

Office of Early Childhood



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

At a Glance

MYRA JONES-TAYLOR, Ph.D., Commissioner

***Established* – June 24, 2013 by Executive Order No. 35**

***Statutory authority* – P.A. 14-39 – An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education and Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education**

***Central office* - 165 Capitol Avenue,
Hartford, CT 06106**

***Number of employees* – 36**

***Recurring operating expenses* -**

Federal: \$15,457,605

State: \$134,083,026

Bond Funds: \$219,874

***Organizational structure* -**

- **Commissioner's Office**
- **Early Childhood Programs and Services**
- **Division of Early Care and Education**
- **Division of Family Support Services**
- **Division of Early Intervention (scheduled to transition on July 1, 2015)**
- **Division of Licensing (transitioned on July 1, 2014)**

Vision

All young children in Connecticut are safe, healthy, learning and thriving. Each child is surrounded by a strong network of nurturing adults who deeply value the importance of the first years of a child's life and have the skills, knowledge, support and passion to meet the unique needs of every child.

Mission

To support all young children in their development by ensuring that early childhood policy, funding and services strengthen the critical role families, providers, educators and communities play in a child's life.

Statutory Responsibility

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was created through Executive Order No. 35, effective June 24, 2013, and statutorily established through P.A. 14-39 – *An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education and Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education*. As a cabinet-level state agency reporting directly to the Governor, the OEC is the lead agency for early care and education, workforce development, program quality and improvement, child care licensing, early intervention and family support. The OEC consolidates the funding streams, programs, and personnel of numerous early childhood services formerly dispersed across the Departments of Education, Public Health, Social Services and the Board of Regents.

The Office of Early Childhood works to:

- coordinate and improve the delivery of early childhood services for Connecticut children;
- ensure that child care and education programs for young children (1) are safe, healthy, and nurturing, (2) appropriately support children's physical, social and emotional, and cognitive development, and (3) are accessible to all children, particularly those at greater educational risk (including those from families in poverty, families with a single parent, families with limited English proficiency, and parents with less than a high school diploma);
- support families raising young children to ensure the children's health, well-being and positive growth and development; and,
- build and support a high-quality early childhood workforce.

Public Service

Commissioner's Office

The Commissioner's Office assures that agency-wide administrative activities are coordinated and accomplished in an effective and efficient manner. The office provides the following services across the agency:

Business Operations

While the Office of Early Childhood began the process of hiring staff for its business operations unit, the functions of fiscal management for all state and federal grants as well as information technology support were provided by the State Department of Education. Going forward, we envision the business operations unit will handle, for state, federal and bond funding, all accounts payable, accounts receivables, budgeting, budget projections and fiscal management for the agency.

Communications

Communications provides a full range of communication activities that serve the agency and its stakeholders. Key functions include public information, freedom of information, media and community relations, marketing communications, issues management and public affairs, Internet services, internal communications and crisis and emergency risk communications. These and other communication activities serve to manage the agency's reputation as the state's leader in early childhood policy and advocacy, and achieve its mission to support all young children in Connecticut in their development by ensuring that early childhood policy, funding and services strengthen the critical role families, providers, educators and communities play in a child's life.

Government and Community Relations

The Government and Community Relations arm of the OEC is responsible for the full range of legislative and regulatory information, including:

- Serving as the OEC commissioner's liaison to the General Assembly, Executive Branch and congressional delegation.
- Reaching out to early childhood community-based organizations to build communication and collaboration.
- Oversight of OEC legislation and regulations.
- Development and implementation OEC legislative agenda.
- Tracking and analysis of early childhood-related legislation.
- Ensuring implementation of approved legislation.
- Coordinating responses to all legislative inquiries.
- Preparing OEC legislative testimony, reports and presentations.
- Participating in legislative workgroups and task forces.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning helps identify the organizational needs of the agency and develop solutions to emerging challenges and opportunities. It undertakes organizational assessments, facilitates priority setting and spearheads new organization-wide initiatives. Strategic planning also provides expertise in performance measurement and management, strategic communications and organizational change to help ensure the activities of the OEC are efficient and effective and staff are well managed and supported to accomplish the work of the agency.

