



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: \$105,556,720

State: \$245,875,530

Bond Funds: \$2,639,024

Organizational structure -

- **Commissioner's Office**
- **Early Childhood Programs and Services**
- **Division of Early Care and Education**
- **Division of Family Support**
- **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, Developmental 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 one fiscal and one Information Technology staff and is managing 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 maintaining OEC fiscal and IT responsibilities.

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, media 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.

- Development and implementation of OEC legislative agenda.
- Tracking and analysis of early childhood-related legislation.
- Ensuring implementation of approved legislation.
- Responding to legislative inquiries.
- Preparing OEC legislative testimony and reports.
- 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
- 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.

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

(Note: Starting in FY17, a new Quality Improvement System (QIS) Division has been established and all quality improvement work has been transferred to that Division.) 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, Care4Kids, 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.

Division of Family Supports

The Division of Family Supports is responsible for the administration of several major state and federally funded initiatives to strengthen the capacity of families to meet the developmental and health related needs of their infants and toddlers who have delays or disabilities, and to prevent child abuse and neglect by helping families and communities be responsive to children, ensuring their positive growth and development. These efforts include collaborating with community stakeholders, 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 support families and to prevent child abuse and neglect by identifying the most effective means of assisting and strengthening families, communities and the human services workforce. To do this, staff provides training and contracts 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. child development system building, provider trainings in maternal and child health, developmental screening)
- Families find resources in time of need

Some of the division's major programs have been 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 Supports include:

- Connecticut Birth to Three System
- Help Me Grow

- In-Home Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Home visiting programs (Child First, Early Head Start, Nurse Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers) funded by the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant program
- Nurturing Families Network
- Healthy Start
- Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome
- Training Programs including Family Development Training and Credentialing and TouchPoints
- Triple P – Positive Parenting Program

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 2015-2016

Government Efficiency and Performance

- Provided the following services:
 - Served 17,500 children through early care and education programs
 - Served 21,500 children through the Care4Kids child care subsidy program
 - Served 10,000 children through the Birth to Three program
 - Served 5,200 families through the Home Visiting programs
 - Provided 4,400 Ages and Stages questionnaires to families
 - Received 1,500 referrals through Help Me Grow

- The OEC conducted three “LEAN” projects designed to streamline administrative processes. Those three projects included the Workforce Registry, Home Visiting invoice and payment, and the intake office that receives Birth to Three and Help Me Grow referrals.

- The OEC merged its existing Family Support Services Division with its Early Intervention Division to create one Family Support Division that includes home visiting, Birth to Three, Help Me Grow, and any other family support services.

- The Early Childhood Information System launched its Early Care and Education module in which, for the first time, all children enrolled in OEC-funded pre-K and infant/toddler programs will be reported under unique identifiers.

- Instituted telephone hearings for the Care4Kids child care subsidy program. Parents can take less time from work and attend a hearing from a location that is convenient to them. It also means that fewer state resources are being used (e.g., security).

- The Division of Licensing transitioned to a new updated version of its licensing data system. The new version features upgrades that increase efficiency and alleviates burdensome processes. A standard process was established for the routine verification of background check completion by licensed child care centers and group child care homes for currently employed staff. Licensing and legal staff were trained on the process and implementation began at the end of FY16.

Improving Quality of Child Care and Education

- Created 430 new pre-k spaces and 282 improved existing pre-k spaces under the federal Preschool Development grant. High-quality elements of the pre-k programs funded with

this grant include early childhood mental health consultation services, coaching for instructional staff, and comprehensive services for children.

- A total of \$2,744,046 was awarded to 17 local boards of education to increase access to high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds through Smart Start. This funding has allowed ongoing support for 21 preschool classrooms and the addition of 16 new preschool classrooms in public schools serving a total of 549 children. An additional \$1,218,405 in bond funding was awarded to boards of education for capital improvements in classrooms.
- \$7.8 million in bond funds grants for facility improvements and minor capital repairs were awarded for Fiscal Year 2016 to help address building and site deficiencies as well as helping to promote the health, safety and learning of children in age-appropriate environments.
- Connecticut's Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for the role of teachers across all types of early childhood settings was completed. This Framework will inform the planning for future pre-service and in-service professional development.
- 2-1-1 Child Care Provider Orientation Project provided 279 orientation sessions serving 5,270 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's Program Leadership Initiative offered six courses for the Connecticut Director Credential, representing 142 spaces. All attendees were individuals currently holding leadership positions within Connecticut programs for young children.
- The Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) provided individualized on-site support to 104 programs actively pursuing national accreditation and assisted 21 programs in achieving accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). A spring selection was cancelled in anticipation of the transition of accreditation support to United Way. Connecticut has moved from third to fourth in the country for the number of NAEYC Accredited programs, surpassed by the efforts of the state of Minnesota, which expanded its accreditation support initiative to help programs achieve the highest level of their quality rating system.

