



CONNECTICUT
BIRTH TO THREE SYSTEM

PRESCHOOL SPECIAL
EDUCATION

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

BIRTH through 5 NEWS

Information for Families and Professionals • VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2

Parent Participation and Partnership

Joyce Staples,
Program Manager
School Readiness Program
State Department of Education



*This article is translated into Spanish
on page 2. Ver la versión española de
este artículo en la página 2.*

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University of
Connecticut

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Programs for infants and young children with disabilities can involve all families in the early learning and development of their child. Partnerships with parents have been a primary focus in the field of early childhood for many years. Families want more information and more opportunities to be actively engaged in their child's program. Programs can offer a wide range of options and opportunities that make a connection with all families. Not all parents can take advantage of all partnership activities, but every family can be involved in one or more ways.

Dr. Joyce Epstein from the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland offers guidance on how programs can create and support opportunities that support a positive parent partnership. She identified six benchmark areas, and the state's Birth to Three System and the Department of Education's preschool special education program contributed the examples for each.

SUPPORTING PARENTS IN PARENTING

Program staff should promote and support parenting skills and the family's important role in encouraging their child's learning at each age and stage of development. Activities can include: coaching parents on creative and effective ways to play and interact with their child using activities and toys from children's own environments; helping parents learn about typical child development through the use of materials and publications; communicating the importance of positive relationships between parents and their child; supporting early literacy and social experiences to prepare children and their parents for the future; and demonstrating to parents how they can sustain their child's learning at home.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Program staff and families should participate in clear on-going, two-way communication about the child's program, goals, and progress. Activities can include: taking time during each home visit or classroom visit to speak with the parent about their child's successes and areas of concern; making sure that written information is left with the family after each visit; providing a routine method for parents to review their child's work and progress and to offer comment; providing opportunities for regular formal and informal on-going contact with parents; and supporting staff development opportunities for parent/staff communication.

SUPPORTING VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES

Program staff should provide volunteer opportunities and appropriate training and support for involving parents in programs their child may attend. Volunteer work must be meaningful and valuable to the program and the parents. Activities can include: providing volunteer opportunities during the program as well as options that allow parents to help in other ways; creating volunteer efforts that reflect the interests, talents and abilities of the parents; training volunteers and creating an inviting climate that encourages mutual partnership and success.

LEARNING AT HOME

Program staff can help families to participate at home in learning activities that are coordinated with the goals and objectives of their child's program. Activities can include: involving parents in identifying and monitoring their child's goals and progress; providing informational materials on activities; engaging parents on how to incorporate such activities into the home; and providing opportunities where staff can learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's learning at home.

DECISION-MAKING AND LEADERSHIP

Programs should provide opportunities for all families to develop and strengthen their leadership role through parent organizations, advisory councils, school boards and other decision-making groups. Activities can include informing parents about available organizations and supporting parents' participation in such groups. The Birth to Three Family Leadership Initiative is available through Parents Available To Help (PATH) as well as the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) and Parents As Policy-Makers. The Birth to Three System has a variety of ways for parents to participate in committees such as serving on the State or Local Interagency Coordinating Council, task forces, or assisting the System by help-

ing to interview other families when Birth to Three Programs are monitored for quality. As children get older, options include PTAs, school boards or other school advisory or policy groups. Parents should be given equal representation in groups and should be supported through training and other mechanisms.

COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Programs can provide coordinated access to community resources for children and families and should serve as a resource to the community. Activities can include: supporting families and helping them to map their community to find resources that they can use; making sure that families know how to use the Internet, either at home or in

their public library, to find resources; introducing families to the Infoline 2-1-1 number; regularly distributing information to parents and staff on cultural, recreational, and social resources that serve children and families in the community; involving the community in the school and collaborating with community agencies to provide family support and adult learning opportunities.

These six benchmarks for parent partnerships identified by Dr. Epstein are not exclusive of each other nor are they separate and distinct categories. The benchmarks for parent partnerships can guide the development and implementation of a well-balanced and comprehensive program that includes opportunities for all parents to be involved.

