



## Message from the Director

Spring brings so many opportunities for us to renew our spirit, health, and commitment to young children and their families. We hope that this spring brings you a sense of renewal and achievement for all you have accomplished during this pandemic.

In April, DIEEC is renewing its commitment to young children by celebrating the 50th Anniversary of "The Week of the Young Child," an initiative of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). "The Week of the Young Child" is a time for us to celebrate the joy of childhood and engage a broader audience on the importance of this unique developmental period of early childhood.

DIEEC is sponsoring a series of events in recognition of this week. First, we are launching a social media campaign with dedicated daily themes about the importance of the first years of life. We also will present a screening of the documentary, "No Small Matter," the first feature documentary on the power of early childhood education. As part of the screening, DIEEC will present a statewide panel on the documentary and its implications for Delaware's efforts to build an equitable early childhood system in our state. There is still time to register for this film screening and panel discussion. Please click [here](https://udel.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_dgwUL43hQK-o31zVr5FR4w) ([https://udel.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_dgwUL43hQK-o31zVr5FR4w](https://udel.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_dgwUL43hQK-o31zVr5FR4w)) to be a part of this critical discussion.

In this month's REACH, you will also find inspiration from Kid's Cottage in Rehoboth and a range of professional development opportunities. We hope you find these helpful and we look forward to your engagement.

Happy Spring!

Rena Hallam  
DIEEC Director



## **Kid's Cottage Not Missing "A Beat" During the Pandemic**

If you are driving north on Route 1 coming out of Rehoboth, if you look to the right, you'll see a billboard that says, "You Never Missed a Beat, Thank you, Team KC."

According to Sheri Mark, Director of Operations at Kids Cottage, an Early Childhood Center in Rehoboth, this public thank you is one way to express gratitude to a staff that went "above and beyond" to serve Sussex County's children during the pandemic.

When Sheri reflects on the year, she keeps coming back to her motivated staff, who, from the beginning of COVID 19, rallied in many ways, adopting the hashtag #KCstrong.

Kids Cottage operated as an emergency child care site in March and April to serve essential personnel's children. The typically thriving center with more than 100 children went to two classrooms with 17 children in a matter of days.

In addition to thinking, "what do we do?" as the world came to a halt, Sheri and the owners of Kids Cottage thought, "how can we help?" Kids Cottage proactively reached out to Beebe Hospital and different local emergency personnel to offer spots at their center, so they could continue to work during quarantine. As a result, many of the children at Kids Cottage during the early days of COVID were new.

The staff, which was reduced by half, didn't "miss a beat" and got the students quickly acclimated, so they felt comfortable and safe in their new setting.

"Our staff stuck by us to meet every challenge," said Sheri. "They took on whatever was required to welcome back children and keep them safe."

"They helped us paint rooms, clean, all while making sure they were pursuing their professional development training. Most importantly, they modeled normalcy for our children, so they weren't afraid."

These efforts to maintain a sense of normalcy also included each employee wearing a badge with their photo so the kids could see their faces.

Relationships are at the center of every strategy Sheri used to operate successfully—from encouraging her dedicated staff to the relationships she formed with other directors by attending Stars Community of Practices.

Alyssa Stein, Stars Technical Assistant, especially noted Sheri's leadership with other programs. "Sheri also volunteered to help other providers that were closed as they reopened, talking through procedures and answering questions in other CoP meetings," said Alyssa.

"COVID was challenging in so many ways, but I am thankful for the opportunities we had to get on calls with our colleagues," said Sheri. "Supporting each other helped ease the fear of adopting new guidelines to continue to stay open. I hope those relationships continue post-pandemic"



## NEWS & UPDATES



**Meet Meg McClary  
DIEEC Outreach Coordinator**

In January, Meg McClary joined DIEEC as outreach coordinator. In this role, Meg will develop and implement DIEEC's outreach



### Capacity Grant Update

Children & Families First, in conjunction with the Department of Education, is pleased to announce the next application round for Capacity Grant awards. The application round opened on **Monday**,



and recruitment efforts for Delaware's early childhood community.

