

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

REACH

A newsletter for early childhood education professionals

Dear Early Childhood Professionals,

The growing season for many crops may be coming to an end as we move into autumn, but at DIEEC, opportunities for growth are going strong. Perhaps you've been thinking about returning to school for a degree; you can find information on scholarship options in this month's issue. You can use our Coach's Corner tips at the start of this new school year to prevent burnout before it even begins. You can also explore the power of a great read-aloud during Children's Book Week, or expand your professional network by signing up for our 1st State Family Child Care Conference. You can even literally "grow" with us in the next cohort of our Let's GROW Outside! initiative!

We invite you to explore the opportunities here and to engage with our team. Thank you for all you do- we look forward to partnering with you this fall!

With warm regards,

Kristy Sheffler
Interim Co-Director, DIEEC

DIEEC Action Items

1st State Family Child Care Conference- Final Week of Registration!

Join us at the Clayton Hall Conference Center in Newark for a day of connection and community, and go home with fresh ideas and strategies for your program! Don't miss out- registration closes on Friday, September 12. Visit our conference web page to learn more and register.

[Secure your spot today!](#)



Let's GROW Outside! - Applications Open September 15

DIEEC's Let's GROW Outside! initiative teaches professionals about the possibilities provided through outdoor gardening with young children and provides a grant-funded opportunity to make your own edible garden come to life.

The next Let's GROW Outside! cohort will begin this fall, supporting a new group of programs that want to make outdoor gardening with children a reality!

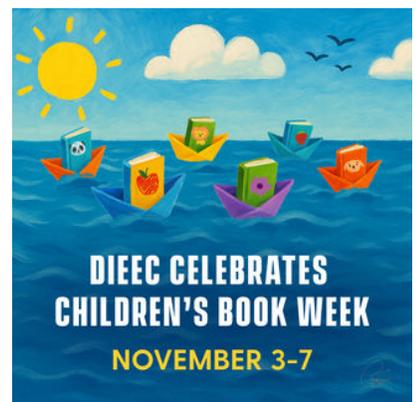
Applications will open September 15, 2025.

[Check out our webpage](#) for application information starting September 15, and learn more about the experience of our first-ever Let's Grow Outside! cohort in our article [Harvesting Success: Celebrating the First Year of Let's GROW Outside!](#)



Children's Book Week: Register Now for Our Guest Reader Initiative

Children's Book Week will take place from November 3-7 this year, and we hope you're ready to join the celebration! This year, we've focused on finding great read-alouds to share with programs. Reading aloud is one of the most important things we can do with children: it boosts critical literacy skills while also building a lifelong love of reading.



DIEEC has another raffle opportunity for you! Read this month's Coach's Corner article about room arrangement (above). Then, [answer our survey question](#) and tell us which tip or idea you plan to use in your own space! You'll be entered to win one of two book bundles!

There are two ways you can celebrate Children's Book Week with DIEEC:

1. [Sign up to have a guest reader visit your program](#) and read to your children. You'll keep the books they bring for your library!
2. In the October issue of REACH, we'll tell you how to participate in a brand new way: by sharing YOUR favorite read-aloud books with us. We'll compile a list of the book titles as a resource for early childhood professionals.

DIEEC News

Provider Spotlight: Kena Trader, Bizzy Bee's Child Care

In our latest provider spotlight, we share the journey of family child care educator Kena Trader as she balanced running her "Bizzy Bee's Child Care" program while pursuing her associate's degree in Applied Science in Early Childhood Development at Delaware Technical and Community College. Her story illustrates the combined power of individual perseverance and community support in making a difference for both Kena and the families she serves.

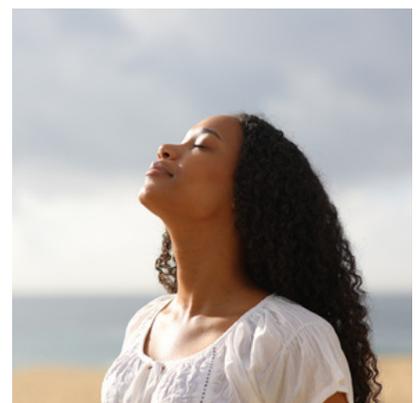
[Read about Kena's journey here.](#)



"The decision to pursue a degree was easy- early childhood education is Kena's passion" - (Image by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC)

Coach's Corner: Preventing Burnout

Working with young children can be incredibly fulfilling, but it also includes long (and sometimes challenging) days. One of the best things educators can do regarding burnout is to be proactive! [In this month's Coach's Corner](#), Meghan Pallante shares self-care strategies you can incorporate into your daily or weekly routines.



(Image: iStock)

Monthly Raffle for Early Childhood Educators

We have another exciting raffle for you!

After you've read this month's Coach's Corner, answer our quick survey question about which of Meghan's strategies for preventing burnout you want to try.

You'll be entered to win one of two fantastic book bundles to refresh your classroom library! We'll randomly draw one family child care educator and one center-based educator; winners will be announced in the October issue of REACH. [Start the survey here to enter.](#)



Our **August raffle winners** were **Belinda Cannon** and **Savanah McKee**.

Congratulations! 🎉 We'll reach out soon to get your prizes to you.

Meeting the Needs of All Children

Do you ever hear comments like these in the course of your everyday interactions?

"You're so lame." "So-and-so is crazy." "You're so articulate," as a compliment to a person of color. "I don't see color."

These comments can be characterized as microaggressions: subtle, often unintentional slights that communicate a negative message to people based on their identity. Comments like the ones above are just a few examples among many that can be invalidating or offensive. While a single comment may seem minor, the cumulative effect can be significant, leading to stress and a sense of being "othered." By understanding their potential impact, we can all contribute to a more inclusive environment.