Participación de



Joyce Staples, Gerente del Programa El Programa de Preparación Escolar El Departamento de Educación Estatal

Los programas para infantes y niños pequeños con incapacidades pueden incorporar a las familias de esos niños en lo que respecta al aprendizaje y desarrollo a temprana edad. Esa colaboración o esfuerzo conjunto (*partnership* o sociedad familia-programa) ha sido por muchos años el foco primario de esos programas. Las familias desean más información y oportunidades de participar activamente en el programa de sus hijos. Los programas pueden brindar una amplia gama de opciones y oportu-

nidades. No todos los padres pueden aprovecharse de todas las actividades de trabajo conjunto, pero toda familia puede participar de alguna manera.

La doctora Joyce Epstein del *Center on School, Family and Community Partnership* de la Universidad de John Hopkins en Baltimore, Maryland, ofrece a los programas orientación para crear y apoyar de forma positiva el trabajo conjunto con los padres. Ella ha identificado seis áreas como puntos de referencia. El sistema estatal *Birth to Three* (el Sistema para Infantes a Tres Años) y el programa preescolar de educación especial del Departamento de Educación aportaron los ejemplos en cada.

Apoyo a los padres en la crianza de los hijos

El personal del programa debe fomentar la habilidad de los padres y la importante función de la familia de estimular el aprendizaje de los hijos en cada edad y cada etapa de desarrollo. Las actividades pueden incluir: enseñar a los padres formas ingeniosas y eficaces de jugar con el niño y tener con él una relación recíproca, valiéndose de juguetes y actividades del entorno de los niños; ayudar a los padres, con materiales y publicaciones, a familiarizarse con lo que es típico en los niños a cada edad; comunicar la importancia de las relaciones positivas entre padres

e hijos; apoyar el aprendizaje de la lectura y las experiencias sociales a temprana edad para preparar a los niños y sus padres para el futuro; y demostrar a los padres cómo sostener la instrucción en el hogar.

Comunicación con las familias

El personal del programa y la familia deberán mantener comunicación permanente y clara en ambas direcciones sobre el programa, sus metas y progreso alcanzado por el niño. Las actividades pueden incluir: dedicar tiempo en cada visita al hogar o a la escuela para hablar con el padre sobre el progreso del niño y cualesquiera motivos de preocupación, dejando a la familia información escrita después de cada visita; crear un método de rutina para que los padres revisen el trabajo y progreso del niño y hagan comentarios; proveer con regularidad oportunidades para contactos formales e informales con los padres; y apoyar la capacitación del personal para la comunicación con los padres.

Apoyo a las actividades voluntarias para las familias

El personal del programa debe proporcionar oportunidades de trabajo voluntario y entrenamiento para que los padres trabajen en programas en que sus hijos puedan participar. El trabajo voluntario debe ser significativo y

valioso para el programa y para los padres. Las actividades podrían incluir: crear oportunidades de trabajo voluntario durante el programa así como alternativas que permitan a los padres ayudar de otra forma; crear esfuerzos voluntarios que reflejen los intereses, talentos y habilidades de los padres; entrenar a los voluntarios y crear un clima acogedor que estimule la mutua cooperación y el éxito.

Instrucción en el hogar

El personal del programa puede ayudar a las familias a participar en el hogar en actividades de instrucción coordinadas con las metas y objetivos del programa de sus hijos. Las actividades pueden incluir: participación de los padres en la identificación y control de las metas del programa y el progreso de sus hijos; proveer material de información de las actividades; comprometer a los padres en la incorporación de tales actividades en el hogar; y fomentar oportunidades en que el personal pueda aprender y compartir enfoques eficaces para comprometer a los padres en la instrucción de los hijos en el hogar.

Toma de decisiones y dirección

Los programas deben proporcionar oportunidades para que todas las

familias desarrollen y fortalezcan su función de dirección valiéndose de organizaciones de padres, consejos de asesores, juntas escolares y otros grupos de toma de decisiones. Las actividades pueden incluir el informar a los padres qué organizaciones están a su disposición y apoyar su participación en tales grupos. El *Birth to Three Family Leadership Initiative* está disponible a través de *Parents Available to Help (PATH)* así como del *Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC)* y de *Parents as Policy-Makers*. En el sistema para Infantes a Tres Años los padres tienen varias maneras de participar en comités, tales como servir en el Interagency Coordinating Council estatal o local, en grupos de trabajo, o entrevistando familias para calificar los resultados de programas de *Birth to Three*. Al crecer los niños surgen nuevas opciones como los PTAs, las juntas escolares y otros grupos de asesoría escolar. A los padres deberá dárseles igual representación en los grupos y apoyo durante el entrenamiento y otros mecanismos.

