

## **Testimony of Secretary Lowery Early Success: Delaware's Early Childhood Plan**

Delaware recognizes that what children experience from birth to age five has a direct impact on their future success in school and life. As we have learned more about the importance of brain development during the early years, there has been a renewed commitment to work together in public/private partnerships to increase the number of young children entering school prepared to succeed. Through strong leadership, federal, state, corporate and private resources have been blended to develop a combination of universal and targeted programs and supports from birth through kindergarten. For example, the parents of every baby born in Delaware receive the *Growing Together* portfolio, a collection of valuable information ranging from a five year calendar customized with Delaware contacts to a Read Aloud book to start early literacy. For first time parents, there is a targeted service with a home visit by a nurse soon after the baby comes home. The nurse links at-risk families to additional supports such as the Parents as Teachers program, a monthly home visit from birth to age three by certified parent educators.

The state-funded Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP) adds to the capacity of federally-funded Head Start to guarantee a quality preschool program for every four year old in poverty. Through similar state/federal support, children with disabilities from birth to five receive preschool special education (PSE) specifically crafted to help prepare them for success in school. Both of these targeted programs, for children in poverty and those with disabilities have been evaluated through a longitudinal evaluation. Begun in 1997 as the children entered kindergarten, the study compared children in poverty who had participated in the ECAP/HS program with a like sample of poor children who had not participated and children with disabilities who were identified during early childhood and received early intervention services with children identified as special education students after entering the public school system. In this longitudinal study, three points of measurement (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) were analyzed for students' academic outcomes. As measured over time at all three grade levels, the students who had received early intervention services (ECAP/HS or PSE interventions) have shown markedly better outcomes than students who did not receive those interventions. Students in the intervention groups significantly outperformed students who did not receive intervention. From the most recent analysis at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the following results are examples of the success rates:

- 73% of the students in poverty who participated in ECAP/HS performed at or above the standard in reading compared to 51% who had not participated in ECAP/HS
- 43% of the students who received preschool special education performed at or above the standard in reading compared to 31% who had not received such services

To improve the quality of early care and education for all young children, state dollars have been leveraged to gain corporate and private funds to carefully develop, pilot and implement the Delaware Stars for *Early Success* rating program. Delaware Stars has

established quality standards for early childhood program providers connecting them with technical assistance, training and limited financial support as programs engage in quality improvement efforts. Delaware Stars for *Early Success* is a five level system, with “5” being the highest rating. The licensing rules issued by the Office of Child Care Licensing serve as the Standards for Star Level 1. With each higher Star Level, a program is required to meet increasingly higher quality Standards in the following categories:

- Qualifications and Professional Development
- Learning Environment and Curriculum
- Family and Community Partnerships
- Management and Administration

Subsidized child care reimbursement rates have improved, and the goal is to tie those rates to Delaware Stars quality ratings as additional resources become available. In 2005, the Legislature increased its focus on early learning by creating the Kids Caucus, a bi-partisan group of legislators focused solely on young children and their growth, development and learning. During the last legislative session, the Kids Caucus successfully championed legislation to increase outreach for the Children’s Health Insurance Program to students receiving free or reduced price meals in their schools.

Full-day kindergarten is another important component in Delaware’s expanded efforts to ensure academic preparedness and success for all children. State funding for full-day kindergarten has increased each year with almost all public elementary schools offering this to families in their communities.

On another front, like many states, Delaware has worked hard to cooperate across state agencies on behalf of young children. The three primary Departments which have responsibility for a variety of early childhood services (Education; Health and Social Services; and Services to Children, Youth and their Families) established one central Office of Early Childhood within the Dept. of Education which is staffed by personnel funded through the three Departments and charged with interagency collaboration and efficiencies. Also, in October 2001, the Governor established the Delaware Early Care and Education Council. The Council is responsible for providing oversight of the development and implementation of *Early Success: Delaware’s Early Childhood Plan*. The membership of the Council comes from the early care and education community, businesses and private citizens.

*Early Success* is a comprehensive plan to ensure that across the state young children and their families have access to quality early learning programs and services. The five goals of *Early Success* are as follows:

1. *Ready Children*: By the year 2015, all of Delaware’s young children will have available the supports they require to ensure that they are physically, socially and emotionally healthy. Early learning opportunities will be available to every child at home and in programs that are developmentally appropriate and individualized. It is important to ensure that every child’s development is progressing. Child assessment for early identification of developmental challenges or disabling

conditions is essential. Early intervention is critical for remediation of developmental delays and readiness for school.