You can learn more by watching this brief video, which portrays the significant influence others can have on a child's life: [Is It Me? The Story of Jacob and Jazz](#).

Visit DIEEC at Community Day in Newark and Coastal Day in Lewes

DIEEC will be hosting tables at two upcoming events, both of which are great for families! Please share the information with your families, and stop by to say hi if you attend!

On **September 21**, we'll be at **Community Day in Newark**. [View the flyer for more information.](#)



On **October 5**, we'll be at **Coast Day in Lewes**. [Visit the website for information.](#)

At both events, we'll be working to raise community awareness of the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences and share the message that investment in early childhood is an investment in community.

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!

Updates from Our Partners

October Conscious Discipline Training- Registration is Open!

Save the date: The Office of Early Childhood Excellence will be offering four single-day, in-person Conscious Discipline training opportunities. Educators may choose one training from the two remaining dates:

- Friday, October 10; or
- Saturday, October 11.

To learn more about Conscious Discipline, [scan the QR code on the flyer](#). [Click here](#) to register.



Mini-Grant Opportunity for Programs Supporting Physical Fitness and Healthy Eating- Apply by September 12

The Division of Public Health Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention Program is excited to announce the opportunity for Delaware early childhood education (ECE) programs to apply for mini-grants of up to \$10,000 to support the implementation of Pilot Programs under the Delaware Advancing Healthy Lifestyles Healthy Early Childcare Mini-Grant Program. Pilot programs must support activities creating an ECE environment that improves children's physical fitness and a culture of healthier eating for generations to come. Changes to policies, systems, and environments are the most powerful way to impact all children, yet we are also looking for programs/events that can address obesity prevention. [Apply here by 5:00 p.m. on September 12.](#)

Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Appreciation Week: September 7-12

Family, Friend and Neighbor Appreciation Week is an opportunity to celebrate the over 5 million FFN caregivers who look after 11.5 million children each year. Read more about the contributions of these pillars of our community on the [Home Grown collaborative's website](#). Thank you to the many members of Delaware's early childhood community who are, or have been, providers of family friend and neighbor care!

Financial Relief for Early Educators to Access Higher Education- New Research Brief

Check out the National Early Care and Education Workforce Center's (NECEWFC) [latest research brief](#), which is all about strategies states are using to provide financial relief for early educators to access higher education!

In Delaware, educators interested in advancing their education can reach out to Delaware's own [Early Childhood Innovation Center](#) to learn about DE RISE Scholarships. This is a fantastic opportunity to get the support you need to pursue a CDA, Associate Degree, or Bachelor's Degree!

Benefits of Family Child Care Networks

DIEEC was recently featured in the National Early Care & Education Work Center's monthly newsletter, Research Snack Time. The issue highlights the vital role of family child care (FCC) networks, and the research includes an examination of DIEEC's own initiative.

The newsletter explores how staffed FCC networks like DIEEC's provide crucial support to educators, from technical assistance to professional development. The findings demonstrate that this support leads to improved provider experiences and a higher quality of care for children. [You can read the feature here](#).

Want to learn more about DIEEC's family child care network? [Visit our webpage](#) to find out how you can get involved!

DIEEC is a core partner in the [National Early Care and Education Workforce Center](#), and we are privileged to be part of the important conversation and to contribute to the growing body of evidence on the impact of these networks.

Quality Improvement Planning

Quality Improvement System Policies and Procedures Manual- Updates for FY26

The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) and the Early Childhood Excellence Team have updated Delaware's Quality Improvement System (QIS) Guide, which includes important information for FY26's Quality Improvement Award (QIA). You can review the updated guide [HERE](#).

As in previous years, to be eligible for a FY26 QIA, programs must be actively engaged in quality improvement efforts. With the support of a DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp), programs will reflect on their areas of growth and build a quality improvement plan (QIP).

Developing a QIP is a multistep process, and requests to work with a QISp will be scheduled in the order they are received. Contact your DIEEC quality improvement specialist about scheduling, or request support from a Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp) through the Delaware Early Care and Education (ECE) portal. See page 9 of the [Program Portal Guide](#) for instructions.

Applying for a Quality Improvement Award?

Many programs are preparing to apply for the first round of Quality Improvement Awards. This year, the Office of Early Learning is requiring programs to have an Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) Account in the DE DOE Enterprise system and engage in training for the formative assessment tool their program is using (e.g., TS GOLD, Funshine, etc.).

If you need to register or do not have access to your ASQ Portal, please use the [ASQ Support Request Form](#). Once your request has been processed, you will be contacted via email with your login information for you to access your portal. You can find step-by-step guidance in the [ASQ Provider Manual for Early Childhood Programs](#), and you can learn more about Developmental Screening by visiting [Delaware's Developmental Screening Resources webpage](#).

Key dates for Quality Improvement Awards:

- The Delaware Early Care and Education Portal will open on September 1, 2025.
- There are four application deadlines: 9/15/25, 11/15/25, 1/15/26, and 3/15/26.
- School districts, SFECEPs, and EHS-CCPs must apply on or before November 15, 2025.
- To be eligible for an FY26 award, programs must hold a certificate or be licensed by the Delaware Office of Child Care Licensing by January 15, 2026, AND have a visit scheduled with their Quality Improvement Specialist by February 1, 2026.

Professional Learning Experiences

Opportunities with DIEEC and Our Partners

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](#).

To view the current list of OEL-approved training opportunities, click here:

[Professional Development, Coaching, and other Professional Learning Experiences for the Early Care and Education Workforce.](#)