Colaboración con la Comunidad

Los programas pueden brindar a los niños y las familias un acceso coordi-

nado a los recursos de la comunidad y deberán ser un recurso de la comunidad. Las actividades pueden incluir: apoyar a las familias y ayudarlas a encontrar en la comunidad recursos que puedan utilizar; asegurarse de que las familias saben utilizar el Internet, en el hogar o en la biblioteca pública, para encontrar recursos; familiarizar las familias con el número 2-1-1 de Infoline; distribuir regularmente a los padres y al personal información sobre los recursos culturales, recreativos y sociales que sirven a los niños y a las familias en la comunidad; comprometer a la comunidad en la escuela y colaborar con las agencias de la comunidad para proveer apoyo familiar y oportunidades de aprender a los adultos.

Este seis puntos de referencia para la acción conjunta de padres y programa identificados por la doctora Epstein no se excluyen entre sí ni son categorías separadas y distintas. Los puntos de referencia para la acción conjunta pueden orientar el desarrollo e implementación de un programa bien equilibrado y amplio que incluya oportunidades para todos los padres involucrados.



From that point on, a group called the Continuous Improvement Partnership Team will be monitoring both the Birth to Three and Special Education systems to make sure that both are following the plan.

Program Updates

BIRTH TO THREE

By Linda Goodman

No one is perfect and no system is perfect either. Recognizing that fact, the U.S. Department of Education requires states to develop "Continuous Improvement Plans" for both their special education and early intervention systems. We took the first step last year when we did a self-assessment of how well Connecticut was doing in both of these areas. Now we are taking the next step which is to look at all of that information again, decide on the results that are really, really important for children and families, plan how we can accomplish those results and determine how we will know when we have accomplished them.

A group of Birth to Three staff, providers, and parent leaders met in the

fall and decided that if the Birth to Three System could accomplish the following four things, it would be doing an excellent job:

1. Eligible infants and toddlers are identified at the earliest opportunity.
2. Families become knowledgeable and have the confidence to increase the general health and well-being of their family.
3. Children will show improved and sustained functional abilities.
4. Families and children are able to access appropriate community supports and services when children leave the Birth to Three System.

Our next step is to continue meeting to examine each of these areas, decide how we are going to improve in each, write a plan, and then start following it. The plan should be ready in February or March and will, just like the self-assessment, be posted on the Birth to Three web site: www.birth23.org.

PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION

By Maria Synodi

This newsletter is devoted to the issue of establishing and maintaining parent involvement and participation in the education of their child thereby creating a parent and professional partnership toward a common goal. Federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reinforces this concept by identifying that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their child at school and at home. School personnel have an obligation to establish a positive climate for partnership and make parent and family participation in their child's education a reality.

The lead article outlines six benchmarks for providing a variety of strate-

gies for parents to be included in the development and implementation of their child's program. By offering a number of mechanisms for the inclusion of parents, all parents can find a way to participate that is comfortable and meaningful for them as well as for the school. Creating and expanding opportunities for on-going communication is often the foundation of a positive parent and professional partnership. The foundation for communication needs to begin at the initial referral and continue throughout the implementation of a child's individualized education program (IEP). Inherent in providing opportunities for parent involvement are incorporating diversity and ensuring that the values and manners of all cultures in the community are represented and respected. Schools can begin by creating a team, examining current practices, developing, implementing and evaluating a plan, training personnel and securing the participation of all, including the

school, family and community.

Parent involvement in the education of their child is one goal amongst many that the IDEA is focused on ensuring. Others include having high expectations for children, providing an appropriate developmental and educational curriculum, and ensuring that special education can become a service rather than a place that children are sent to. The U.S. Department of Education is currently working on the reauthorization of the IDEA with Congress. A number of national forums will be held to identify what is working, what is not, and how to improve the federal law for children with disabilities. Individuals wishing to send comments can direct them to:

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Special Education Programs
Attention: Director of the Office of Special Education Programs
400 Maryland Street, SW
Washington DC 20202

State ICC Update

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AT THE INTERAGENCY COORDINATING COUNCIL

By Ann Gionet

The Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) provides advice and assistance to the Lead Agency (DMR) on issues related to the Birth to Three System. The ICC is a combination of parents of children with developmental delays or disabilities, providers of early intervention services, legislators, physicians, agency staff and others who work together on behalf of infants and toddlers and their families.