Early Childhood Programs and Services

Early Childhood Programs and Services are overseen by the agency's Deputy Director. This branch of the agency is comprised of the following:

- Data/Accountability
- Early Childhood Partnerships and Collaboration
- Special Projects
- Division of Early Care and Education
- Division of Family Support Services
- Division of Early Intervention
- Division of Licensing

Data/Accountability

The Data/Accountability Coordinator works to increase the knowledge of OEC data metrics and performance measures. The coordinator is responsible for all data reports issued by OEC and works with OEC staff and other state agencies in identifying linkages between programs, required reporting elements and data fields, to help provide direction and perspective in the development of the Early Childhood Information System (ECIS).

Early Childhood Partnerships and Collaboration

The manager for Early Childhood Partnerships and Collaboration facilitates state-level collaboration between Head Start/Early Head Start and state agencies and entities that carry out activities designed to benefit low-income pregnant women, children from birth to school entry, and their families. The manager also serves as the state's Head Start Collaboration Officer.

Special Projects

The special projects coordinator is assigned to time-limited projects such as the study of child care licensing regulations and processes by the National Association of Regulatory Administration (NARA), acting as facilitator for the OEC regarding Medication Administration,

and supporting the Deputy Director in space planning and other projects. In addition to these assigned projects, the coordinator has been responsible for development of interagency agreements. The coordinator has acted as the OEC liaison with the State Department of Education Human Resource Office in facilitating the hiring process for newly established and refill positions. In addition, the coordinator has acted as the agency's LEAN Coordinator, serving on the state's LEAN Steering Committee.

The Deputy Director also oversees the four divisions of the Office of Early Childhood.

Division of Early Care and Education

The Division of Early Care and Education is made up of four units:

- Workforce Development
- Program Improvement and Support
- Standards, Instruction and Assessment
- Grants and Subsidies

Workforce Development Unit

The Workforce Development Unit oversees systems, policies and practices to support the goal of developing a highly qualified and effective workforce for all children birth to age five. Collaborative partners include higher education institutions, professional development providers and members of the early childhood workforce. Connecticut Charts-A-Course, which resides in the unit, is responsible for the professional registry, scholarship administration, career counseling and other key functions to support individuals and programs.

Program Improvement and Support Unit

The Program Improvement and Support Unit focuses on improving the quality of early care and education by assisting programs to participate in the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation process. This ongoing support offers programs on-site individualized technical assistance, networking and training opportunities to pursue and attain national accreditation. Additionally, workshops, training and technical assistance is available to guide program improvement efforts.

The unit also offers college-credit coursework and other professional development opportunities to improve the qualifications of Connecticut's early care and education program administrators. These opportunities assist administrators in meeting the educator qualifications established by NAEYC, as well as the requirements of the Connecticut Director Credential (CDC).

Standards, Instruction and Assessment Unit

The Standards, Instruction and Assessment Unit supports programs, families, providers, and communities to help young children grow and learn using the Cycle of Intentional Teaching as a Framework. Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) provide common language around what children from birth to age five should know and be able to do. Instruction and assessment is composed of planning experiences to support children's development, gathering information about how they are progressing and adjusting what is being done to support them based upon this information. The unit offers webinars, workshops and technical assistance around the framework so that all young children will have high-quality learning experiences, across all types of settings.

Grants and Subsidies Unit

The Grants and Subsidies Unit oversees and monitors state and federal grants, contracts and subsidies which support early care and education programs, including School Readiness, Child Day Care, state Head Start supplement, Even Start, community early childhood planning, early literacy and program quality enhancement and facility improvements. The unit ensures funds are administered efficiently and are used for the intended purpose. Effective July 1, 2014, the Unit will also oversee the Care 4 Kids subsidy program which is currently under the oversight of the Department of Social Services.

Division of Family Services and Support

The Division of Family Support Services is responsible for the administration of several major state and federally funded initiatives to prevent child abuse and neglect by helping families and communities be responsive to children, ensuring their positive growth and development. These efforts include funding a broad range of organizations to implement evidence-based programs, testing innovations in the field and conducting research to assess the effectiveness of programs and developing strategies for improvement.

The division provides a comprehensive approach to preventing child abuse and neglect to ensure the health, well-being and positive growth and development of all young children in Connecticut.

The division identifies and supports the most effective means of assisting and strengthening families, communities and the human services workforce in order to prevent child abuse and neglect. To do this, staff provide training and contract for direct services to help:

- Parents become effective caregivers and develop nurturing relationships with their children (i.e. through home visiting and creating single points of access to services in communities)
- Communities and human service staff become more responsive to the needs of children and support their positive growth and development (i.e. truancy prevention, child

development system building, provider trainings in maternal and child health, developmental screening)

- Families find resources in time of need

The division's major programs are researched and evaluated by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research. The evaluation is a vital ingredient in the development of the division's programs and has consistently shown that the programs are making a positive difference in the lives of the children and families that participate.

