



Governor Calls for Universal Access to Pre-K

The biggest news so far this year came during Governor Malloy's State of the State Address when he announced his proposal for universal access to pre-kindergarten in Connecticut. The proposal calls for pre-kindergarten opportunities for 1,020 children for fiscal year 2015, and will expand to serve a total of 4,010 additional children by 2019. The opportunities will be available to low-income children in the state's poorest cities and towns. The call for universal access will provide these children, who would otherwise not be able to attend pre-K, access to a high-quality early learning program. Eligibility will be based on residency and income and will use the existing eligibility requirements for the state's School Readiness program.

The Office of Early Childhood has created a page dedicated to the Governor's proposal. The website provides information about the proposal, how the expansion will be implemented and links to media coverage on the topic. To access the website, go to www.ct.gov/oec/upk.



March 13, 2014 – Governor Malloy visits the First Congregational Church Preschool, a School Readiness Program and the oldest preschool in Bloomfield.

Legislative Update

The 2014 Legislative Session is well underway and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is monitoring several early childhood bills that are making their way through the legislative process. The OEC is closely watching two major Senate bills.

S.B. 25 – An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood would codify the Office of Early Childhood, giving the Office the necessary statutory authority over its various programs. S.B. 26 – An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education would: 1) allow for expansion of School Readiness slots in both Priority and Competitive School Districts and allow for

rate increases, 2) require annual inspections of licensed child care centers and homes, and 3) move youth camp licensing into the OEC. S.B. 26 also requires the OEC to develop a plan for universal access to pre-K. The Education Committee held a public hearing March 3 on both bills and later voted them out of Committee by a 32-0 vote.

S.B. 424, An Act Concerning Access to Preschool Programs for Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families also was voted out of the Education Committee. This bill would require DCF to ensure that all children placed in out-of-home care are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program.

(continued on page 5)

CONTENTS

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	2
CT KINDERGARTEN PROFILE.....	2
FACILITY BOND FUNDS	3
GOVERNOR'S SYMPOSIUM.....	3
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM	3

NARA COMES TO CT	4
WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD 2014	4
DCF, DPH & OEC PARTNER ON WELLNESS	4
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE (continued).....	5
IN CASE YOU MISSED IT	5

Strategic Priorities

The priorities below are systems-building strategies and initiatives identified as the agency's strategic priorities. Many of these priorities cross into the different divisions within the agency. Our vision is to develop systems through coordination and collaboration, resulting in cohesive systems that best serve young children and their families.

Action Priorities: Systems and/or changes that will be implemented

- **Improve the Child Care Licensing System**
 - Act on recommendations from reports and assessments to improve the child care and camp licensing system to keep children healthy and safe in child care and camp settings
- **Create an Early Childhood Information System (ECIS)**
 - A centralized early childhood data system will make it easier to manage and analyze data, resulting in more accurate and useful data, improving programs and policies
- **Public Information Outreach**
 - Provide targeted information to families, providers and communities on the importance of early childhood and resources for accessing early childhood programs, services and supports

Systems-building Priorities: Develop plans that are ready for immediate implementation

- **Create a Universal Screening and Referral System** (already underway)
 - Improved system will lead to children being screened more regularly and earlier identification of those with needs, allowing for earlier intervention and improved outcomes
- **Create a Technical Assistance System** (already underway)
 - Develop and begin implementation of a plan to coordinate all early childhood technical assistance offered in Connecticut to increase the quality of programs and services offered to young children
- **Create a Home Visiting System** (Launch in April)
 - Develop a plan to coordinate home visiting services for families needing additional support and/or services in the home setting
- **Create an Integrated State-Funded Early Care and Education System** (Launch in June)
 - Create a seamless and coordinated birth to 5 system providing high-quality care to young children regardless of the funding source

*Opportunities for input will be included as part of the planning process. Please stay tuned for information.

Nearly 90% of CT Kindergartners in Full-Day

While universal access to pre-kindergarten is a hot topic these days, Connecticut has also made great strides in implementing full-day kindergarten programs. Based on preliminary data from the October 1, 2013 student census from the State Department of Education, approximately 88% of Connecticut kindergartners are enrolled in full-day programs. A full-day kindergarten program provides 900 hours of actual schoolwork for a minimum of 180 days.

