

# EARLY CONNECTIONS:

## News from the Office of Early Learning

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### ~ Letter from Director ~

On February 21<sup>st</sup>, over 400 child care providers, Head Start coordinators and school readiness practitioners from all over Minnesota took (unpaid!) time to convene in Duluth for the Northland Foundation Early Childhood Providers Appreciation and Training Seminar. The event, which I also attended, was a combination of community thank-you, Parent Aware information session and training on intentional practice. Teaching with intention—planning what, when and how to teach—supports a young child’s learning, and is an important technique for adults who work with children.

The Office of Early Learning also uses intentional practice in our decision-making. We often ask ourselves, what is the purpose of this policy? What are the outcomes we would like to see? In addition to *what* we decide, *how* do we come to that decision? How do the choices we make bring people together instead of keep them apart, and help improve the quality of all programs instead of a few? How do our choices keep us focused on our accountability for public resources, and, most importantly, how do they empower families to make their own choices?

At the Early Childhood Providers Appreciation and Training Seminar, a group of child care providers from Itasca County shared the story of the pride they felt when they received their Parent Aware rating, and I was reminded of meeting with them last fall when the road to implementation was still bumpy. I sat, listened intently, honored what they had to say, clarified the intent of Parent Aware ratings and Early Learning Scholarships, and together we created a plan for moving forward. That meeting was intentional practice at its best, and it brought to mind the Bill Gates quote, “Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.”

By working together over the past year, we have made progress, we’ve learned a great deal and we continue moving forward. Building a collaborative community through intentional practice leads to

shared vision, shared responsibility, and shared success, and it is this collaboration that will help us turn the tide of school readiness in Minnesota.

As you may know, Governor Dayton's budget proposal includes investment in young children that is unprecedented in our state's recent history, reaching our littlest learners and their families by increasing the availability of scholarships, tying child care reimbursement rates to program quality and supporting all-day kindergarten. It's a promising vision that honors the truth that Minnesota's future begins and ends with the care and education we provide to our children.

We have a long way to go, but we're on the right path, Minnesota. Let's keep moving forward together.

Onward,

Karen

## ~ Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant ~

### **Transformation Zone Highlight: White Earth**

Race to the Top makes deep investments in four Transformation Zones. These Zones are the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood, Northside Achievement Zone, Itasca County and the White Earth Reservation. Each Transformation Zone is developing unique plans for distributing Early Learning Scholarships to low income families that will allow them to access high quality early learning programs for their child.

The White Earth Early Learning (WEEL) Scholarship Program is available for children six weeks of age through kindergarten entry. Families receiving scholarships, ranging from \$4,000 to \$13,000, will participate in child development education and parent mentoring. The goal is to better equip parents to take an active leadership role in the education of their children. Children will have the opportunity to attend an early learning program that is participating in Parent Aware. For more information on the WEEL Scholarship Program call 218-983-3285 ext. 1385 or 1407, or see their [White Earth Child Care website \(http://www.whiteearthchildcare.com/\)](http://www.whiteearthchildcare.com/).

White Earth, along with the other Transformation Zones, is working with providers, offering training and information, as they become Parent Aware rated. Watch for information specific to other Transformation Zones in future issues of Early Connections.

## ~ Initiatives

### **Parent Aware**

Parent Aware completed its first year of expansion! For child care programs, Parent Aware is now available in 21 counties. Accredited child care providers, Head Start and school-based pre-kindergarten programs remain eligible for a streamlined pathway to a rating that is available statewide. Information on rollout counties and ratings is available on the [Parent Aware website \(http://www.parentawareratings.org/\)](http://www.parentawareratings.org/). In addition, accredited child care providers can call Val Peterson at Child Care Aware of Minnesota at 651-290-9704 x107 and Head Start and school-based preschool

programs can email Mary Owen at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) at [mary.owen@state.mn.us](mailto:mary.owen@state.mn.us).

