

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

REACH

A newsletter for early childhood education professionals

Dear Early Childhood Professionals,

This issue kicks off a very special season as we open nominations for the 5th Annual DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards. We invite you to help us celebrate the professional expertise within our community by nominating a colleague who demonstrates exceptional dedication to Delaware's children and families.

This month, we also explore the power of creating inclusive environments that honor each child's unique identity and highlight how a creative "reset" space can support social-emotional success. We have also included essential updates on Quality Improvement Awards and upcoming professional learning opportunities like "Early Math: Math Up!" and Conscious Discipline. Whether you are seeking technical assistance during our virtual office hours or looking for fresh ways to get children moving (check out this month's Coach's Corner), we hope these resources provide both practical support and moments of inspiration. Thank you for the intentionality and care you bring to your programs every day.

Warmly,

Kristy Sheffler, DIEEC Interim Co-Director

DIEEC ACTION ITEMS

Who will you nominate? The DIEEC Excellence in Early Childhood Awards are Back!

Excellence happens every day in Delaware's early childhood programs. We are pleased to announce that nominations for the **5th Annual Excellence in Early Childhood Awards** are officially open! This milestone year continues our tradition of recognizing the professional expertise of those who lead our youngest learners.

Do you know a professional who goes above and beyond? We are looking for nominations in three categories:

- **Classroom Educators**
- **Family Child Care Educators**
- **Early Career Educators** (those just starting their impactful journey)

Help us shine a light on the vital work happening across the state. [Visit our Excellence In Early Childhood Awards webpage](#) and **submit your nomination by March 4th!**

Excellence happens every day in Delaware's early childhood programs

Nominations are now open!

Submit nominations by March 4, 2026

DELAWARE INSTITUTE FOR EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Excellence in Early Childhood Awards

5★ Anniversary

Celebrate a standout Delaware educator by submitting your nomination in one of our three categories by March 4th.

Discover Early Math: Math Up! at Our Upcoming Family Child Care Community Meetings

Curious about new ways to bring math to life in your FCC home? Join DIEEC Professional Development Coordinators Susan Lewis and Joy Rowe at two upcoming in-person FCC community meetings. They'll share details about the **Early Math: Math Up!** cohort and lead a fun, hands-on math activity you can use with your little learners right away.

Saturday, February 7, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.: Kent Community Meeting, University of Delaware Paradee Center, 69 Transportation Circle, Dover, 19901

Tuesday, February 10, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.: City of Wilmington Community Meeting, 1100 N. Pine St., Wilmington, 19801.

No RSVP is necessary; all family child care educators are welcome. See you there!



Photo credit: Pexels

Provider Spotlight: Early Childhood Education Arts Academy (ECEAA)

What do you get when you combine a former storage closet, a life-sized teddy bear, and the Pyramid Model? For the ECEAA in Wilmington, the answer is a powerful tool for social-emotional success. [Read about "The Art of the Reset"](#) to see how this arts-integrated program is using a small multi-sensory de-escalation room to make a big impact on children's self-regulation skills.

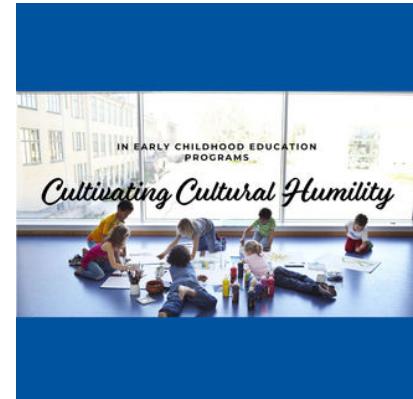


Alicia Powell, program director at ECEAA (Photo credit: Christian S. Ferrell/DIEEC)

Meeting the Needs of All Children: Identity

"In ECE [early childhood education], this means respecting the unique experiences and identities of every child and family, creating an environment where all voices are heard and valued." Children then feel they belong and have self-worth.

Cultivating cultural humility is one crucial way you can support identity development in young children. [To read more, click to view the full article on LinkedIn.](#)



Coach's Corner: Get Moving!

