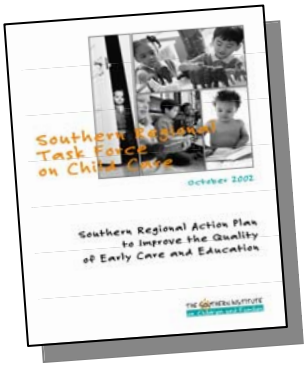

Southern Regional Action Plan to Improve the Quality of Early Care and Education

Survey on the Status of Implementation Efforts

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* Delaware was not represented on the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care when the 2003 survey was conducted. Therefore, the following data is for actions taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004 only.

Goal 1: All children and families will have the benefit of a quality, comprehensive and coordinated early care and education system.

1.1 ***Public policy at the federal, state and local level will require planning and coordination across major systems to improve quality, including Head Start, state pre-kindergarten, subsidized child care and licensing.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The Legislature created a task force to work on implementation of full day kindergarten and improving the quality of early care and education. The work of the task force compliments the work of the Governor appointed Delaware Council on Early Care and Education. The three state agencies most involved in early care and education co-fund an Office of Early Care and Education housed in the Dept. of Education.

1.2 ***Public policy at the federal, state and local level will support families by linking early care and education programs to health coverage, physical and mental health care, nutrition, economic support, transportation and parenting education services.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has continued working on the objectives in the *Partnering to Promote Emotional Wellness in Young Children: A Framework for Action.* Tasks have included implementing Partners in Excellence. Delaware has continued its planning for the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant. The state plan will be completed in February.

1.3 ***Federal, state and local policies and systems will ensure coordinated, seamless transitions for children moving among early care and education programs and into kindergarten.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The Legislature and Governor have committed to improving early care and education via the creation of the task force and appointment of the Council.

Goal 2: Rigorous licensing requirements and/or regulatory processes will be enacted to ensure that children are adequately protected in all early care and education settings.

2.1 ***States will establish staff-child ratios and maximum group sizes for centers and homes that meet NAEYC[1], NAFCC[2] or APHA[3] /AAP[4] national standards.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has completed a draft of revised child care center rules. The proposed rules would bring Delaware closer to the national standards than they are currently. The rules were opposed during the public review process. They are currently in another revision and should go to another public review in 2005.

2.2 ***States will develop and enforce health, fire and safety requirements for all early childhood care and education settings that reflect standards set forth by the APHA and the AAP.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
In 2002 the regulatory exemption for preschools and part day programs was removed by the Legislature. Since 2002, the Office of Child Care Licensing has been working to bring all of the part day programs under Licensing. Only a few programs are not yet in full compliance with the rules. Current licensing rules are in alignment with the first set of APHA/AAP models standards in the area if health, fire and safety.

2.3 ***State law will require strict enforcement of licensing requirements. States will use a range of sanctions that will include license revocation when a provider is unable or unwilling to meet requirements.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has an effective enforcement process that includes revocation, suspension, probation and Agreements of Understanding.

2.4 ***States will conduct at least three unannounced monitoring visits per year to verify compliance with requirements.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has a requirement for annual compliance visits. That requirement is met. Additional visits are made based on the compliance history of the facility.

2.5 ***States will require that child care providers, early childhood teachers and others who have regular access to children in early childhood settings have federal and state background checks using fingerprinting and screening against the state child abuse registry*****.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
All staff and volunteers in all child care programs and schools have federal and state fingerprint checks, and are checked against the state child abuse and adult abuse registries. Perpetrators on institutional abuse in child and adult are included on the registries.

2.6 ***States will ensure that all licensing and early care and education staff are educated in recognizing signs of child abuse and are trained in the state's child abuse reporting laws*****.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
By regulation, all early care and education staff are trained in identifying abuse and neglect. By state law all public school teachers are trained. Licensing staff are part of the child abuse investigating agency and are trained during orientation.

2.7 ***States will have a well-trained regulatory workforce with average caseloads between 50 and 75 per staff person[5] and a system capable of providing technical assistance*.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The current caseload for licensing staff is 150 facilities. The caseload is a mix of center and family child care homes. The caseload standard is set by state law.