Meg brings a wealth of experience in early childhood. She's been a part of the community for more than 20 years, holding various roles. Most recently, she was the director of an early childhood education program in Maryland that focused on children with learning differences, where she gained great experience in early childhood special education, a true passion for her.

Additionally, Meg's school was a part of Maryland Excels, so she has experience working in a quality framework. She also had her hand in professional development for her staff by supervising teacher's credentialing. Finally, Meg is an adjunct instructor for Chesapeake College where she developed courses for continuing early childhood education.

You may have already met Meg, virtually, but she looks forward to meeting more of you in person, post pandemic. In the meantime, don't hesitate to reach out to [Meg](mailto:mmcclary@udel.edu) ([mmcclary@udel.edu](mailto:mmcclary@udel.edu)) or call her at 302-354-8904.

**March 15, 2021.** The deadline for applications is **noon on Friday, April 16, 2021.**

The Capacity Grant is available to qualifying, licensed early childhood education programs throughout Delaware. Programs must be enrolled in Delaware Stars or Bridge to Stars and engaged in quality improvement efforts.

The grant funding is intended to provide resources to enhance early childhood education programs and expand the supply of child care in targeted funding categories.

Programs are encouraged to begin working with a Capacity Grant Technical Assistant before the application deadline. Eligibility requirements, guidelines, and the application materials are located on the Children & Families First [website](https://www.cffde.org/capacity-grant).  
<https://www.cffde.org/capacity-grant>

Contact [Andrea Prettyman](mailto:andrea.prettyman@cffde.org), [andrea.prettyman@cffde.org](mailto:andrea.prettyman@cffde.org), the Capacity Grant Program Manager, or call 302-233-6475 with questions and to arrange technical assistance.

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### **New Research Report "Increasing Child Care Quality in Delaware: Recommendations from the Cost of Quality Care Study"**

Recently a cost of quality care study was conducted to help the state with identifying the key components of early childhood quality and the associated cost estimates.

DIEEC's research team took these findings a step further to address, "How Can the Findings Be Put Into Action?"

This [report](#) (attached at the end of this publication) looks at the implications for Delaware's policies and practices and recommendations



### **Dawn Alexander, Speaker ASQ Innovators Webinar Series**

Dawn Alexander, preschool coordinator, Colonial Early Education Program, is participating in this series that highlights the successes and solutions of ASQ users.

Dawn's topic is "Optimizing Child Find Efforts in a Community with ASQ Online."

The series is free. For more registration information, please click [here](https://bit.ly/2R1etjI).  
<https://bit.ly/2R1etjI>



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS

## Professional Development Offerings

We've included professional development opportunities on our April calendar that include new offerings and some of the highly rated trainings.

In particular, we are offering a new training:

### **"Programming for Infant Toddler Care: Primary Care Giving and Continuity of Care"**

Participants will take an in-depth look at these two elements of programming in infant/toddler care. After developing an understanding these two elements, you will learn how they are beneficial, and how to implement them in programs.

Also, be sure to check out this popular training:

### **"Connecting with Children Through Their Love Language"**

Knowing a child's love language can help you foster a relationship with a child that helps them know they are loved. During this workshop, you will explore the five love languages: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service and Physical Touch. You will identify ways to determine a child's primary language and explore ways to reach children in a way that best meets their needs.

Check out the complete calendar and register by clicking here.

<https://dieecpd.org/registry/calendar>

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# Increasing Child Care Quality in Delaware: Recommendations from the Cost of Quality Care Study



By: Gerilyn Slicker, Christina Joe, & Jason T. Hustedt

March 2021



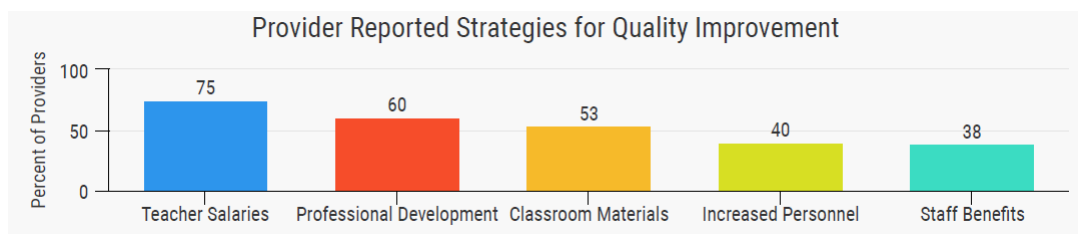
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# Introduction to the Cost of Quality Care Study