New in 2013 are additional resources to help early childhood programs prepare for Parent Aware. Made possible by \$500,000 in one-time federal funding through the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), the grants will provide additional low-cost training that meets Parent Aware requirements, and for the purchase of new curriculum and assessment tools available for child care, Head Start and public school pre-kindergarten programs. Look for information soon from your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency.

Parent Aware is led by DHS in coordination with the OEL. The Child Care Resource & Referral system is coordinating local-level implementation. Parent Aware is also supported by a unique partnership with community leaders through Parent Aware for School Readiness and Greater Twin Cities United Way. For more information contact Nara Topp at [nara.topp@state.mn.us](mailto:nara.topp@state.mn.us).

### **Early Childhood Scholarships:**

Early Learning Scholarships are now available for families living in Becker, Blue Earth, Clearwater, Itasca, Pine and Nicollet counties; Wayzata school district; the cities of Duluth, Minneapolis, Saint Paul and Willmar and the White Earth Reservation.

Applications for state-funded Early Learning Scholarships became available in October, and approximately 347 of the 460 available have been awarded to date, with an additional 96 applications being processed. Waiting lists have been started in some areas.

The Transformation Zones anticipate awarding the Race to the Top federally-funded Early Learning scholarships to approximately 1560 children throughout the grant period.

### **~ Prenatal to Three Framework ~**

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), to work with community stakeholders in developing a planning framework for children prenatal to age three. This framework will bring a comprehensive systems approach to the work we do with and for infants, toddlers and their families and help to provide a seamless approach to the programs and services we provide to children birth through age eight. To cheerfully borrow a phrase from the Project for Babies at the University of Minnesota, we are “building power for babies.” This effort began in August 2012 and has included over 60 stakeholders from both public and private agencies. The group has worked to develop a framework that is inclusive of children, families, and communities and introduces core indicators for health, education, and well-being for each group. The first phase of the process, creating the framework, is almost complete and the OEL has won a technical assistance grant from Zero to Three to continue the process. This grant will allow the OEL to move forward in creating strategies for success in moving our indicators and affecting positive outcomes for our youngest children and their families as well as developing engagement strategies for parents, providers and policy makers.

[Building Power for Babies Report](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/cfh/documents/pto3fact.pdf) (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/cfh/documents/pto3fact.pdf>) on the first phase was released this month and work is expected to continue through 2013. For more information contact Megan Waltz at [Megan.Waltz@state.mn.us](mailto:Megan.Waltz@state.mn.us).

## **~ Early Head Start~**

Based on the compelling brain research, federal funds were allocated in 1994 to start Early Head Start programs. Early Head Start provides services for eligible families with very young children and pregnant women to promote child development and family self-sufficiency. The program fosters parent-child interaction and works in partnership with other programs and services including early intervention for infants and toddlers with disabilities, homeless services, comprehensive health and mental-health, child welfare and maternal and child health home visiting. Early Head Start services can be delivered through a home-based model, center-based, or in partnership -including family child care settings. The outcomes for Early Head Start programs are to strengthen parents as the primary nurturers of their children, support and enhance parent-child relationships; and promote children's growth and development.

In Minnesota, there are 18 federally funded Early Head Start programs serving 1,589 children. Minnesota state funds provide services for an additional 593 young children in nine additional program sites. Unfortunately, the number served is less than 25 percent of the babies and toddlers who are eligible to benefit from this evidence-based program. For more information on Early Head Start contact [mde.els@state.mn.us](mailto:mde.els@state.mn.us).

## **~ Minnesota Professional Development Registry Upgrades ~**

The Minnesota Professional Development Registry will play an increasingly visible and critical role in our state's professional development system. Launched in July 2008, the Registry helps practitioners at every level of experience and training establish a pathway to professional growth through a Career Lattice.

Parent Aware is increasing emphasis on professional development for early learning practitioners. To accommodate the expected increase in participation, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and the [Minnesota Center for Professional Development](http://mncpd.org/) (<http://mncpd.org/>) are taking steps to ensure that the Registry has the technical and human resources needed to serve Minnesota's early care and education workforce.

