

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

REACH

A newsletter for early childhood education professionals

Dear Early Childhood Professionals,

Happy New Year! This month, we are leaning into the power of connection, from the collaborative family child care model featured in our **Provider Spotlight** to the launch of **Leader Link-Up**, a new monthly space for program leaders to connect and share practical strategies. If you are looking to take a more active role in shaping the supports we offer the community, we invite you to apply for the **DIEEC Leadership Board** by January 15.

This issue also contains essential updates to help you navigate the coming months. You will find critical reminders regarding **Quality Improvement Awards (QIA)**, including the February 1 deadline to schedule your Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp) visit, as well as registration for our upcoming **Math Up!** and **PALS** Professional Learning Experiences. From social-emotional learning strategies to the creative cardboard ideas in **Coach's Corner**, we hope these resources provide steady support for the vital work you do every day.

We wish you a peaceful and restorative close to the year!

Warmly,

Kristy Sheffler, DIEEC Interim Co-Director

DIEEC Action Items

Apply by January 15: DIEEC Early Childhood Educator Leadership Board

Last call! Leverage your on-the-ground experience to offer insights into the needs of Delaware's early childhood community and provide recommendations on DIEEC's programs and initiatives! Apply to join the DIEEC Early Childhood Educator Leadership Board, a diverse group of educators dedicated to strengthening the supports provided for Delaware's early childhood community. The Leadership Board is open to classroom educators, program administrators, and family child care educators. [Learn more and apply here.](#)



The Leadership Board brings educator voices together to strengthen Delaware's early childhood supports.
(Photo credit: DIEEC)

DIEEC News

New Opportunity for Early Childhood Leaders: Leader Link-Up

DIEEC is offering a new monthly opportunity for early childhood program leaders to connect, share inspiration, and gain practical strategies. Monthly meetings are held virtually, for one hour, typically during lunchtime.

The next meeting will be held on **Wednesday, January 21, at 12:30 p.m.** [Fill out our interest form, and we'll send you a reminder and Zoom link the day before](#) the meeting. See you there!



Photo credit: iStock)

Coming Soon: The 2026 DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards!

The DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards return this spring to celebrate the educators who go above and beyond for Delaware's children. While nominations don't officially open until February, now is the perfect time to start thinking about the colleague whose dedication deserves the spotlight. Stay tuned for details on how to honor the excellence you see every day! [In the meantime, take a look at last year's nominees.](#)



2025 Award Winners (from left to right): Shakira Waples, Tara Chetty, Madison Hogsten, Stacy Morgan, and Ashley Avelleyra. (Photo credit: Evan Krape/UD Office of Communications and Marketing)

Provider Spotlight: It Takes A Neighborhood

Field trips, shared logistics, and an emotional safety net—all just one block away. Step inside the unique partnership of Claymont educators Rose Currington and Carmen Wright, who are proving that family child care doesn't have to be a solo journey. [See why their collaborative model is a win for educators, children, and families alike.](#)



Better together: Carmen Wright and Rose Currington prove that child care thrives when neighbors work as a team. (Photo credit: Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC)

Meeting the Needs of All Children: Everyday Social-Emotional Learning

The Devereux Center for Resilient Children strives to "foster resilience in and promote the social and emotional development of young children (birth to age 5), so that they can be successful in both school and life." In a recent blog post, the Devereux Center shared helpful ideas for weaving social-emotional learning into everyday classroom activities. By focusing on these skills in the context of existing activities, you help children build a lifelong foundation—strengthening their communication, teaching them to manage emotions in healthy ways, and fostering the empathy needed to resolve conflicts and build lasting relationships. [Read more: Supporting Social-Emotional Growth Through Everyday Classroom Activities.](#)

Coach's Corner: Unboxing Potential: 8 Uses for Cardboard Boxes in the Early Childhood Classroom

Don't toss those delivery boxes! Check out this month's Coach's Corner for 8 activity ideas and stay active during these chilly winter months.



Photo credit: iStock

Monthly Raffle for Classroom Educators

This month, we're raffling off two \$10 Wawa gift cards! [Read this month's Coach's Corner article](#), then tell us [which suggestion you want to try, or share a way you already creatively use cardboard boxes in your program](#), and you'll be entered to win. **Deadline is January 28.**

Our **December raffle winners** shared how they plan to start the new year with positivity and a growth mindset. ([Want to learn more? Check out our December 2025 Coach's Corner article on Setting Intentions.](#))



- **Center-based classroom educator:** Diana Mercado, Pirulo's Child Care Center
- **Family child care educator:** Doncheline West

Congratulations! We'll reach out soon to get your prizes to you.

Office Hours

Did you know that DIEEC offers regular drop-in office hours for FCC educators and center-based administrators? DIEEC staff is on hand and ready to provide technical assistance and help get your questions answered. See our upcoming office hours below. No appointment needed- just stop by!

Center-Based Programs	Family Child Care Educators
Zoom link for ALL center-based office hours	Zoom link for ALL FCC office hours
Tuesday, 1/13/26 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.	Tuesday, 1/20/26 from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.
Tuesday 1/27/26 from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.	Tuesday 2/3/26 from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

DIEEC Public Calendar

DIEEC's public calendar is a great way to keep up with what's happening in the early childhood community. Upcoming events are listed on the bottom of our [DIEEC homepage](#), and you can also [click through to the full calendar](#). Click on an event name to get all the details: who, what, when, where and how to join in!