2.8 ***States will ensure parental right of access to their child's early care and education facilities*.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
By regulation, all parents have the right of access to their child's program.

Goal 3: States will support development of quality early care and education programs for all children.

3.1 ***States will provide all early care and education providers with resources to help them improve the quality of care and education they deliver, such as technical assistance and training, accreditation support, grants to meet health and safety requirements and grants to support family child care home networks.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has a range of supports for early care and education staff. There are gaps in the system that need to be addressed. The state has an infant and toddler quality improvement program, Project INSITE. There is a cadre of child care health consultants in addition to a range of training opportunities. There is also a cadre of technical assistance consultants for the PIE program. Grants for expanding capacity are available. The state's accreditation support program was discontinued after ten years due to lack of interested programs. There are no facility improvement grants. All early care and education providers were given the state early learning standards. Training on the standards will begin in 2005.

3.2 ***States will have Child Care Resource and Referral networks to deliver quality early care and education enhancement support services to providers, such as outreach, training and technical assistance.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The child care professional development system, Delaware First, in managed by the Office of Child Care Licensing. Most of the system's activities are implemented by the state wide R & R, Family and Workplace Connection. Family and Workplace Connection is the licensee for the state's T.E.A.C.H. program. The state also has an active early childhood apprenticeship program.

3.3 ***States will implement a rating system to recognize providers for incremental levels of quality.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The state is in the final stages of development of the tiered quality rating system, *Delaware Stars for Early Success*. It will be a voluntary system managed by a non-profit entity.

3.4 ***States will implement tax and other incentives to develop and expand early care and education programs that demonstrate a higher level of quality.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
There has not been any activity in this area.

3.5 ***States will use a formal mechanism to seek parental input in program evaluations and will use that information in making policy decisions related to early care and education programs.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Parents participate as members of the Delaware Council on Early Care and Education. As part of the ECCS planning parent focus groups were conducted and a parent group is being formed.

3.6 ***States will identify and support the use of effective research based curricula*.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The state has identified effective research based curricula as part of the Delaware Stars for Early Success. This is one of the indicators of higher quality. The state has implemented the Partners in Excellence (PIE) curriculum. The PIE curriculum and the Positive Behavioral Support curriculum used by the public schools have been aligned.

Goal 4: Staff in early care and education settings will be appropriately credentialed and adequately compensated.

4.1 ***States will maintain a professional development system that ensures, at a minimum, providers in early care and education settings meet standards set forth by APHA/AAP, NAEYC or NAFCC.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has had a professional development system since 1991. Delaware First includes a network of resource centers and vans, personnel registry system, training approval, staff competencies, training curriculum designed based on core competencies, and director training.

4.2 ***States will require approved ongoing annual professional development for staff, appropriate to their education levels and job requirements, as specified in APHA/AAP. States will provide and implement a professional development system that verifies trainers, approves training and tracks the training of participants*****.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The state's personnel registry system does all of the above.

4.3 ***The federal government and states will provide universally available, comprehensive scholarships to early care and education providers who are pursuing a CDA or two- or four-year degree in child development, early childhood education, early childhood special education or child care administration. Scholarships will address the costs of tuition, fees and books and will support components such as travel costs, paid release time and child care.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has a T.E.A.C.H. program. The first participants started coursework in Sept. 2004. Delaware's apprenticeship program includes support for college course work. It does not support an entire degree program.

4.4 ***States will work with educational institutions to ensure that coursework is accessible in order to meet the early care and education workforce training needs, such as courses offered at night, on weekends, in accelerated formats, on-line and in various languages. Courses will address the varying educational levels of the workforce.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has night and weekend courses and trainings offered for college and community based education. Infant/toddler and core curriculum training has been offered in Spanish. These offerings have been limited and need to be expanded. Delaware accepts on-line coursework offered by accredited colleges. Our small geographic has limited the demand for on-line courses. Also there is value to the cross-fertilization that occurs in a classroom experience.

4.5 ***The federal government and states will provide financial incentives that reward completion of approved levels of professional development.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
T.E.A.C.H. and apprenticeship are Delaware's only compensation initiatives at this point.