Active family participation is critical to the success of any system and the ICC is legislated to have up to 20% of its membership be parents of children who have been involved in the Birth to Three System. The ICC looks for other ways to have families participate including meeting with Local Interagency Coordinating Councils

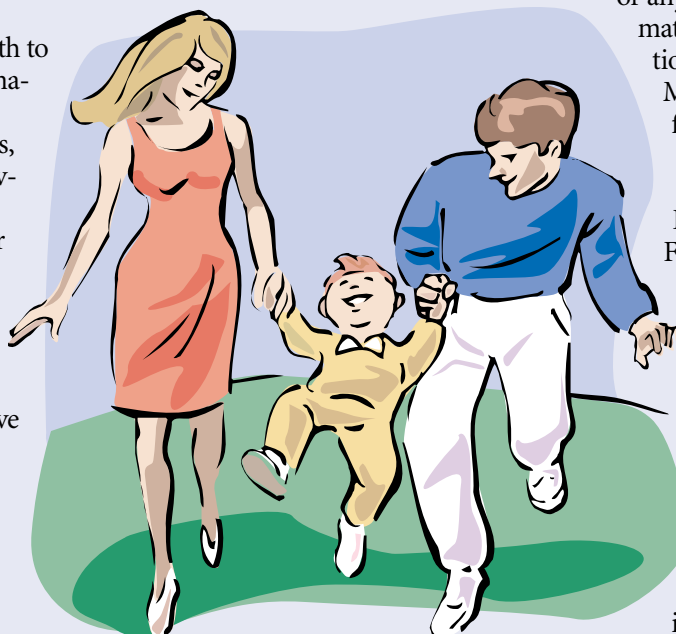
(LICC) who provide supports on a local basis to families involved with the Birth To Three System, preschool special education, or other community based preschool experiences.

Birth to Three Family Leadership coordinators provide updates at ICC meetings. This program trains parents of

children who have utilized the Birth to Three System to provide support to families presently enrolled, will link families with other families, and assist families with finding community supports as needed.

All ICC meetings have a public comment time on the agenda where parents or anyone can come and share information, concerns, or ask a question. We usually meet the second Monday of every other month from 9:00 A.M. until 2:00 P.M. Most meetings are held at Infoline, 4th floor, 1334 Silas Deane Highway, Rocky Hill, CT. Future dates include February 4, April 8, June 10, August 12, October 7 and December 9.

If you are unable to attend a meeting but have information to share, please contact Eileen McMurrer by phone at (860) 418-6134 or by fax at (860) 418-6003. Additional information about the ICC, including directions to meetings, can be found at the Birth to Three web site at www.Birth23.org.





Learning Opportunities and Resources



LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

For Families and Service Providers:

• Orientation to the Connecticut Birth to Three System

8:45 AM – 12:30 PM
Monday, January 7, 2002
DMR North Central Office or

Wednesday, February 13, 2002
Rensselaer, Hartford

• Resources for Families

Thursday, February 21, 2002
8:45 AM – 4:00 PM
Rensselaer, Hartford

Contact Kathy Granata at (860) 418-6146 or kathy.granata@po.state.ct.us

Or register by using the registration form in the 2001/2002 Birth to Three training calendar. No registration fees.

Autism in Young Children Series:

• The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

January 10 – 11, 2002; 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Rensselaer, Hartford; \$45 registration

The PECS follow-up for those who attended the 2000/2001 workshop:

Wednesday, January 9, 2002
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Rensselaer, Hartford; \$50 registration

• Developing Skills in Practical Discrete Trial Instruction for Young Children with Autism

February 7, March 7 and April 4, 2002
9:00 AM – 3:30 PM
Rensselaer, Hartford; \$90 registration

• Introduction to Verbal Behavior:

Teaching Communication Skills to Children/Youth with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities

February 26 – 27, 2002
9:00 AM – 3:30 PM
Ramada Inn, Plainville
\$75 registration