The data also showed that 132 school districts, 10 Charter Schools and 14 Magnet Schools provide full-day kindergarten to all children.

To view the 2013-2014 profile of Connecticut kindergarten programs, go to:

www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/profile_of_kindergarten_programs_2013-2014.pdf

Available Bond Funds

Early childhood providers have reported physical barriers to maintaining and achieving quality facilities. Bond funds have been allocated for facility improvements and minor capital repairs to facilities that house School Readiness programs and state-funded day care centers to help address building and site deficiencies, and to promote the health, safety, and learning of children in appropriate environments.

Bond funds for minor capital improvements of child care facilities are distributed via requests for proposals (RFP). Two separate legislative bond fund allocations totaling \$25 million are still available. In late spring of this year, the second RFP for \$10 million will be released. And a third RFP for \$15 million is planned for 2015.

In general, eligible minor capital projects include repair and replacement work and other indoor and outdoor improvements not covered by the State's existing public school construction grant program. Some examples of work which may be considered for grant award include replacement of windows, doors, ceilings and floors, heating and ventilation and building alterations to better align space design with program needs, ensuring greater quality of care for students. Most recently, upgrading wiring for connectivity, and minor addition or minor new construction to convert existing space into classroom space have been added to the list of eligible projects.

Funding priority will continue to be given to programs located outside of public school buildings, projects to correct code violations or to obtain or keep national accreditation, and renovations where a safety concern has been identified. For the upcoming disbursement of funds, minor new construction/addition to convert existing space into classroom space will also receive priority.

Early childhood bond funds are a new and welcome resource in Connecticut. The OEC is planning to offer statewide informational and technical assistance sessions conducted by expert facilitators to assist child care providers in this process. Please visit www.ct.gov/oec for details.

Governor's Pre-K to 3rd Grade Policy Symposium

On Tuesday, April 8 at the Mark Twain House in Hartford, the Office of Early Childhood will be taking part in the Governor's Pre-K to 3rd Grade Policy Symposium. Please note that the event is by invitation only.

The symposium will focus on the new Early Learning and Development Standards for children birth to five years old. The standards, developed by the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet, provide the basis for supporting children's growth and development. More than 100 state and national experts participated in the development process, ensuring a strong and comprehensive set of learning standards. For more information about the Early Learning and Development Standards, go to www.ct.gov/oec/elds. Guest speakers include Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan, Dr. Kristie Kauerz and Dr. Steve Tozer.

Quality Improvement System Underway

We are happy to announce that the Quality Improvement System project is underway. The Quality Improvement System, previously known as the Technical Assistance System, is a component of the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that focuses on improving the quality of child care and early childhood experiences in early childhood settings throughout the state.

The Quality Improvement System is being designed to support program improvement for child care providers. By improving supports and making them more accessible, we hope to help providers improve program quality.

The project is in the beginning stages and as we progress, we look forward to incorporating stakeholder feedback. Visit www.ct.gov/oec/qis for more information.

NARA Comes to Connecticut

In the last newsletter, we let you know about the results of a needs assessment by the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) of the child care licensing program. Based on recommendations in NARA's report, licensing staff participated in on-site training by NARA earlier this March.

The training began with an overview of best practices in the licensing process, including the purpose of licensing, the rulemaking process, the phases of licensing, and types of inspections and measurement tools. Positive and negative enforcement strategies and the evaluation of evidence and decision making were also covered. A significant portion of the training focused on the balanced use of authority for staff.

NARA's recommendations also included the development of a manual of internal policies and procedures for licensing staff. In May, NARA will be providing additional on-site training to staff that will focus on a newly developed manual of internal policies and procedures.

The training provided to licensing staff, as well as other efforts taken in response to NARA's recommendations, will help to strengthen and improve child care licensing in our state. The child care licensing program continues to work closely with NARA to address the recommendations made in NARA's report and make

other improvements.

The Child Day Care and Youth Camp Licensing Programs are currently administered through the Department of Public Health. The two programs are scheduled to transition to the Office of Early Childhood on July 1, 2014 as part of the Governor's initiative to streamline and coordinate early childhood programs in the state.

