategic plan framework. Over 150 stakeholders attended and an online survey was also available to capture written feedback. The feedback collected is driving revisions to the Strategic Planning Framework. The presentation, webinar recording and summary of feedback collected is available on the OEC website at www.ct.gov/oec/strategicplan2015.

Based on public feedback, new legislation and appropriated funds, the OEC will develop the draft of the strategic plan by fleshing out the framework with

additional detail and specific strategies and goals. The OEC will share the draft of the full strategic plan on its website, through webinars and after Early Childhood Cabinet meetings.

The public will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the draft plan through regional public forums to be held in early 2016, an online survey and through comment after Early Childhood Cabinet meetings.

For more information about this project, please contact Mary Farnsworth at mary.farnsworth@ct.gov.

First Cohort of PK-3 Leadership Program Underway; Registration Now Open for Second Cohort

The University of Connecticut, with the support of the Office of Early Childhood, kicked off the first cohort of the PK-3 Leadership Program this summer. The program is set up in a cohort model that will lead to increased knowledge, understanding and practice for leaders so they can make a difference in improving outcomes for children beginning with our youngest learners.

Seventeen participants from all over Connecticut are participating in three modules convened from July 2015 to May 2016. The modules include: PreK-3rd Grade Curriculum and Instruction; Assessment Practices with Young Children and Evaluation of Teachers and Programs; and Leading for Equity,

Excellence and Early Success. Participants include directors of pupil personnel services, community- and public school-based early childhood directors, principals, curriculum directors and assistant superintendents. National and local presenters for the program include: Nita Copley, Kristie Kauerz, Sharon Ritchie, EA Aschenbrenner, Steve Tozer, Claire Cameron, Mary Beth Bruder and many others.

Registration for the second cohort, which begins in July of 2017, is currently open. Information about the program and testimonials from current participants are available at <http://pk3leadership.uconn.edu/>.

Early Childhood Professional Recognition Reception



On Friday, Oct 16, the OEC and CAEYC co-hosted the 2015 Early Childhood Professional Recognition Reception at the Crowne Plaza in Cromwell. The event honored achievements in early childhood.

Honorees included:

- Two newly approved Early Childhood Teacher Credential Higher Education Institutions;
- Over 250 state-funded programs meeting the July 1, 2017 education requirement as recorded on July 1, 2015 for Qualified Staff Members;
- 119 Programs achieving NAEYC and NAFCC Accreditation between October 2014 and September 2015; and
- CTAEYC President Nanci Dower and Board member Sonya Lewis awarded the 2015 Outstanding Teacher honor to Susan Blaskey, a teacher for 29 years at Northwest Children's Center, Cromwell.

The celebration included remarks by OEC Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor.



Celebrating You! Home Visiting Conference

Celebrating You! A Home Visiting Conference brought 450 people working with home visiting programs across Connecticut together on October 22nd. The purpose of the conference was to provide home visiting teams from across the state tools that promote well-being and resilience essential to taking care of themselves while helping to strengthen the families they serve.

From the moment of arrival, this goal was met by guests attending Innovation Stations which provided opportunities to get a quick look at ideas, resources and tools that can be used to nurture self, families and their children.

Following a celebration of home visiting programs and families, guests participated in opportunities to apply theory to practice through compelling speakers and real-time exploration.

This inspired day was concluded with keynote speaker Doug Edwards of Real Dads Forever presenting *Fun to the Max: Get your Internal Landscape Ready*.



Online Birth to Three Referrals Are Now Easier Than Ever

The Connecticut Birth to Three System recently launched two major enhancements to the online referral process based on survey results from more than 100 referral sources, including families. A prominent “Refer a Child Here” button was centrally positioned on the website home page. That button leads the user to new online “smart” forms with three unique versions tailored to the person making the referral and their relationship to the child being referred:

- Parents/Guardians/Foster Parents,
- Department of Children and Families case workers, and
- All others, especially medical providers.

These smart forms limit the information the user is asked to provide to reflect that child and family’s specific situation, thereby decreasing time for completion overall while increasing the value-added information required in certain circumstances.