• Working Together: A Focus on Families

March 1, 2002; 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM
Ramada Inn, Plainville
\$25 registration

• Parents Supporting Parents: The Development of Family Leadership

March 2, 2002; 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Ramada Inn, Plainville
\$15 registration

• My First Social Stories: How to Teach Social Understanding to Young Children with ASD

March 21, 2002; 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM
Radisson Inn, Bristol; \$50 registration

• Social and Communication Interventions for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

April 5, 2002; 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM
Holiday Inn, Cromwell
\$60 registration

For more information contact Carissa D'Amico at the Special Education Resource Center: (860) 632-1485 ext. 269

WEB RESOURCES

The web sites listed here are not endorsed or warranted in any way by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System or by the collaborators of this newsletter. As with all information obtained from any source, web sites should be used with caution. There is no control over the posting of incorrect material on the Internet. Be aware that not all web sites list their information sources and do not accept information as "fact" just because it appears on a web site.

<http://codi.buffalo.edu>

Cornucopia of Disability Information, is a community resource for consumers providing disability information in a variety of areas.

<http://www.washington.edu/doi/DO-IT>

Provides information about people with disabilities successfully pursuing academics and careers, and programs promoting technology to maximize independence.

<http://www.specialchild.com>

Special Child is an online publication for parents and caregivers of children with special needs.

<http://www.fcsn.org/peer>

Parents Engaged in Education Reform is an organization dedicated to insuring the consideration of children with disabilities in efforts at educational reform.

<http://www.state.ct.us/sde>

The Connecticut Department of Education web page.

book written by Elizabeth Jeppson and Josie Thomas, capture the basis for a national focus on increasing family and professional partnerships. *Essential Allies* and its partner publication, *Words of Advice; A Guidebook for Families Serving as Advisors* by the same authors, offer families and professionals a clear and concise snapshot of the elements necessary to build partnerships and engage in collaborative agreements from both sides of the table. Each book



"Finally, families are visionaries. Their dreams are not tied to bureaucratic limitations. Their ideas and hopes for their children, their families, and their communities provide challenge, inspiration, and guidance." These words, taken from *Essential Allies; Families as Advisors*, a

"SNIPPETS"

The Parent Perspective

By Conni Wells

builds on the experiences and expertise of existing partnerships from across the nation, using the words of families and their professional counterparts to emphasize the steps that can lead to productive and successful partnerships.

The first book, *Essential Allies*, outlines the necessary attitudes that lead to beneficial relationships with families involved in shaping the system of care. The book carries messages about the benefits and barriers of family involvement and the many ways to make it happen. It carefully lays the foundation to promote a family centered approach to family involvement and gives specific samples and tools that can be used in building family involvement programs, such as sample contracts, advisory council by-laws and communication guidelines. *Words of Advice* also explores six roles consumer advisors can play and helps family advisors and consultants build the balance between their involvement, family demands, and their own personal needs.

What 'Words of Advice' do the authors offer? The book outlines Ten Steps for Being a Successful Advisor:

1. **Begin with yourself.** You can't participate effectively as an advisor until you have yourself together.
2. **Learn about the community.** Learn as much as you can about the people and programs that work with your population of families.
3. **Develop the big picture.** Educate yourself about the issues and concerns of all people affected by the service system.
4. **Develop new skills.** Attend conferences, ask to follow another advisor, or learn about computers, public speaking, or how Bills are made into law.
5. **Assume the best about people.** Providers are not the enemy. Build bridges, don't burn them.
6. **Learn to collaborate.** Make it your priority to work with providers and other consumers.
7. **Be prepared.** Read what is sent to you in preparation for meetings and ask questions until you understand.
8. **Learn to say "no."** Don't take on too much and know when you

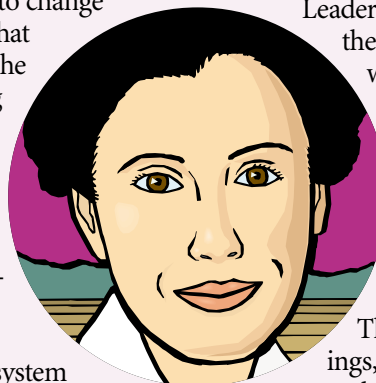
need a break.

