

## Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

# REACH

A newsletter for early childhood education professionals

Dear Early Childhood Professionals,

Welcome to the March edition of REACH! Spring is a time of growth and renewal, and at DIEEC, we're embracing that spirit by offering you a variety of ways to enhance your professional journey.

We're thrilled to announce that nominations for the DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards are now open! This is your chance to recognize and celebrate the outstanding contributions of early childhood educators. We're also excited to bring back the Physical Activity Learning Sessions (PALS), a professional learning experience that will equip you with the tools to integrate active play into your daily routines.

This month's newsletter also features a Provider Spotlight on family child care educator Sharon McPhatter, whose dedication at Happyland Childcare is truly inspiring. And be sure to check out our Coach's Corner for insights on enhancing dramatic play in your settings.

At DIEEC, we understand the importance of staying connected and informed, which is why we're pleased to announce new open office hours for center-based programs. Finally, I'm particularly excited about the kickoff of this year's Early Childhood Educator Leadership Board. Your voices matter to us, and we're grateful for the opportunity to listen to and incorporate educators' perspectives into the work we do every day.

With warm regards,

Kristy Sheffler  
Interim Co-Director, DIEEC

# DIEEC Action Items



## DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards

Nominations for the DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards are open! If you know someone who goes above and beyond in providing high-quality care and education, this is your chance to recognize their dedication and hard work. You can nominate yourself or someone you know who exemplifies the best in early childhood education.

Visit our [DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards](#) page to make a nomination or learn more!

*DIEEC Outreach Manager Meg McClary, center, with the 2024 Educator of the Year winners and runners-up. From left, Mary Waters, Stacy Morgan, Meg McClary, Caitlin Gibbons and Meghan Eudy. Photo credit: Courtney Foster/DIEEC.*

## Spark Your Children's Love for Active Play

The Physical Activity Learning Sessions (PALS) professional learning experience (PLE) is back! This hybrid multi-session PLE will show you how to incorporate physical activity throughout the day, with playful routines and engaging activities. You'll be empowered to design enriching physical experiences tailored to the children in your program. Participants receive a duffle bag full of materials to support active play in their own programs! Register now for our [PALS experience starting in April 2025](#).



*The PALS PLE focuses on physical activity in early childhood settings. (iStock image)*



*iStock image*

## Zero to Three Cohort- Don't Miss Out!

We have just ONE spot left in our upcoming Zero to Three Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators cohort! Don't miss this opportunity to provide your infant-toddler educators with the professional development, resources, and support they need to help children in their care thrive. The program includes:

- 14 professional development hours,
- a book bundle,
- CLASS observation,
- and professional development sessions.

Learn more on our Professional Learning Experience webpage. Interested? Act soon by emailing [ecinstitute@udel.edu](mailto:ecinstitute@udel.edu).

## Office Hours: DIEEC is Here for YOU

Did you know that DIEEC has open, virtual office hours for family child care educators and center-based programs? These are in addition to any office hours that your Quality Improvement Specialist may hold. We can provide technical assistance and help get your questions answered. No appointment needed- just drop in. Open office hours are listed on [DIEEC's public calendar](#)- click on the event title and use the Zoom link to join.



Have questions? Drop in; no appointment is needed. (iStock image)

### March office hours for FCC educators

**Tues. March 4**, from  
1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

**Wed. March 19**, from  
1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

### March office hours for center-based educators

**Tue. March 11**, from  
10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

**Wed. March 26**, from  
1:00 to 2:00 p.m.



Members of DIEEC's Early Childhood Educator Leadership Board meet in Dover, February 22. Photo credit: Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC.

## DIEEC Early Childhood Educator Leadership Board - Kickoff Success

Our Early Childhood Educator Leadership Board kicked off its second year with an in-person meeting of new and returning board members. The board represents a cross-section of Delaware's early childhood community, including center-based and family child care educators; new and experienced educators; program administrators; and representation from all three counties in Delaware. The board is one way that DIEEC strives to include educator voices in all that we do, and we're excited to learn from this diverse and outstanding group of educators.