The Cost of Quality Care Study (Ernst & Young, 2020), funded by Delaware's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) award in 2018, was conducted to assist the State of Delaware with identifying the key components of early childhood quality and estimate the cost of care and operations for child care providers across the State. The cost of quality study uses a cost-based approach which relied on interviews and surveys of providers in Delaware to estimate a base case cost reflective of a baseline number of children served and staff employed separated by provider type and the ages of the children enrolled. Data comes from 146 providers across all program types (64% center-based, 36% home-based) and counties in the State. 36% of respondents participated in Delaware Stars for Early Success, the state's quality rating and improvement system. The report identified key components of early childhood quality, from the perspective of providers. It also gathered input pertaining to the costs and needs of providers associated with providing quality care, in the context of revisions to Delaware Stars.

## Key Findings

The Cost of Quality Care Study modeled out scenarios to enhance the quality of programs, but each scenario is a substantial and costly undertaking. Given limited availability of funds, the most important needs for providers and the options that are most related to quality experiences for young children must be prioritized. The graph below depicts provider responses from the statewide survey that are most related to quality improvement identified in the statewide survey. In addition to the suggestions summarized from providers by Ernst and Young (2020) such as increased teacher salaries and additional personnel, providers cited increased professional development and classroom materials as areas for which to invest to increase program quality of care. When asked the same set of questions specifically *about serving children receiving Purchase of Care*, increased teacher salaries (66%), class materials (58%), and increased personnel (44%) were among the most commonly cited provider needs. Somewhat different proportions emerged when providers reported areas of investment to *increase their program's quality for children with special needs*, with professional development topping the list (69%) followed by classroom materials (58%), increased personnel (50%), and increased teacher salaries (48%).



The report identified three primary ways that providers can improve their quality standards, based on the cost analysis and recommendations of program administrators. Two of the suggestions are around attracting and retaining a quality ECE workforce, namely increasing salaries and the inclusion of all benefits (health, dental, workers compensation) for full-time employees. A third suggestion is to increase the total personnel dedicated to serving ECE providers.

### PDG B-5 Cost of Quality Care Study's Possible Models for Increasing Quality



**Increase salaries:** Specifically, models of salaries based on Delaware K-12 salaries and a midpoint to K-12 parity were presented alongside the baseline salary in Delaware ECE programs and a high salary case (based on 75% of salaries in 5-star rated programs) to model ways to increase salaries.



**Inclusion of all benefits:** Full-time employees should have access to health, dental, and workers compensation benefits.



**Increase personnel:** The provider survey and interviews revealed a need for more personnel to improve the standard of quality in programs with a goal of reducing the burden on existing teachers and helping children with social adjustments.

# Implications for Delaware Policy & Practices

Results from the Cost of Quality Care study in Delaware raise a need for further consideration of the best ways to support the ECE workforce. As a next step, how can the findings be put into action? We have identified three major sets of topics to be addressed in future policy discussions and potentially incorporated into the revision of Delaware Stars. Delaware should consider these questions below when prioritizing strategies and allocating funds. This will help in determining the most cost-effective and meaningful services and incentives in which to invest.



## Attracting & Retaining a High Quality ECE Workforce

- What level of salary increase would be linked with higher retention rates for Delaware's ECE workforce, especially highly qualified staff?
- What types of benefits are cited as highest need? Which benefits would be associated with higher staff retention rates?