9. **Share the spotlight.** Suggest other families that can also participate. Make sure new people are brought into the activities on a regular basis.
10. **Go to the dump-yard.** Get rid of old prejudices. Keep an open mind and open heart.

Working with systems of care can be a frustrating ambition. Many families and consumers make the decision to partner and collaborate to change the system because of what they did not get. But, at the same time, collaborating on behalf of the other families and seeing the benefits and changes is the highest reward.

To learn more about collaborating, serving as an advisor, or getting more involved in making the system of care more responsive to the needs of the population it serves, or to get a copy of *Words of Advice*, contact Ann Gionet, Family Advocate, at the Department of Public Health at (860) 509-8074 or e-mail at ann.gionet@po.state.ct.us.

Conni Wells is with the Florida Institute for Family Involvement (FIFI), Home of Family Voices – Florida, and the Florida Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, 3927 Spring Creek Hwy, Crawfordville, FL 32327, (850) 926-3514 or (877) 926-3514, toll-free.



trained veteran parents offer emotional support, information and resources to new parents who are going through similar experiences. Parents who have used parent-to-parent support report feeling less isolated, have brighter outlooks and are better connected to their communities.

PATH's new Birth to Three Mentors Program offered through the Connecticut Birth to Three System Family Leadership Initiative is based on the philosophy and framework of the success of the parent-to-parent model. Its mission is to increase parent support, participation and leadership in all levels of the Connecticut Birth to Three System. Through regional trainings, which began this fall, parents have an opportunity to learn about the Birth to Three System in great detail so that they can work with other parents to actively participate in and help to shape the Connecticut Birth to Three System.

If you are interested in learning more about PATH/Parent to Parent of Connecticut, please call 1 (800) 399-7284.

CONNECTICUT PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING, 2002

The goal of Partners is to foster collaboration among parents who have children with disabilities, people with disabilities, and policy makers at national, state and local levels. Partners in Policymaking teaches people to be community leaders.

Entering its fifth year of funding through the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, Partners in Policymaking graduates have become involved in key policy and advocacy roles in the state, becoming members of boards, councils, task forces and advisory committees. They are recognized as skilled and capable leaders in disability issues in their communities and in the state. Faculty include nationally recognized advocates in the disability field, and state experts in disabilities.



PATH/PARENT TO PARENT OF CONNECTICUT

PATH/Parent to Parent of Connecticut is an information and support network of families who have children with developmental and health related needs. The heart of PATH/Parent to Parent services is the one-to-one connections between "veteran" parents and new parents. The

Partners training is open to parents of children with disabilities and individuals with disabilities. All applicants should be willing and able to make a commitment to attending ten full day training sessions. Participation in all ten sessions, and completion of an advocacy project is required in order to graduate from the program.

The Connecticut Partners in Policy-making training sessions are held on Saturdays, from 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM at the Farmington Marriott Hotel. This training is provided at no cost. Limited funds are available to assist in childcare, PCA and travel expenses. Training will commence in February 2002, and last through July 2002.

We are currently accepting applications for our 2002 Partners in Policymaking Training class. Interested individuals should call Molly Cole, (860) 679-1504 (e-mail: mcole@nso1.uhc.edu) to request an application packet for Partners in Policymaking, 2002.

NEXT STEPS

The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc. (CPAC) is a statewide nonprofit parent-to-parent organization that offers information and support to families of children with any disability or chronic illness, age birth through twenty-one. We believe in parents and their ability to advocate effectively for their children. Many can get information and support by phone, from a friend or over the Internet. But some parents may need and want a more personal connection. That's where Next STEPs (Support and Training for Educators and Parents) comes in.

Parents can be intimidated by the system, overwhelmed by their family's needs and frustrated by the breakdowns in communication. Next STEPs is designed to provide a "next step" in the continuum of supports and information for parents and educators.

What you need to be a Next STEPs Parent Advisor:

- The parent or family member of a child with special needs
- Interest and ability to provide information, support, and guidance to parents of children with disabilities

information, support, and guidance to parents of children with disabilities

- Successful completion of initial training and participation in ongoing training
- A one-year commitment of volunteer service
- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- Nonjudgmental attitude and sensitivity to the concerns of parents and children with disabilities
- Ability to carry out the mission of CPAC

What you will gain from becoming a Next STEPs Parent Advisor:

- A series of eight free training sessions (24 hours)
- All training materials
- Ongoing technical assistance, updated information and support
- Opportunities for continued networking with other parents and additional CPAC activities
- Follow-up meetings and training

Our Next STEPs graduates have told us:

"I understand the laws related to disability and special education 95% better than I did before the training."

