



Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

At a Glance

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

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

Statutory Authority – Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 10-500 (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 – 107

Recurring operating expenses -

Federal: \$22,350,339

State: \$250,740,662

Bond Funds: \$851,070

Organizational structure -

- **Commissioner's Office**
- **Early Childhood Programs and Services**
- **Division of Early Care and Education**
- **Division of Family Support Services**
- **Division of Licensing**

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 Conn. Gen. Statute Sec. 10-500 (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, 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

The Office of Childhood hired three fiscal staff and has assumed a large portion of the day-to-day fiscal functions, budgeting, reporting and year-end responsibilities for both state and federal funds. The Office of Early Childhood continues to work closely with the State Department of Education in transferring additional responsibilities that current staffing levels can assume and successfully complete.

Information technology staff is supporting the purchasing and deployment of all necessary software and hardware to all divisions within the OEC. IT staff works with the State Department of Education to coordinate the inventorying, migration of IT systems from other agencies, user support, hardware imaging, security, deployment of hardware for new staff, and hardware testing and maintenance.

Business Operations is in the process of drafting formal policies and procedures, forms, and internal processes which will guide internal business practices.

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.
- Outreach to early childhood community-based organizations to build communication and collaboration.

- Monitoring of OEC legislation and regulations.
- Development and implementation of OEC legislative agenda.
- Tracking and analysis of early childhood-related legislation.
- Ensuring implementation of approved legislation.
- Coordinating responses to legislative inquiries.
- Preparing OEC legislative testimony, reports and presentations.
- Ensuring OEC participation 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 Licensing

Data & Accountability

The Data & Accountability Coordinator works to increase the knowledge of OEC data metrics and performance measures. The coordinator is responsible for 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

As Director of the state’s Head Start State Collaboration Office, 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.

Special Projects

The special projects coordinator oversaw completion of a study of child care licensing regulations and processes by the National Association of Regulatory Administration (NARA). The coordinator completed development of five interagency agreements related to new functions assumed by the Office of Early Childhood. The coordinator worked closely with the State Department of Education Human Resource Office and the Department of Administrative Services in establishing and filling 25 new positions. In addition, the coordinator acted as the agency's LEAN Coordinator, serving on the state's LEAN Steering Committee. The coordinator was a member of the teams that allowed the OEC to successfully compete for the FY15 Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting grant and the Preschool Development Grant.

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. Registry staff housed in this unit are responsible for the Connecticut Early Childhood Professional Registry, including uploading and coding professional development qualifications, administering scholarship funds, processing licensing Head Teacher, ECTC and Technical Assistance Provider applications, providing career counseling, supporting program requirements, 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 oversaw the Care 4 Kids subsidy program which had previously been 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:

- Training Programs including Family Development Training and Credentialing and TouchPoints
- Family Empowerment Programs
- Help Me Grow
- Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program
- Nurturing Families Network
- Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome
- The Stranger You Know
- The Family School Connection
- Triple – Positive Parenting program
- In-Home Cognitive behavioral Therapy

Division of Licensing

The Division of Licensing is responsible for administering the Child Care Licensing and Youth Camp Licensing Programs. Family child care homes, group child care homes, child care centers and youth camps are required to be licensed. The child care licensing specialists and supervisors, nurses, health program staff, administrative and support staff assure that licensed child care facilities and youth camps operate at or above the required standards established by state statutes and regulations. This is accomplished through technical assistance, application processing, facility monitoring, complaint investigation and enforcement activities. The Division licenses more than 4,000 child care facilities and youth camps.

Improvements/Achievements 2014-2015

Government Efficiency and Performance

- The Office of Early Childhood applied for and received \$74 million in federal grant funding.
- With funding from the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, the Office of Early Childhood conducted an agency-wide organizational assessment that serves as the foundation for designing and implementing a four-year strategic plan.
- The Early Childhood Information System consists of several program-level data systems that will, when connected through a data warehouse, allow the OEC to integrate data across its own programs and then engage in data-sharing with other state agencies of de-identified data. The first step has been to build out the program level data system for the OEC-funded early care and education programs. Development and testing of that system took place throughout FY15 and the system is set to launch to 450 program users (community agencies and public schools providing publicly funded early care and education programming) in fall 2015. A major accomplishment of the project was working with the State Department of Education (SDE) to create a single system for the purpose of creating and assigning children enrolled in preschool unique child identifiers (called State Assigned Student IDs).

Improving Quality of Child Care and Education

- The School Readiness program was expanded by an additional 1,020 spaces in FY15. A total of 46 towns and cities were awarded a portion of the 1,020 spaces.
- Approximately \$2 million was awarded to 14 local boards of education to increase access to high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds through Smart Start. This funding has allowed for the creation of 26 new preschool classrooms in public schools serving nearly 400 more children. An additional \$1.5 million dollars in bond funding was awarded to boards of education for capital improvements in classrooms.
- Over \$8 million in bond funds grants for facility improvements and minor capital repairs were awarded for Fiscal Year 2015 to help address building and site deficiencies as well as helping to promote the health, safety and learning of children in age-appropriate environments. A second Request for Proposals (RFP) for Minor Capital Improvements for early care and education settings was released in June 2015. Approximately \$13.5 million in bond funds is anticipated for facility improvements and minor capital repairs for Fiscal Year 2016.