## Personnel Expansion

- Which types of personnel (e.g., more teachers, support staff) should be prioritized to enhance workforce productivity and the overall quality of ECE programs in Delaware?
- Using a shared services approach, how can the state help providers that need additional personnel to increase overall program quality? How can ECE providers benefit from sharing staff such as social workers with other child care programs in order to offer similar specialized family support services across different providers?



## Using Existing and/or Expanded Delaware Stars Services to Better Support ECE Programs & Staff

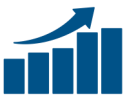
- How can Delaware Stars be revised to help build the administrative capacity of programs to address the key quality issues identified in the survey?
- In addition to increasing staff qualifications, what additional professional development, training, and coaching/mentoring opportunities are needed to further improve program quality? How are these supports related to recruiting and retaining qualified staff?
- How can the financial incentives linked to Delaware Stars be restructured to assist program administrators in addressing quality improvement?



# Recommendations

Based on the findings of the Cost of Quality Care Study, we propose several recommendations.

These recommendations can be carried out in a variety of ways by the state of Delaware. Although the recommendations apply to all programs in the State, some specifically relate to mechanisms and funding available through Delaware Stars.



## Collect More Data

More research is needed to determine what financial and other programmatic incentives, when made available to Delaware providers, can improve child care program quality. Specifically, when funds are limited, which incentives (e.g., increased salaries, access to full benefits, offering family support services, etc.) are the most meaningful to providers? More data can also be collected to identify the types of personnel (e.g. social workers, specialists) that would be most impactful for providers.



## Restructure Financing of Early Care & Education

Financial incentives can be restructured by increasing existing subsidy and tiered reimbursement payment rates, and by expanding availability of grants to support quality programming. The funds must be used toward research-identified quality-related services, including increasing salaries for the workforce, increasing benefits for staff, and/or hiring additional support staff.

- **Subsidy:** Subsidy reimbursement rates for all providers should be increased to reflect the cost of quality care.
- **Tiered Reimbursement:** Modifications to the existing tiered reimbursement system can include increased reimbursement rates or allowing all enrolled providers to be eligible for higher reimbursement rates, regardless of Star level.
- **Quality Improvement Grants:** Eligible providers can apply for an annual quality improvement grant to be used at their discretion to enhance their program's quality of care. Providers would specify the aspects of quality that would be addressed in their grant applications.
- **Capacity Grants:** Providers meeting specified criteria can continue to apply for existing capacity grants to be used specifically for items such as research-supported curriculum materials, and funds can be dedicated to expand the reach of the capacity grants.



## Develop State-Sponsored Shared Service Models to Assist Child Care Providers in Delivering High Quality Care

Increased awareness of existing Delaware Stars supports and services among providers should be prioritized. Exploration of the use of state-sponsored hubs or shared service models should also occur. For example, Delaware Stars or another state partner can assist with the provision of shared family support services or specialists. Under a shared service model, the State would take on the cost of hiring a specialist or providing family support services to be used across multiple programs, providing an essential support for providers without negatively impacting programs' bottom line. In addition, there is a need to explore how Delaware Stars can provide specialized professional development and technical assistance to meet the unique needs of providers that would improve quality in a cost-effective way.

## About the Authors:

**Gerilyn Slicker:** Gerilyn is currently a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Delaware and a Research Assistant at the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood. Gerilyn's research interests are in early childhood policy, with specific focus on investigating and evaluating the influence of federal, state, and local policies on children's experiences with early care and education. Previously, Gerilyn taught preschool and served as a Head Start director and education leader.

**Christina Joe:** Christina is an Ed.D. student at the School of Education at the University of Delaware and is a Research Associate at the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood. Her interests are in quality improvement, with a focus on school age childcare. Christina has taught preschool, served as School Age Child Care director, technical assistant, and Early Childhood Program Coordinator.

**Jason T. Hustedt:** Jason Hustedt is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Delaware and serves as Research Director for the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood. His research involves three main topics: (1.) parent-child interactions in low-income families with infants and young children, (2.) school readiness and the outcomes associated with early childhood programs, and (3.) research on state and federal early childhood policies. His teaching at UD focuses primarily on child and family policy issues and on research methodology.

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