"I have learned not to judge others because people are entitled to their own opinions and decisions."

"I accept diversity and enjoy it."

"Understanding the law and my child's rights has given me a lot more confidence in advocating for my son."

If you are interested in more information about the Next STEPs Parent Advisor training or how the Next STEPs network can help you, call the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center at (860) 739-3089 or (800) 445-2722.

DANBURY CHILDREN FIRST

Danbury Children First, a parent-led organization, works to involve, empower and support parents to improve the lives of children at home, in school and in the community. Our focus is on parents because they want the best for their children and know their children best. Our partners include the City of Danbury, United Way of Northern Fairfield County and

the Danbury Public School District. All Danbury Children First programs are free and childcare is provided.

Danbury Children First provides three main types of service to the community. First, we advocate for young children, ages birth to eight years old. Currently parent-led committees are advocating for more access to health services for children, more parental involvement in the schools, increased

BIRTH through 5 NEWS

Information for Families and Professionals

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Birth through 5 News is distributed free of charge to those interested in issues related to children, ages birth through five, with special needs. The mailing list includes families and providers active in the Birth to Three System, directors and providers of preschool special education services, special education directors, families in various preschool special education programs, local ICCs and others upon request. To add or delete your name from the mailing list, or to notify us of a change of address, please send your name, address and phone number to *Birth through 5 News*, CT Birth to Three System, 460 Capitol Ave., Hartford, CT 06106.

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understanding of different cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds, and more high quality early childhood education and care.

Second, Danbury Children First provides information to parents. This includes a Parent-to-Parent Newsletter written and designed for parents, by parents, that goes to over 7,000 in the community in three languages— English, Spanish and Portuguese.

Third, Danbury Children First offers parent leadership development programs, including one-day sessions on such topics as presentation skills, diversity training, negotiation, and understanding state and local government. In addition, Danbury Children First offers the 20-week Parent Leadership Training Institute program. For information on any of the above, to become a member, or to learn if there is a Children First organization in your area of Connecticut, please call (203) 797-8088.

THE PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE

PLTI enables parents to become leading advocates for children. The cornerstones of the program are respect, validation and a belief that when the tools of democracy are understood the public will actively engage in civic life. This is followed with alumni activities, a statewide network of parent leaders, exposure to children's policy opportunities and further training.

Parents apply through a competitive process for the 20-week civic leadership training built on interactive adult learning practices:

- A retreat to develop group and define mission
- A 10-week course on building a community of parent leaders
- A 10-week study developing a democracy tool kit within a community framework
- A community project completion

Sites currently taking applications for either fall or winter classes are Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New Haven, Greater New London Area, Norwalk, Stamford and Waterbury. Connecticut sites currently exploring PLTI are Manchester, East Hartford, Bloomfield and Torrington.

For more information or to get an application for PLTI in your community please contact **Sharon Williams, Commission on Children, 18-20 Trinity St., Hartford, CT 06106 (860) 240-0290 or fax (860) 240-0248 Sharon.Williams@po.state.ct.us**



SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

SERC, which began in 1969, is a non-profit professional development and technical assistance agency. SERC's mission is to serve as a centralized resource for professionals, families and community members regarding early intervention, general and special education and student support services for children and youth, birth to age twenty-one, and transition-to-adult life for individuals with special needs. SERC has many different initiatives, including the Early Childhood Education Initiative. The goal of the Early Childhood Education Initiative is to support early childhood professionals and families to ensure that all young children in Connecticut have the best beginning possible.

For more information about SERC, visit the web site at www.serc.rh.edu. To join contact SERC at (860) 632-1485, ext. 235 or 244, and library staff will be pleased to assist you. Or visit SERC at 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT.

For questions related to registration for SERC's Early Childhood Education Initiative workshops contact **Carissa D'Amico, Project Assistant, at (860) 632-1485, ext. 269.**

For content questions about Early Childhood Education Initiative workshops contact **Megan Formica, Consultant, at (860) 632-1485, ext. 313.**

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