Programs within the Division of Family Support Services include:

- Family Development Training
- Family Empowerment Programs
- Help Me Grow
- Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (currently under the Department of Public Health, scheduled to transition on October 1, 2014)
- Nurturing Families Network
- Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome
- The Stranger You Know
- The Family School Connection

In addition, the division is responsible for the administration of the Community-Based Program to Prevent Child Abuse, a federal program to support innovative community-based prevention efforts.

The Division of Family Support Services has been working on a number of groundbreaking projects that will benefit families and children throughout the state and make a significant contribution to the prevention field.

Division of Early Intervention

The Division of Early Intervention will be made up of the Early Child Special Education IDEA Part B Program from the State Department of Education (scheduled to transition on July 1, 2015) and the Birth to Three IDEA Part C Program from the Department of Developmental Services (the anticipated transition is pending legislation).

Division of Licensing

The Division of Licensing is made up of the Child Day Care Licensing and Youth Camp Licensing Programs from the Department of Public Health (effective July 1, 2014.)

Improvements/Achievements 2013-2014

Government Efficiency and Performance

- The passage of *Public Act 14-39 – An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education and Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education* in the 2014 legislative session formally established the Office of Early Childhood. The establishment of the agency in statute assigns responsibility to the Office of Early Childhood for the coordination and improvement of various early childhood programs and components in the state to create a cohesive high-quality early childhood system. It also provides the agency with the authority for oversight of early childhood programs.
- The OEC launched its work on the Early Childhood Information System (ECIS). Currently, Connecticut does not have a centralized mechanism for collecting and managing early childhood data. To the contrary, early childhood data is dispersed across at least six agencies and more than 25 associated databases, making data sharing incredibly challenging. Without an ECIS the state cannot make informed and effective early childhood policy, costing the state unnecessarily and hindering its ability to turn the curve in the lives of young children and their families. The ECIS will help ensure that complete and accurate data is collected, linked to and coordinated with the K-12 data system, in particular, so that quality assessments and longitudinal analyses of early care and education programs can be performed and student progress can be monitored.
- The OEC, in conjunction with the Department of Public Health (DPH), worked with the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA), an international professional organization to identify strengths and weaknesses within the state's child care licensing program. The work included a three-stage Needs Assessment conducted by NARA and consisted of an online survey, forums and in-depth interviews of child care providers, parents and licensing staff. As a result of the Needs Assessment, NARA made recommendations to help improve the current child care licensing program. To view NARA's report, please go to www.ct.gov/oec/nara.
- The OEC helped facilitate the transition of two Head Start programs which lost federal funding to new Head Start programs. By having various early childhood programs in one coordinated agency, the OEC was able to make the transition as seamless as possible, resulting in minimal impact on affected children and their families.
- Creation of the agency website and social media pages. Website provides information pertaining to the agency's organization and work. There were nearly 75,000 page views of the website from December 2013 through June 2014.

- The OEC developed a logo, mission, vision and guiding principles to give the agency a common brand. The brand provides the agency with an official presence and identity as well as giving staff a sense of unity and belonging.

Improving Quality of Child Care and Education

- One of the priority initiatives for OEC is to create a coordinated system to help improve the quality of early care and education settings in Connecticut. The office has begun its work for the design and implementation of the state's Quality Improvement System. This system will be a major component of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Connecticut. A plan for its design is anticipated to be available by fall 2014 for public review. During the design process, stakeholders will be invited to contribute ideas, suggestions and information to help the team design a robust and effective system of supporting program quality.
- The OEC recently published and distributed copies of Connecticut's Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS). The CT ELDS were developed through the work of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet and its Early Learning Standards Workgroup. In addition, over 100 state and national experts participated during the development process, helping to ensure a strong and comprehensive set of Early Learning Standards. The CT ELDS set forth what children, from birth to age five, should know and be able to do across domains of development and areas of learning. They are designed to provide a foundation and common language to help families, communities and school work together to support children's early learning and growth. In addition to the full document, the OEC published family guides with more general information about supporting children across domains and about the importance of screening (Action Guides) and posters which include information from the CT ELDS. The OEC distributed approximately 20,000 CT ELDS books, 15,000 posters and 60,000 family guides to early childhood programs, providers, libraries and pediatrician's offices. In addition, support around using these resources to promote positive outcomes for children was provided through webinars reaching 750 live participants and archived on website and professional learning opportunities that reached approximately 500 early care and education providers, 85 early childhood program directors and consultants and 30 higher education faculty. A second mailing is being planned for public school special education directors and Birth-to-Three providers.
- Mental Health Training (DCF/ECCP) - Family Daycare and Infant and Toddler Teacher Outreach and Engagement Project to build the capacity of early care and education providers, to meet the social emotional and behavioral needs of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in their care and to include center based infant and toddler care and licensed family home daycare providers:

- Social Emotional Needs Assessment
 - Created English and Spanish survey questionnaires and data collection and analysis system to conduct needs assessment with Family Home Daycare Providers and Center Infant Toddler Providers across the state
 - Conducted focus groups with Family Home Daycare Providers and Center Infant Toddler Providers
 - Completed 294 surveys with Family Home Daycare Providers and 573 surveys with Infant Toddler Providers
- Resource Development
 - Created range of materials to meet provider specified requests for information, including informational letters, training information, resource books, and *Tips for Tots* and *Tips Post Cards* in English and Spanish
 - Distributed resources in Tool Kits to 26,454 Family Home Daycare Providers and 39,319 Infant Toddler Provider participants
- Website
 - Splash page created for ECCP webpage with resources for ongoing resource access and support
- Expanded the All Our Kin (AOK) model to enhance the quality of family child care programs in Bridgeport, Norwalk and northern Fairfield County. AOK completed a feasibility study to examine current demographics of family child care and family, friend and neighbor care in the state, the programs and services that exist for supporting family child care licensure and quality in different regions, and the extent to which caregivers are able to access these programs and services. Twenty-two caregivers from Bridgeport and Norwalk successfully completed the family child care licensing process and joined AOK's family child care provider community. Ninety-six licensed family child care providers in Bridgeport, Norwalk and northern Fairfield County are currently engaged in improving the quality of their programs through AOKs professional development efforts including coaching and consultation, Child Development Associate (CDA) training, Growing Healthy Children series and small business series. All Our Kin trained 35 child care providers in five cohorts across three cities (New Haven, Bridgeport, and Norwalk) in the Circle of Security model. Circle of Security guides adults in a deep exploration of attachment and their relationships with children through a series of discussion-based workshops.
- 2-1-1 Child Care Provider Orientation Project provided 40 orientation sessions serving 300 participants throughout the state on topics including health and safety, child development and child care licensing requirements, process and benefits. It also provided health and safety kits containing a fire extinguisher, carbon monoxide and smoke alarm detectors, first aid kit, Child Health Immunization and Health Forms and HUSKY information) to participants in Health & Safety Orientations.

- The OEC provided scholarship assistance to individuals pursuing degrees in accordance with meeting the educator requirements for state-funded child care programs. Scholarship funds are available for degree-seeking individuals attending the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities/Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education by Connecticut Charts-A-Course, a program of the OEC. Of the \$350,000 SDE FY12-13, all funds were committed; \$303,474 reconciled spent, representing 197 individuals. Of the \$250,000 SDE QE FY13, all funds were committed; \$201,137 reconciled spent, representing 175 individuals.
- The OEC made a significant number of improvements to the Early Childhood Professional Registry (www.ccacregistry.org) including the ability to now accept scholarship applications throughout the year. During the 2014 fiscal year, over \$900,000 was awarded for scholarship assistance mainly toward Early Childhood degree and credential advancement.
- This year the OEC's Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) assisted 41 programs to achieve accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Further, the AFP provided support to 140 licensed child care programs seeking NAEYC Accreditation. Supports included on-site technical assistance, and training, coaching and mentoring focused on program improvement opportunities. Professional development funds were awarded to advance programs toward compliance with NAEYC criteria. In collaboration with SDE/IDEA 619, AFP supported public school and community-based programs serving 3-, 4- and 5- year-olds with identified disabilities. Connecticut ranks third in the country for the number of programs accredited by NAEYC and first in the nation per capita.
- Connecticut's Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for the role of the teachers across all types of early childhood settings was developed. This Framework will inform the planning for future pre-service and in-service professional development.
- Thirteen institutes of higher education have been approved to deliver the Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) which allows a person working in a School Readiness program to meet statutory requirements. (The ECTC is not the same as a teaching license issued by the State Department of Education.)
- In June, Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the Office of Early Childhood announced the allocation plan for 1,020 additional School Readiness spaces included in Fiscal Year 2015's budget. A total of 46 towns and cities were awarded a portion of the 1,020 spaces. In determining the allocation, first priority for spaces went to programs that demonstrated high-quality. Every community that requested spaces received some of the expansion.
- Over \$8 million in bond funds were granted for facility improvements and minor capital repairs for Fiscal Year 2014. These funds help address building and site deficiencies, and promote the health, safety and learning of children in appropriate environments. The repairs