As part of the upgrade, DHS is directing an additional \$300,000 in one-time federal funding to make technical improvements to the Registry, plus hire additional staff, and provide child care providers and other partners with more information about how to use the Registry. DHS is gathering public input from Registry users and community stakeholders to help inform the improvement process. These measures will help the Registry meet the increased demand as more early childhood practitioners use the system to support their professional development. For more information on the Registry please contact Scott Parker at [Scott.J.Parker@state.mn.us](mailto:Scott.J.Parker@state.mn.us).

## ~ Infant and Toddler Intervention~

On September 28, 2011 the new Federal Regulations specific to Part C of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), which provides infant and toddler intervention services, were passed by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). These regulations went into effect on July 1, 2012. Many of the changes had a positive impact for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families, including:

- More opportunities for parents to be made aware of their rights and to consent to activities conducted by the school district. There are also additional requirements related to confidentiality of information.
- Changes to determining the native language of a child and their parents for evaluation and service delivery, including for those who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or for an individual with no written language.
- Process changes related to Part C eligibility determination that reduce time and streamline activities required as a part of the evaluation process.
- Transition process changes as a child moves from Part C infant and toddler intervention services to Early Childhood Special Education.
- Enhanced disclosure requirements. Providers must now give parents copy of each evaluation and assessment of the child, the family-directed assessment, and the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) as soon as possible after each IFSP meeting.

While families have always been an integral part of the child's IFSP team, the new Federal Regulations increase opportunities for and ensure family engagement and informed choice throughout the entire intervention process for their child. For more information on Part C please contact Kara Hall at [Kara.Hall@state.mn.us](mailto:Kara.Hall@state.mn.us).

## ~ Public Health Family Home Visiting~

For over 100 years, nurse home visiting has been a strategy to improve the health and well-being of families. Home visiting is a voluntary maternal and child health intervention, ideally delivered prenatally and often beginning with a comprehensive public health nursing assessment. Evidence-based models such as Healthy Families America and Nurse-Family Partnership targeted to families at risk have been shown to be an effective service strategy for improving outcomes in maternal and child health, family safety, school readiness, and economic stability and self-sufficiency.

MDH provides administrative oversight, training, technical assistance, and collects statewide outcomes and measures of home visiting services delivered at the community level. Under [Minnesota Statute 145A.16](https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=145A.16) (<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=145A.17>) the Minnesota Legislature directs federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding to community health boards and tribal governments for services.

The [Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program \(MIECHV\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/mch/fhv/fedmiech.html) (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/mch/fhv/fedmiech.html>), created by the 2010 Affordable Care Act,

provides unprecedented federal support to expand the reach of evidence-based home visiting programs to Minnesota's highest risk communities and to enhance connections with other early childhood services and systems.

The MDH [Family Home Visiting Committee](#),

(<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/mchatf/FamilyHomeVisitingCommittee.html>) a multi-stakeholder work group of the Maternal and Child Health Advisory Task Force, will complete its charge this spring by providing guidance to the Commissioner of Health regarding the expansion and integration of evidence-based public health home visiting programs in Minnesota's health and early childhood systems. For more information on Home Visiting please contact Candace Kragthorpe, [Candace.Kragthorpe@state.mn.us](mailto:Candace.Kragthorpe@state.mn.us), or Mary Jo Chippendale, [MaryJo.Chippendale@state.mn.us](mailto:MaryJo.Chippendale@state.mn.us).

## ~ Stay Connected ~

Stay connected to events and happenings of the Office of Early Learning by subscribing to the Early Learning page on the MDE website. Receive notification when a new edition of Early Connections is posted. If you have ideas for future newsletters or questions contact: [mde.els@state.mn.us](mailto:mde.els@state.mn.us).

For more information about the Office of Early Learning, contact Karen Cadigan at [karen.cadigan@state.mn.us](mailto:karen.cadigan@state.mn.us).

**Minnesota** Department of  
**Education**