2. *Ready Families*: By the year 2015, families of young children in Delaware will have the support and education needed to support their children's healthy growth, development, learning and readiness for school. Families are significant partners in creating a culturally competent comprehensive and integrated early learning system. Families are the primary influence on their children. All other components of the early learning system must support the families of young children to be successful.
3. *Ready Early Care and Education Programs*: By the year 2015, all of Delaware's families will have access to early care and education programs that will offer families a safe learning environment that will ensure positive outcomes for children. Early care and education programs will be staffed by professionals educated and skilled in supporting the growth, development, and learning of young children. Programs will be regulated to ensure basic safeguards for children, both physical and developmental.
4. *Ready Communities*: By the year 2015, Delaware citizenry will understand the importance of the children's growth, development and learning during the first five years and be willing to support and invest in creating an early childhood system. The early childhood system will be a durable, normalized component of the state budget, corporate investments, and community giving. Public will, governance and finance together create a community that is willing and prepared to support the early childhood system. Communities will work together to design and build localized solutions to support their young children and families.
5. *Ready Schools*: By the year 2015, the schools and the early learning community will forge meaningful, productive relationships that support children and their families.

Supporting the goals of Early Success, Early Learning Foundations program guides have been developed for early childhood in alignment with the K-12 kindergarten expectations. Likewise, the social and emotional development program for young children, Partners in Excellence (PIE), has been connected with the K-12 Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program. Just as the K-12 system works to prepare children for college and the workforce, the early learning system works to prepare children for their school years. Connecting the systems and successfully facilitating the transition for children and their families between the two systems is important to the success of both early learning and K-12.

The current report of Delaware's Early Childhood Council highlights recent collaborative efforts to achieve the goals of *Early Success*. They are provided here to emphasize the importance of strategic public and community partnerships and to illustrate the broad scope of work of the Council and the Office of Early Childhood.

## *I. Ready Children*

### Emotional Wellness Committee:

- Began work in August, 2008
- Included representation from multi-agencies and multi-disciplines
- Mission Statement: To develop a systemic framework to support the emotional well-being of young children and their families
- Focused on specific tasks including: mapping resources, identifying gaps in resources and services, establishing standards for practice and identifying priority areas needed for the systematic promotion of emotional wellness in the state

### United Way of Delaware Success By 6™:

- Partnered with the Department of Education to give leadership to Emotional Wellness Committee
- Continued commitment to improving the quality of early care and education by financially supporting Delaware Stars and serving as a member of the public/private management team--specific responsibilities related to leading the coordination of private resource development, serving as fiscal agent for private funds, and providing leadership on building public will
- Partnered with Nemours Health & Prevention Services to conduct a parenting needs assessment
- Partnered with Family Support Coordinating Council for that Council to begin functioning as the advisory body for Success By 6™'s work related to supporting families

### Early Childhood Comprehensive System Grant:

- Focused on developing, implementing and sustaining comprehensive early childhood programs through collaborative partnerships and systems building initiatives
- Funded the KIDS COUNT in Delaware Indicators for Early Success issue brief
- Provided funding to host a series of educational trainings on topics promoting the importance of the medical home, family-centered primary care and newborn hearing screenings

### Nemours Health and Prevention Services:

- Collaborated with the Delaware Child and Adult Care Food program to set higher nutrition standards for foods qualifying for reimbursement
- Implemented a Child Care Learning Collaborative to test out a new approach to training, focused on helping centers make policy and practice changes to promote healthy eating and physical activity
- Supported a statewide quality rating system, Delaware Stars for Early Success.
- Initiated a pilot study for improved screening for developmental delays in primary care pediatrics--Assuring Better Child Health & Development (ABCD) project

## ***II. Ready Families***

### Family Support Coordinating Council:

- Supported the submission of a federal grant *Supporting Evidence-Based Home Visitation Programs to Prevent Child Abuse*
- Adopted a model that describes the future path of the council; the goal of this model is to establish the resources and supports needed to nurture *strong families* in Delaware
- Sponsored the Parent Practitioner Partnership Summit held on May 14, 2008 which addressed partnerships between parents and practitioners in healthcare, education and human services to improve child outcomes

## ***III. Ready Early Care and Education Programs***

### T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®:

- Provided scholarships to 136 individuals
- Worked in conjunction with other initiatives (i.e. Delaware Stars) to increase the quality of early childhood programs through increased education for early childhood professionals

### Delaware First: Early Childhood Professional Development System

- Developed a Framework for Professional Development that outlines the expectations and intensity of training opportunities for the early childhood
- Awarded a grant to the University of Delaware for the creation of the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood
- Provided the formal review and certification of early childhood staff qualifications