Anyone with concerns about a young child’s development may refer the family to the Connecticut Birth to Three System. Only the parent or guardian can accept their child’s referral and schedule a free developmental evaluation. If you have concerns about a young child’s development, talk with the parent about your concerns. You may then go to www.birth23.org/referrals for the online and fax forms, or call the child Development Infoline at 1-800-505-7000 (toll-free, TDD, multilingual).



Video Series on Supporting Dramatic Play

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood is pleased to present a series of videos supporting dramatic play in preschool and toddler settings.

In *The Importance of Pretend Play*, an early childhood expert stresses the influence dramatic play has on children’s learning and development across different domains.

Four additional videos, listed below, demonstrate how teachers use their understanding of early childhood development to provide learning opportunities for children across multiple domains through various dramatic play centers. These videos feature preschool and toddler teachers across Connecticut:

- **The Bakery** – Supporting Children to Succeed in the Dramatic Play Center
- **The Train Station** – A Child-Created, Teacher-Facilitated Dramatic Play Center
- **The Garden Center** – A Child-Created, Teacher Modeled Dramatic Play Center
- **We Can Clean, Too!** – Supporting Pretend Play in the Toddler Room

All five videos can be accessed through this link: <http://www1.easternct.edu/cece/supporting-childrens-learning-in-dramatic-play-centers/>

In addition to the videos on dramatic play, videos on fostering essential dispositions in young children were also released and are available at <http://www1.easternct.edu/cece/fostering-essential-dispositions/>.

Closed captioning is available in English and Spanish. While watching the videos, click on “settings” for the option to turn on subtitles in English or Spanish.

These videos were developed by the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University, and support the implementation of the [Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards](http://www1.easternct.edu/cece/fostering-essential-dispositions/).

Work Continues Toward State's Quality Improvement System

As announced this spring, the Office of Early Childhood is excited to launch an integrated quality improvement system to support early care and education programs and professionals in 2016.

An integrated quality improvement system will help the OEC ensure that state dollars are used to achieve efficiencies of scale while meeting the needs of programs throughout the entire state. The system will provide support to programs to meet state and Federal funding, legislative and licensing requirements.

Beginning in FY16, this system will allocate funds to support early care and education providers so they may provide safe, supportive environments for children and families while incorporating best practices in teaching and learning.

To achieve this work, the OEC is partnering with the state's child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R), United Way, to be the agency's operational partner. The OEC will retain responsibility for policy making and approval on key policy areas such as eligibility, content delivered and system goals.

The OEC has entered into this partnership for a number of reasons including:

- Our national expert organization partners studying Quality Rating and Improvement Systems across the country, such as BUILD and Child Trends, have identified building on the infrastructure of the state's CCR&R as a best practice.
- States that have not partnered with their CCR&R have struggled to connect their infrastructure and have created duplicate investments – for example, they don't have access to data when they need it to run their systems effectively and efficiently.
- CCR&Rs have an existing national organization to support them and an established, common role in all states. The states that have built their QRIS

systems around their CCR&R, such as Georgia, have benefitted from the existing investments.

- We are lucky to have United Way of CT as our statewide CCR&R with statewide technology capabilities, efficiencies and effectiveness that surpass most other states. Rachel Schumacher, Director of the federal Office of Child Care, recently toured United Way's facility and was impressed at how far ahead our state's system is compared to many states and noted its exceptional operational capabilities.
- A statewide survey showed that United Way's infrastructure and offerings were used and valued by every setting type (private and publicly funded centers, family child care) statewide with a high rate of satisfaction.

To ensure transparency and public participation, the OEC will establish an ongoing Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) committee to help refine and improve the policies of the system and the quality of support delivered. These CQI committees will include representation from early care and education programs and partners across the state. The CQI will help refine and improve the policies of the system and the quality of support delivered.

For more information about the QIS, visit our website at www.ct.gov/oec/qis or contact Mary Farnsworth at mary.farnsworth@ct.gov.