must be done to part of the facilities that house funded school readiness programs (within priority school districts and competitive communities) and state-funded child day care centers, where children are currently located or will be relocated. A second Request for Proposals (RFP) for Minor Capital Improvements for early care and education settings was released in June. Approximately \$13.5 million in bond funds will be granted for facility improvements and minor capital repairs for Fiscal Year 2015.

- Successfully proposed legislation, which was enacted effective July 1, 2014, to require annual inspections of licensed child day care centers, group day care homes and family day care homes.
- Established and implemented a standard training program for newly hired Child Care Licensing Specialists and License & Applications Analysts.
- In the spring, the federal Office of Head Start in partnership with the Office of Child Care, released a grant opportunity for states and communities to enhance the quality of infant toddler child care by aligning state child care regulations with federal Head Start Performance Standards. The OEC convened interested communities in public discussions to highlight ways to better align policies across funding streams and to provide support for creating successful partnerships.

Family Support Services

- Launched the Triple P CT program. Triple P stands for “Positive Parenting Program.” Over 140 individuals working in Hartford and five towns in Northeastern CT were trained and accredited in Triple P. Triple P practitioners work in a variety of settings and include school social workers, family resource center staff, youth librarians, preschool teachers, recreation staff, case managers, behavior technicians, school counselors, home visitors, health care clinicians, mental health counselors and outreach workers. Clinical/ implementation support is provided to new Triple P practitioners, and includes one-on-one coaching, telephone support and refresher workshops. A public awareness campaign was launched in May 2014 and included community kickoff events, radio ads and the development of a website, brochures, posters and billboards.
- In the spring, OEC launched its *Help Me Grow* campaign to increase awareness of the critical need for universal developmental screening of children birth to five years of age and linking at-risk children to necessary supports and services. Participating communities throughout the state hosted Community Cafés where parents were able to participate in guided, meaningful conversations about child development. Cafes were held in Bridgeport, Danbury, Derby, Hartford, Killingly, Putnam, Plainfield, Sterling, Middletown, New Britain, Norwalk and Stamford. These communities also held events with free developmental screenings for two-year-olds and parents were able to register to receive parent questionnaires through the mail

to help track their children's development. One thousand five hundred and forty-five people participated in the campaign as partners, volunteers or parents. If each of these individuals shares the campaign message about the critical need for universal developmental screening and timely linkage to supports and services with only five people, they will raise awareness among 8,500 people in Connecticut over the coming year and fewer children who need help will slip between the cracks.

- United Way of Connecticut, in partnership with the OEC, was awarded a three-year planning grant from the federal Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) to build Connecticut's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS). The ECCS plan will focus on: coordination of the expansion of developmental screening activities in early care and education settings across the state by working with pediatric and other child health providers to link early screening training and referrals among medical homes, early intervention services, child care programs and families.
- The Nurturing Families Network programs employed seven full-time and four part-time fathering home visitors. One hundred and twenty-two fathers and/or boyfriends participated in over 2,200 home visits. This was a 22% increase in home visits from the previous year. Fifty-nine fathers participated in Nurturing Parenting Groups. The Family Support Services unit continues to develop and strengthen the Fathering Home Visiting component of Nurturing Families Network through professional development, policy work and technical assistance.
- Over the past year, David Mandel from David Mandel and Associates has worked with fathering home visitors around risk assessment and gender specific strategies for engagement and retention of fathers in the home visiting program. As a result of these trainings, fathering home visitors developed skills and gained confidence to engage dads in the program.
- The Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Program: Building Healthier Families and Communities began an 18-month randomized controlled trial (June 1, 2013 - March 31, 2015) on behalf of the Hartford Childhood Wellness Alliance to change maternal behaviors related to infant nutrition, parenting skills and family wellness. Fifty-six mothers have been recruited to take part in the study. OEC staff worked directly with Nurturing Families Network program staff at participating Hartford sites to maximize recruitment and participation of families in this study.