Week of the Young Child, April 6-12, 2014

This year, the Week of the Young Child will be celebrated around the country from April 6-12, 2014. To celebrate the Week of the Young Child, we have created a website where we will be posting information, including a list of events statewide. Events include art shows, storytelling, parades and much more. You can visit the website at www.ct.gov/oec/woyc2014.



DCF, DPH and OEC Partner on Wellness

Connecticut hopes to receive funds from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for its third LAUNCH Project to increase capacity to support social emotional health and wellness. The new project would strengthen partnerships at the state level and use a public health approach of prevention, early identification and intervention strategies in a more intensive effort in New Haven. The Elm City Project LAUNCH (ECPL) would work through a local Young Child Wellness Council to enhance an early elementary school and a medical home by adding an early childhood mental health specialist and would expand screening activities through pediatric practices. Long-term outcomes for

children birth to age 8 would include improved early access to services, increased coordination of services and increased public awareness about issues impacting wellness in young children.

Connecticut has received two 5-year Project LAUNCH grants in the past. The first was awarded to LEARN in the southeastern corner of the state and resulted in marked strengthening of infant mental health capacity in the state. The second grant, awarded to Wheeler Clinic to focus the New Britain community, is in its third year and has supported Child First services and community-wide training in Circle of Security.

Legislative Update

(Continued from page 1)

The bill allows DCF to determine if enrollment in a preschool program is not in the best interest of the child.

Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor testified in support of the Governor's early childhood bills, along with many early childhood stakeholder organizations.

Myra also testified before the Appropriations Committee March 12 in support of a House and Senate Resolution (S.R. 9 and H.R. 5) that would approve the collective bargaining agreement between the Office of Early Childhood and CSEA-SEIU Local 2001 for licensed family child care providers and unlicensed family, friend and neighbor providers who receive Care4Kids funding. The collective bargaining agreement would raise Care4Kids rates for the first time in 13 years, provide professional development opportunities and offer incentives to increase child care quality. The cumulative 12 percent Care4Kids rate increase over a four-year period for licensed family child care providers would also extend to licensed child care centers. For unlicensed family, friend and neighbor, rates would rise to one-third of the minimum wage by the fourth year of the agreement. Both bills are on the House and Senate floor.

We are also monitoring the state budget process. Myra testified February 24 before the Appropriations Committee in support of the Governor's budget proposal for early childhood. The Governor is calling for universal access to preschool in our poorest communities by 2019, starting with an additional 1,020 School Readiness opportunities for low-income children in 2015. On Thursday, March 27, the Appropriations Committee will release its budget proposal, which will be followed by budget negotiations between the Administration and the Legislature. The legislative session ends midnight Wednesday, May 7.

In Case You Missed It



Early childhood and universal pre-k have been hot topics in the media. Here are some articles and media clips in case you missed them:

March 26, 2014: [New Haven Register Article: Talking to Babies Vital, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Leaders Says at Valley Event](#)

March 12, 2014: [Executive Director, Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor, talks to Sybil Wilkes of the Tom Joyner Morning Show about universal access to pre-K](#)

March 9, 2014: [New Haven Register Article: Greater New Haven educators rejoice over Malloy plan to expand pre-kindergarten services](#)

March 7, 2014: [Governor Dannel P. Malloy and Executive Director, Dr. Myra Jones Taylor, appear on Fox CT Morning News](#)

March 7, 2014: [Article: CTLatinoNews.com: "Early Childhood Bill Could Benefit Many Latino Children"](#)

March 5, 2014: [Hartford Courant Blog: Regulating Child Day Care](#)

February 18, 2014: [Executive Director, Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor, talks to John Dankosky about universal access to pre-K on "Where We Live"](#)

February 7, 2014: [News Clip from WTNH News 8: Governor Malloy Calling for Universal Pre-Schools](#)



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

CONNECTICUT OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

165 Capitol Avenue | Hartford, CT 06106

860-713-6410 | www.ct.gov/oec

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ctoec

Twitter: www.twitter.com/ct_oec