## Provider Spotlight: Sharon McPhatter

Discover how Sharon McPhatter, who originally started her family child care program to meet her own family's needs, built Happyland Childcare into a successful home-based program, and [learn some of her strategies for growth and engagement here](#).

Sharon McPhatter is a family child care professional and owner of Happyland Childcare. Photo credit: Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC



Dramatic play provides a range of learning and development opportunities for children. (iStock image)

## Coach's Corner - Community Partnerships

A thoughtfully planned dramatic play area supports opportunities for children to try out new language and vocabulary, develop social skills, improve motor skills, and be creative. And, because dramatic play offers so many growth opportunities, we want ALL children to participate. [Check out Coach Meghan Pallante's tips for making the most of dramatic play in your program!](#)

## Meeting the Needs of All Children

How do you know what each child needs? By building a strong relationship and really knowing each child individually. This 2-minute video is a wonderful example of individualizing to build fine motor skills, while the child takes the the lead through play.

[YouTube Video: THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS | Quality Teaching is No Small Matter](#)



## Coming Soon: A Refreshed New Website

We're excited to share that [www.dieec.udel.edu](http://www.dieec.udel.edu) is getting a facelift! The site will have a new look, and it will be easier for you to find what you need. All information and resources related to DIEEC's role in supporting Delaware's Quality Improvement System will now be gathered in one convenient location on the site.

We're also adding a brand-new Resource Hub! This carefully curated collection features reviewed materials from trusted sources. Whether you're looking for tools to enhance your practice or new ideas to inspire your work, the Resource Hub will be there to help. Stay tuned for the launch date of our new and improved site!

## DIEEC Public Calendar

DIEEC's public calendar is a great way to keep up with what's happening in the early childhood community. Upcoming events are listed on the bottom left side of our [DIEEC homepage](#), and you can also click through to the [full calendar](#). Click on an event name to get all the details: who, what, when, where and how to join in!

# News from Our Partners

## ECLKC has Moved!

ECLKC has moved to a new address at [www.HeadStart.gov](http://www.HeadStart.gov). Same great resources, new location. If you have a login and/or saved items on the ECLKC site, you will NOT need to create new credentials on the new site- everything will transfer over. Questions? Check the [Transition to HeadStart.gov FAQs](#) page.

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## Quality Improvement Planning

If you are working on a Quality Improvement Award application, be sure that you are referring to the most recent version of the [Program and Policy Guide](#). On page 2 of the guide, you will find a summary of the most recent updates made by the Delaware Department of Education.

### FY25 Quality Improvement (QI) Award Deadline

The final application deadline for the FY25 QI Award is March 15, 2025. If you are planning to apply by March 15, you should already be working with a DIEEC Quality Improvement (QI) Specialist on a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

QI Specialists are available to support programs in their quality improvement journey regardless of their intent to apply for a QI Award. For more information on the QI process, working with a QI Specialist, or applying for an award, please refer to the [Program and Policy Guide for Delaware's Quality Improvement System for Early Care and Education Programs](#).

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### Quality Improvement Resource Highlight

Each month, we share resources that Delaware program leaders can use to support themselves and their staff as they work towards higher levels of quality.

This month, we're offering resources that focus on 'serve and return.' 'Serve and return' is the back-and-forth interaction between a caregiver and a child. The child initiates an interaction, the 'serve,' and the caregiver responds with a 'return.' These meaningful, responsive interactions foster positive connections between children and their caregivers and support healthy brain development.

- **A Guide to Serve & Return**, from The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, includes a variety of resources, including a **podcast episode** and a **handout** that summarizes the five simple steps to a successful ‘serve and return’ interaction.
  - Here’s a **short video** that illustrates the handout mentioned above.
- The Head Start brief, **You’re the Best Teacher! Responsive Interactions with Young Children**, explains how adults’ responsive social interaction is key to children’s early learning.

Your Quality Improvement Specialist can assist you in selecting the most suitable resources for your Quality Improvement Plan.

If you have a resource to share or something that you’re doing in your program that we can highlight, we’d love to hear about it! Submit your ideas to [ecinstitute@udel.edu](mailto:ecinstitute@udel.edu) to be included in a future edition of REACH.