4.6 ***The federal government and states will provide college loan forgiveness programs for persons earning an approved degree who work for a specified period of time in early care and education programs.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area**.**

4.7 ***States will work toward a system whereby staff with approved degrees or credentials will receive employment benefits and compensation at comparable levels to the state's public education system.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

4.8 ***States will ensure meaningful agreements and processes to enable the transfer of credits between and among approved two- and four-year degree programs.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
All the two and four year degree programs in early care and education have articulation agreements. We are currently working on articulating high school early care and education career tracks with the colleges. This allows successful high school work to be recognized with college credit.

Goal 5: Families will have the information to make well-informed decisions about the quality of their child's care and education and to be actively involved in their child's care and education.

5.1 ***States will support Child Care Resource and Referral networks that are easily accessible to parents and that provide information on child development, quality indicators, provider choices, vacancies and linkages to additional information.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Some funding is provided to the R&R, but they not fully funded by the state for their services.

5.2 ***States will support early care and education providers in promoting parental involvement and in seeking parental input into the development and improvement of their programs.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Parental engagement is one of the domains for Early Success. It is also an indicator of quality in the Delaware Stars for Early Success tiered quality rating system.

Goal 6: Quality early care and education programs will be financially accessible to all children.

6.1 ***Federal and state governments will adjust the child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the cost of quality care.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

6.2 ***States with income taxes will establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

6.3 ***State and federal child and dependent care tax credit income-eligibility and expense limits will be indexed for inflation.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

6.4 ***Federal, state, local and private funds will be sufficient to meet 100% of the need for direct early care and education financial aid, based on initial eligibility levels at 85% of the state median income. Federal law will allow and states will implement redetermination policies that allow families to retain early care and education financial aid until they reach 100% of state median income.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

6.5 ***Federal and state governments should develop policies and systems to assure families receiving financial aid pay no more than 10% of their gross income for early care and education.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

6.6 ***States will set payment rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years for each level and type of care. Annual inflation adjustments to payment rates will be made between market surveys.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware does conduct the market rate study every two years. This fiscal year there was a rate increase for infant and toddler care. This is the first rate increase in seven years.

6.7 ***States will implement payments to providers commensurate with the quality-rating level achieved by the early care and education programs.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

6.8 ***States will examine the financing of quality early care and education in their state and work toward providing payment rates that recognize the cost commensurate with the standards set forth in this action plan.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

6.9 ***States will design and aggressively implement outreach initiatives to provide families with easy-to-understand early care and education financial aid information and application assistance.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
Delaware has not taken any action in this area.

Goal 7: States will ensure that accountability is built into all systems, programs and activities undertaken to achieve the goals of this action plan.

7.1 ***States will convene appropriate stakeholders to develop written strategic plans for improving the quality of early care and education programs in the state. These plans will include key goals, quantifiable measures of progress and program outcomes for all quality enhancement activities.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The Delaware Early Care and Education Council has this responsibility.

7.2 ***States will collect and analyze data and produce written annual reports on progress toward identified goals. Reports will be made readily available to the public.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004
The Delaware Early Care and Education Council issues an annual report to the Legislature and Governor via the Interagency Resource Management Committee.

7.3 *States will use data and annual reports to make continuous policy improvements and evaluate quality enhancement activities.*

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Delaware conducted a study of the quality of early care and education in Delaware to determine a baseline of data. Over 600 early care and education settings were evaluated. These included child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start, part-day preschools, after school programs, Early Childhood Assistance Programs (state Head Start like program), and early childhood programs offered in public and private schools. At each site the appropriate Environmental Rating Scale was conducted, the Teacher/ Child Interaction scale and interviews of providers and directors were also conducted. This study will allow Delaware to measure the impact of the systemic changes over the next 10 to 15 years. A number of the individual programs/projects include assessment component. This report is too large to copy and send since it is over 600 pages. It will be available on CD after the first of the year.

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[1] NAEYC – National Association for the Education of Young Children
[2] NAFCC – National Association of Family Child Care
[3] APHA – American Public Health Association
[4] AAP – American Academy of Pediatrics
[5] American Public Health Association & American Academy of Pediatrics. 2002. *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance –Guidelines for out-of-home child care programs.* Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.