### Delaware Stars for *Early Success*:

- Completed the second year of “testing” the Delaware Stars system
- Enrolled in 69 child care programs including all three counties; small and large centers; family child care and large family child care homes; before and after school programs; programs that serve infants and toddlers, children with special needs, and children whose primary language is other than English; Head Start and ECAP programs; and NAEYC accredited programs
- 46 of the enrolled programs are serving children and families of low-income.
- Served more than 5,000 children and their families in Delaware Stars programs

### Relative Care Training Program:

- 600 Relative Caregivers have received training information
- 178 Relative Caregivers have attended training
- 42 Relative Caregivers have completed all 45 hours

### Partners in Excellence (PIE) Project:

- Provided training and technical assistance in three sites that have been designed on a framework of program wide change consistent with the PBS system used in schools
- Supported a training of trainers on the Parent Modules
- Developed and piloted an approach that provides continuity to the systems that care for and educate young children in Delaware

#### ***IV. Ready Communities***

##### Social Venture Partners Delaware:

- Gave more than \$2.5 million toward the improvement of early childhood education in the state of Delaware since its inception
- Partnered with A.I. duPont Hospital for Children; this five-year partnership places psychology residents in early care centers to provide year round behavioral health management for at-risk children and families
- Invested in a curriculum development specialist to train teachers and administrators in inner-city child care centers how to properly prepare their children for kindergarten

##### Coalition for Early Learning:

- Members testified at the Department of Health and Social Services budget and Joint Finance Committee hearings
- Planned successful Annual Early Childhood Advocacy Day
- Worked with the Kids Caucus to codify Delaware Stars for *Early Success* into law
- Worked with Kids Caucus to gain support for Purchase of Care reimbursement rate increases, rates indexed to bi-annual market rate study and rates tiered according to star ratings

##### Delaware Children’s Campaign:

The Delaware Children's Campaign (DCC) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that offers a different approach to child advocacy. What makes DCC different from other efforts is its use of public opinion data to identify issues relating to children that are of concern to Delawareans. Our polling along with the input of our platform committee helped us determine the DCC’s agenda:

- Reduce the infant mortality/morbidity rate
- Increase assistance for youth aging-out of foster care
- Ensure quality early education is available to all children

DCC is dedicated to improving access to quality early care and education by building public awareness and grassroots support. Campaign staff works to educate and engage citizens, media and policy makers regarding the societal cost savings of quality/consistent delivery of early education programming.

##### Wilmington Early Care and Education Council (WECEC):

- Engaged members and community volunteers - “Friends of the Council”
- Represented early care and education programs throughout the City of Wilmington and community based organizations

- Assisted with planning and executing special events
- Met at the new City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation building
- Worked with the City webmaster [www.wecec.org](http://www.wecec.org) to the City of Wilmington web site

#### Sussex Early Childhood Council (SECC)

- Spent time developing its mission and purpose - The Mission of SECC is to foster collaboration among families, communities, providers, and schools for children's early success in Sussex County
- Represented child care providers, human service agency representatives, parents, home visitors, school district representatives, and others interested in young children and families in Sussex County

#### *V. Ready Schools*

##### Delaware After-School Alliance (DEASA)

- Public-private partnership that endorses the goal of all school age children being academically, socially, culturally and physically healthy
- Worked on building bridges that link schools, communities, and families through policy development and partnership engagement with other agencies
- Involved itself in many key efforts over the last year that address the common moral, social and educational concerns of Delaware's citizenry, not the least of which were the Governor's Dropout Prevention Summit and the Governor's Expanded Learning Opportunities Summit

I'd like to close my remarks by sharing two of Delaware's most recent efforts to increase quality in our early learning system. In a new responsibility shifted to the Office of Early Childhood, the Department of Education (DOE) provides the formal review and certification of early childhood providers' staff qualifications. Early childhood practitioners make application for review of qualifications and in 2008, DOE staff reviewed more than 3,000 applications on the education and experience of individuals using the specifications of the child care licensing (Delacare) rules. The Department is currently working on a web-based modification, which will be ready by fall 2009, of the online database for teacher certification that will include the early childhood workforce.

And finally, DOE has worked on the development of a Framework for Professional Development that outlines the expectations and intensity of training opportunities for early childhood. The Framework helps practitioners in making informed choices for their professional development experiences. The Department recently awarded a multi-year grant to the University of Delaware for a new Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood to develop and offer the state recommended training in the Framework. The Institute will develop, in collaboration with other education organizations, a variety of state recommended professional development opportunities to meet the identified needs of all sectors of the early childhood field. The Institute will provide quality assurance to the consumer by closely monitoring the delivery and making sure that the content of training is research based and aligned with state standards for the field.