- Connecticut's Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for the role of 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. Final stage to adopt, print and disseminate the document is scheduled for early 2016.
- The OEC collaborated with the State Department of Education on a Kindergarten Symposium in May 2015. This session provided professional learning related to executive functioning as well as providing information about plans for a revised Kindergarten Entrance Inventory.
- 2-1-1 Child Care Provider Orientation Project provided 250 orientation sessions serving 5,000 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. These orientation sessions are required before an individual can become a Care4Kids provider, either as a licensed family child care home or an unlicensed family friend and neighbor provider.
- The OEC's Program Leadership Initiative offered six courses for the Connecticut Director Credential, representing 116 spaces. All attendees were individuals currently holding leadership positions within Connecticut programs for young children.
- The Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) assisted 45 programs in achieving accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Further, the AFP provided support to 125 licensed child care programs seeking NAEYC Accreditation. Professional development funds were awarded to 65 AFP sites to advance compliance with NAEYC criteria. These funds also reached 83 non-AFP sites and a total of 1,033 staff. In collaboration with SDE/IDEA 619, AFP supported public school and community-based programs serving 3-, 4- and 5- year-olds with identified disabilities by providing funding support for NAEYC Accreditation fees, training and technical assistance. Connecticut ranks third in the country for the number of programs accredited by NAEYC and first in the nation per capita.
- A total of \$1,245,998 in scholarship assistance was provided 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 regionally accredited higher education institutions via the Connecticut Early Childhood Professional Registry. For the first time, the scholarships were available year-round.

- Two additional institutions of higher education have been approved to deliver the Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) which allows a person working in a state-funded program to meet statutory requirements. This brings the number of approved institutions to 15. There are three ways to meet the requirement; hold an appropriate State Department of Education early childhood teaching license, hold an ECTC, or be grandfathered into the workforce as outlined in Public Act 15-134.
- The CT Office of Early Childhood, with the University of CT NEAG School of Education, designed and developed a Prek-to 3rd Grade Leadership Program to increase the knowledge of pre-service and in-service leaders about the unique developmental period. The program enrolled 19 participants in the summer of 2015 which included early childhood community program directors, school district central office administrators and elementary school principals. The nine-month long executive style learning program covers modules on curriculum and instruction, assessment practices with young children and evaluation of teachers and programs and leading for equity, excellent and early success.

Licensing

- The Division of Licensing hired and trained 16 additional child care licensing staff to implement the provisions of Public Act 14-39, which mandated annual inspections of all licensed child care centers, group child care homes and family child care homes.
- The Division of Licensing partnered with the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) Early Childhood Advisory Committee to investigate the feasibility of licensing pre-K programs administered by public schools. To better inform public schools regarding the licensure process, school districts throughout the state volunteered to undergo mock inspections of their pre-K programs by the Division of Licensing . The objective of the mock inspections was to identify any obstacles public school programs might face if licensing became required, as well as the extent to which licensing requirements are appropriate when applied to pre-K programs operating in public schools. A total of seven school districts volunteered to participate in the process, which resulted in mock inspections of a total of 25 classrooms.
- In response to a 2014 report issued by the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) of strategies to improve Connecticut’s child day care licensing program, the OEC developed a Policy and Procedure Manual outlining key functions of the child care licensing program including topics such as initial licensing, routine licensing inspections, and complaint processing. The new manual will ensure consistency in the application of licensing regulations during the licensing inspections.

Family Support Services

- The Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program was transferred from the Department of Public Health to the Office of Early Childhood in 2014. The federally funded program offers services in high-needs communities across the state using four evidenced- based home visiting program models – Parents as Teachers, Child First, Early Head Start and the Nurse Family Partnership. Together these programs provide services to roughly 1,200 families each year. The OEC was awarded \$10.4 million in federal funds to continue funding for these programs through December 31, 2016.
- Building on the success of a randomized control trial to test In-Home Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (IHCBT) to treat maternal depression among mothers participating in the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) home visiting program, the OEC has launched a community-based initiative to expand and enhance the program. The OEC, in partnership with the University of Connecticut Health Center, is recruiting and training licensed private practice therapists eligible for Medicaid reimbursement to provide the treatment in tandem with NFN services in their communities. To date, roughly 20 therapists have been trained to provide IHCBT, many of which have begun working with families and utilizing the therapy. This approach allows for the sustainability of the effort, expands the

network of mental health providers available to the families participating in NFN and eliminates the need for duplicative state or federal grant funding for mental health services.