## DIEEC Professional Learning Experiences (PLEs)

### Upcoming Free PLE Opportunities with DIEEC

DIEEC’s professional learning experiences (PLEs) are available at no cost to you. You can browse and register for a variety of PLEs on the [DIEEC professional learning experience calendar](#). Check out these upcoming offerings:

#### Virtual-Live and Hybrid Professional Learning Experiences

Title	Hours	Level	Start Date
<a href="#">Relationship-based Care for Infants and Toddlers for Family Child Care Professionals- PLUS</a>	8	Introductory	March 10
<a href="#">Sing, Dance &amp; Stomp</a>	4	Introductory	March 10
<a href="#">Giving Care to the Caregiver for Family Child Care Professionals</a>	5	Introductory	March 10
<a href="#">Implementing Teaching Strategies Gold</a>	7	Intermediate	March 11
<a href="#">A Series of Conversations for Family Child Care Networks: Understanding Head Start Program Performance Standards- Administrative Requirements</a>	3	Intermediate	March 11
<a href="#">The Right Fit: Recruiting and Selecting Staff PLUS</a>	8	Intermediate	March 18
<a href="#">A Series of Conversations for Family Child Care Networks: Understanding Head Start Program Performance Standards- Enrollment and Eligibility</a>	3	Intermediate	March 19

Title	Hours	Level	Start Date
<a href="#">Creating a Cost-Effective Outdoor Learning Environment for FCC Educators PLUS</a>	6	Introductory	March 20
<a href="#">Understanding Children’s Behavior as Communication for Family Child Care Professionals PLUS</a>	8	Introductory	March 22
<a href="#">Giving Care to the Caregiver for Family Child Care Professionals</a>	5	Introductory	March 10
<a href="#">Aprendizaje Sensorial: Bebés, Niños Pequeños y Más Allá</a>	4	Introductory	March 25
<a href="#">The Leader’s Role in Building Authentic Community Engagement PLUS</a>	8	Intermediate	April 1
<a href="#">Every Day Math</a>	10	Intermediate	April 7
<a href="#">5 Strategies for a Happy and Healthy Classroom (live)</a>	3	Introductory	April 7
<a href="#">How to Read a Book to Young Children: Microlearning Deep Dive with Coaching PLUS</a>	4	Introductory	April 8
<a href="#">Advanced Assessment for Teachers: Purposeful Planning PLUS</a>	10	Advanced	April 8
<a href="#">Strengthening Business Practices: Staff Recruitment and Retention for Center-Based Administrators and Large Family Child Care Providers PLUS</a>	7	Introductory	April 8

### Virtual-Live and Hybrid Professional Learning Experiences

All of the PLEs listed below open on April 1. Click on each PLE name to learn more.

- [The Role of Play in Any Setting](#)
- [Community Resources in Early Care](#)
- [Self-Regulation and Play](#)
- [Leadership: Promoting Safety, Trust, and Cooperation](#)
- [6 Pillars of Character Building for School Age Children](#)
- [School Age: Building Community with Partner Schools](#)

## How to Access Former DEPDNow Trainings

Three of the former DEPDNow trainings can be accessed through DIEEC using an online platform called Canvas. Please note that the timing for this process has changed—you'll now need to allow up to 48 hours between registering for a course and beginning it. We appreciate your patience as we all navigate this new process together.

Steps to get started:

1. Register for a course
  - [Health & Safety Training for Child Care Professionals](#)
  - [Administration of Medication Certification](#)
  - [Maintaining Equity in Early Childhood: Suspension / Expulsion Prevention](#)
2. Within 24 hours, you will receive an email titled “UD Guest Account Invitation” from [ziadagir@udel.edu](mailto:ziadagir@udel.edu). Follow the instructions in the email to set up your account.
  - Video tutorial: [Creating Your Canvas Account](#)
3. Within 24 hours after setting up your account, you will receive an email titled “Course Invitation” from Instructure Canvas. Click the “Get Started” button in this email to log in to Canvas and begin your course.

Additional courses. The Office of Early Learning (OEL) has prepared a chart to guide you in accessing trainings similar to the others formerly available through DEPDNow. These can be accessed through the Office of Head Start’s [Individualized Professional Development \(iPD\) Portfolio](#).