Check out Meghan Pallante's tips for being more intentional about how we encourage movement in our programs- especially during winter when we may not get outside as much as we'd like. Regular movement activities support the development of gross motor skills, but they also boost learning, confidence, social skills, and self-regulation. ["Jump" on over and read the full article](#)- how will you get moving this winter?



Photo credit: iStock

Monthly Raffle for Early Childhood Educators

This month, we're raffling off two \$10 Wawa gift cards! [Read this month's Coach's Corner article](#), then [share a creative tip to get children moving, and you'll be entered to win](#). Deadline to enter is February 25.

Congratulations to our **January raffle winners** 

- **Center-based classroom educator:** Cecilia Winn
- **Family child care educator:** Jamila Roach

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, 2/10 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.	Tuesday, 2/3 from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.
Tuesday 2/24 from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.	Tuesday 2/16 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

Important Notice About POC Payments and Winter Storm Fern

The The Delaware State of Emergency for Winter Storm Fern began at 12:01 a.m. on Sunday, January 25, 2026, and was officially terminated at 3 p.m. on Monday, January 26, 2026. However, DSS will reimburse providers statewide for Monday, January 26, 2026, and Tuesday, January 27, 2026. [Please see the attached email, sent on Friday, January 30, for more information.](#)

Questions? Please email POCResource@delaware.gov.

Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) Training Requirements

The Early Childhood Excellence Team in the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) would like to remind programs that, for fiscal year 2026 (FY26), all programs utilizing TSG/SmartTeach must abide by DDOE's TSG/SmartTeach policies. Training must be completed by June 30, 2026, and monitoring for compliance will begin on July 1, 2026. [View DDOE's TSG/SmartTeach policies here.](#)

Delaware Immigrant Children Guidance for Early Care and Education

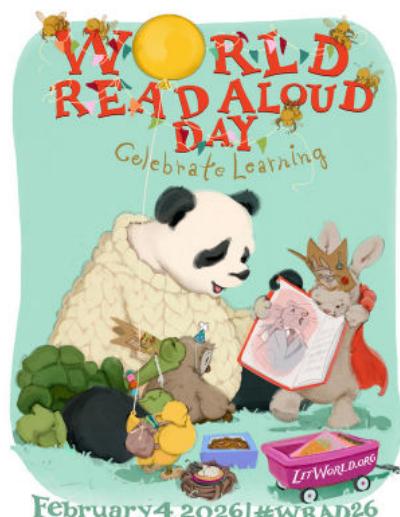
The Delaware Department of Education has a webpage with guidance and resources for educators and families concerned about immigration actions in child care facilities. [This page links to the Attorney General's Office guidance for businesses and organizations.](#) It is important to note that guidance for child care businesses differs from guidance for Delaware public schools.

February 4 is World Read Aloud Day!

According to researchers at [Ohio State University](#), children who are read five books a day hear almost 1.5 million more words by age 5 than those who are not read to. But reading aloud to children isn't just about building vocabulary:

"Reading aloud is a joyful act of storytelling and a powerful catalyst for growth. When we read aloud, we ignite pathways in the brain that shape literacy, language, and our behavioral development. Whether we are reading fairytales or biographies, every story becomes a building block for lifelong learning."

[Learn more about World Read Aloud Day](#) and download a free activity packet at LitWorld. Need a few read-aloud book ideas for your program? [Check out the resource DIEEC created for Children's Book Week](#) last fall!



World Read Aloud Day 2026 is on Feb 4th! Head to worldreadaloudday.org for exciting activities & resources. #WRAD26 #WorldReadAloudDay @litworld

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.

Applying for a Quality Improvement Award?

Key dates for Quality Improvement Awards:

- The final application deadline for fiscal year 2026 (FY26) is 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 Quality Improvement Plan co-created with their DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp). The deadline for starting this process was 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.

Professional Learning Experiences

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 \[ecinstitute@udel.edu\]\(mailto:ecinstitute@udel.edu\) for more information](#), or [attend one of our upcoming Family Child Care Community Meetings to learn more](#).

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](#).

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](#).