Two professional development strategies were implemented under AFP guide program improvement:

For sites working with an AFP facilitator, program-wide professional development reached 84 programs and 744 staff participants, and focused on provision of supports to align with state initiatives. With a focus on alignment with state initiatives, content addressed implementation of the Early Learning and Development Standards, the Project Approach and “Making and Tinkering” as strategies to respond to children’s interests and needs. Teachers participated in coursework in community colleges and training on assessment of child progress using Teaching Strategies GOLD. To support the maintenance of program quality, 127 administrators attended training by the National Center for Early Childhood Leadership focused on program assessment and systems building.

For all early childhood sites regardless of funding source, professional development was provided to 1,351 participants on topics including NAEYC Accreditation, ethics, curriculum, infectious diseases, and observation of teaching practices.

- A total of \$1,082,888 in scholarship assistance was provided to individuals pursuing competency development, and meeting state and national educator requirements. Scholarship funds are available via the Connecticut Early Childhood Professional Registry.
- The CT Office of Early Childhood, continues to work with the University of CT NEAG School of Education, to implement the Prek-to 3rd Grade Leadership Program to increase the knowledge of pre-service and in-service leaders about this unique developmental period. The 19 participants 2015-2016 included early childhood community program directors, school district central office administrators and elementary school principals. These participants received their PK-3 Leadership Fellowship Certificates in May 2016. For 2016-2017 a second cohort of 20 participants is currently enrolled; there is a waiting list of interested participants for future cohorts. This ten-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

Licensing Operations

- The 16 new child care licensing specialists hired to comply with the mandate for annual inspections of child care programs in accordance with Public Act 14-39 completed sufficient training to assume independent responsibility for the monitoring of child care programs in the field. With this addition of staff, the Division is now completing annual inspections of all licensed child care centers, group child care homes and family child care homes.
- The Policy and Procedure Manual for staff was updated with the addition of a section on Field Safety, language to be consistent with legislative and procedural changes and technical changes. All licensing staff received refresher training on the manual. Staff performance is measured based upon compliance with the procedures outlines in this manual.
- A complaint intake form and process for the public to file complaints against child care and youth camp programs online was developed and implemented.
- Proposed revisions were drafted for the youth camp, child care center/group child care home and family child care home licensing regulations, which as moving through the established regulation implementation process.

Legal Office

Background Checks

- Adopted a background check disqualification policy for licensed providers similar to what already existed for Care 4 Kids providers. This created consistency throughout the agency and helped to remove some of the agency's backlog as crimes unrelated to someone's ability to provide child care are no longer considered.
- Instituted a process for child care center background check review.
- Proposed and passed background check legislation to cover household members in family child care homes which was enacted into law this year.
- Tracked the number of fingerprints processed, both paid and reprints. This allows for an easy comparison of month-to-month changes in volume and averages. This information is regularly relayed to the state police. Tracked hits and non-hits totals so we know the percentage of results that are hits in any given month or overall.

Child Care Licensing Hearings

- Recruited and contracted with a pool of outside, impartial hearing officers for child care licensing hearings.

- Communicated with providers before initiating the enforcement process if we believe they will close their facility or if the violations are such that they can be corrected without enforcement.
- Improved the licensing hearings process through use of professional interpreters, appearance forms, etc. A clerk to the hearing officer is assigned for every hearing, which provides the hearing officer with administrative support from beginning to end.

Family Support Division

- The Office of Early Childhood applied for and was awarded 9.1 million in federal funds from the Health Resources Service Administration to continue the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program through December 2017. This federally funded program offers services in high-needs communities across the state using four evidenced-based home visiting models – Parents as Teachers, Child First, Early Head Start, and the Nurse Family Partnership. These programs provide services to roughly 1,400 families each year.
- In July 2015, the Home Visitation Program Consortium was created by Public Act 15-45. The consortium is tasked with advising the Office of Early Childhood, Department of Children and Families, Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Education regarding the implementation of the recommendations for the coordination of home visitation programs within the early childhood system. The consortium meets quarterly to continue the work of the Connecticut Home Visiting Plan for Families with Young Children.
- Dr. Brazelton’s Touchpoints Training was provided to approximately 90 family support providers within OEC evidence based home visiting programs. The Touchpoints model promotes the idea that all development, for a child takes place within and in interaction with relationships and that development is enhanced when the parent-child relationship is strengthened. The goal of Touchpoints is to support parents and therefore children in developing the basic trust that is vital to naturally develop healthy interdependence.
- Multiple trainings in the Family Development Credential- Empowerment Skills for Family Workers, Family Development for Leaders and Supervisors, Ages and Stages-3 were provided in Connecticut communities.
- As of the end of FY16, 50 therapists have been recruited and trained to provide In-Home Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (IHCBT) to mothers participating in the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) home visiting program.