News from Our Partners

In Case You Missed It: Professional Preparation for Early Childhood Education (PP ECE) Offered at Delaware Technical Community College (DTCC)

For educators seeking classroom early childhood teacher certification, the Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL) Regulations require "successful completion of Training for Early Care and Education 1 and 2 (TECE 1 and TECE 2) or equivalent training as recognized by OCCL. The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) is excited to share that there is a new opportunity, called [Professional Preparation for Early Childhood Education \(PP ECE\)](#), to meet OCCL's 120 hours of training requirement. This new opportunity was created for educators seeking an instructor-led way to complete the 120 hours of training. [Please see the December 22, 2025 email from the Early Childhood Excellence team at DDOE for more information.](#)

Kindergarten Registration Resources to Share with Families

Do you have children in your program who will turn 5 by August 31, 2026? Early childhood education programs can request **Kindergarten Registration Information postcards** to distribute to enrolled families. The postcards include a QR code that will connect families and caregivers to digital resources for the kindergarten transition. [Request postcards for your program here.](#)

In addition to the postcards, the Delaware Readiness Teams offer a variety of resources to support parents, families, and caregivers in preparing for and registering children for kindergarten. For more information, [view the email sent by DDOE's Early Childhood Excellence team on January 5, 2026](#) or visit the [Delaware Readiness Teams website](#).

Delaware EARNS: Helping Delaware Workers Save for the Future

Delaware EARNS is a state-sponsored retirement savings program for workers whose employers don't offer a retirement plan. It provides a convenient way for small-business employees and owners to save money for retirement in a tax-advantaged Roth IRA. Every little bit helps! [Learn more and enroll](#).

Institute for Community Mental Health – Clinic (ICMH-Clinic): Providing Accessible, Evidence-Based Mental Health Services

Located on the University of Delaware's STAR Campus, the ICMH-Clinic serves children, adolescents, and families across Delaware. Services include therapy, assessment, training & education, and referral support. The clinic accepts Medicare and Medicaid as well as many commercial insurance plans. If you or the families in your program are interested in learning more, referring a child/family, inquiring about training opportunities, or have any other questions, you may reach the ICMH-Clinic at icmhc-admin@udel.edu. [View the flyer for more information](#).

Subscribe to College of Education & Human Development News

Did you know that DIEEC is housed within the [College of Education and Human Development](#) (CEHD) at the University of Delaware? Our position in the college provides the foundation of DIEEC's mission to develop and deliver evidence-based supports for early childhood professionals, children, and families.

[Stay connected with the latest research and news from CEHD through their monthly newsletter](#), featuring stories from the School of Education, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, Master of Social Work program, and centers for education, research and service.

Quality Improvement System

Quality Improvement Planning

The Delaware Department of Education's Office of Early Learning has released the [FY26 Program and Policy Guide for Delaware's Quality Improvement System \(QIS\) for Early Care and Education Programs](#). This guide provides information to support the development of Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) and applications for Quality Improvement Awards (QIA). Note that changes made after the guide was published are listed in the Update History on page 2.

As in previous years, to be eligible for an FY26 QIA, programs must be actively engaged in quality improvement efforts. With the support of a DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp), programs will reflect on their areas of growth and build a quality improvement plan (QIP).

Developing a QIP is a multistep process, and requests to work with a QISp will be scheduled in the order they are received. Contact your DIEEC quality improvement specialist about scheduling; you must have a visit scheduled with your QISp by **February 1, 2026**, in order to apply for an award in FY26.

Applying for a Quality Improvement Award?

Key dates for Quality Improvement Awards:

- There are two remaining application deadlines: January 15, 2026, and March 15, 2026.

To be eligible for an FY26 award, programs must:

- Hold a certificate or be licensed by the Delaware Office of Child Care Licensing by January 15, 2026, AND
- Be open and serving two or more children AND
- Have a visit scheduled with their Quality Improvement Specialist by February 1, 2026.

In addition, programs must:

- Have an Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) account in the DE DOE Enterprise System.
- Use a formative assessment tool with fidelity (as intended by the publisher) to inform curriculum planning, teaching, and individualization across all developmental domains. Training must be completed on the tool, and documentation must be uploaded to the DE ECE Portal when applying for a QIA.

If your program does not currently meet the above requirements, there is still time to complete them so that you are eligible for the award. [See page 12 of the QIS guide](#) for details and instructions.

Professional Learning Experiences

This month, DIEEC is highlighting two upcoming opportunities for educators to engage in in-depth Professional Learning Experiences. Sharpen your classroom practice- from building foundational math skills to fostering healthy habits through physical play.

DIEEC's professional learning experiences (PLEs) are available at no cost to you. You can browse and register for a variety of PLEs on the [DIEEC professional learning experience calendar](#).

Early Math: Math Up!

DIEEC's [Early Math: Math Up! professional learning experience](#) helps early childhood educators build skills to foster strong early math development in children from birth to age five. Through a combination of learning opportunities and coaching, participants deepen their understanding of effective teaching practices, strengthen their interactions with young children, and gain strategies to support early mathematical development. Interested? Reach out to ecinstitute@udel.edu for more information.

Physical Activity Learning Session (PALS)

[PALS is a professional learning experience series](#) focused on physical activity. Throughout this PLE, you will learn effective practices of physical activity in early childhood settings. We are currently enrolling family child care educators to participate in a cohort, which will begin in February. All participants receive a physical activity kit filled with resources and materials to support them in integrating more physical activity into their program.

[Complete the interest form to join us in February](#), or to keep informed about future cohorts!

To view the current list of OEL-approved training opportunities, visit [Professional Development, Coaching, and Other Professional Learning Experiences for the Early Care and Education Workforce](#).