

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

REACH

A newsletter for early childhood education professionals

Dear Early Childhood Professionals,

June brings a major milestone for our team as the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood moves to a new home on the University of Delaware's Children's Campus. While our physical office will be closed for the move from June 1 through June 5, our staff will maintain regular hours, and our phone number and email remain unchanged. We are eager to welcome you to our new space, so please save the evening of Tuesday, August 18th, for a special DIEEC Block Party filled with tours, summer snacks, and community connection.

This issue also includes updates to support your operations and professional growth as we head into summer, including tips on school-age summer programming in Coach's Corner. We are thrilled to celebrate the dedication of our workforce by announcing the winners and honorees of the 2026 Excellence in Early Childhood Awards, as well as the recent graduates of our Language & Literacy and Pyramid Model cohorts. You will also find important logistical reminders, including the transition of core trainings to the Department of Education's PDMS and Schoology platforms, and final steps for wrapping up the fiscal year 2026 Quality Improvement cycle. We hope these resources provide steady support for your essential work.

Warmly,

Kristy Sheffler, DIEEC Interim Co-Director

DIEEC ACTION ITEMS

Update Your Address Book: DIEEC is on the Move!

DIEEC is excited to share that our office is moving! Our new location is in the heart of the University of Delaware's Children's Campus. We're excited to have new neighbors: the UD Lab Preschool, the Center for Disability Studies, and the Early Learning Center, just to name a few!

While our staff will be keeping regular hours, **our physical office is closed from June 1 through June 5, 2026**, as our furniture and technology are moved to the new space.

Our email address and phone number remain the same: you can still reach us at ecinstitute@udel.edu or by phone at 302-831-3239.

As of **June 8, 2026**, DIEEC's new street and mailing address is:

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood
461 Wyoming Rd.
Newark, DE 19716.



Update Your Address Book: DIEEC is on the Move!

One of the most exciting parts of moving is inviting YOU to visit us in our new home! Early childhood professionals and supporters are invited to join us at our new office in the early evening on **Tuesday, August 18th**, for tours, summer snacks, interactive stations, and connection with the ECE community. Pencil it in now- more details will be shared in the July issue of REACH!



Core Trainings Transitioning to PDMS and Schoology

As of May 1, 2026, all new registrations for the following courses are available only on the Delaware Department of Education's PDMS/Schoology platform. PDMS is where you register for professional development, and Schoology is where you complete the course.

If you do not already have one, you will need to create an EdAccess account to use PDMS and Schoology. Click [HERE](#) to learn how to get started. Once you have an account, you can use the links below to register for and access the trainings.

- [Administration of Medication](#)
- [Health & Safety Training for Child Care Professionals](#)
- [Maintaining Equity in Early Childhood: Suspension/Expulsion Prevention](#)

An additional course, [Mandatory Reporting and Recognition of Child Abuse and Neglect](#), has also been added to PDMS and Schoology. This is a new version of the course previously available through the Office of the Child Advocate.

Verifying training completion for PDMS/Schoology courses. When you complete one of the above courses in PDMS/Schoology, please **upload your transcript to OCCL**, rather than the PDMS certificate, to verify training completion.

If you were previously enrolled in one of the above courses with DIEEC, you do NOT need to register again in PDMS and Schoology as long as you complete the course in Canvas by June 12. **If you do not complete the Canvas course by June 12, your progress will be lost**, and you will need to start again in PDMS and Schoology.

This information pertains **only** to the courses listed above. Other professional learning opportunities with DIEEC continue to be available on the [DIEEC PD registry](#).

Need additional information? [This brief overview and toolkit](#) can guide you through creating an EdAccess account and requesting help.

Announcing the Winners of the 2026 Excellence in Early Childhood Awards!

DIEEC's motto is "Every child deserves a great beginning- our job is to help make that happen." The [Excellence in Early Childhood Awards](#) are intrinsically linked to this core mission of working collaboratively to build a brighter future for all children by shining a light on the talent, dedication, and impact of Delaware's early childhood educators. We are so proud of the professionals listed below who have demonstrated their commitment to providing high-quality early childhood experiences through their pursuit of lifelong learning, innovative teaching methods, and dedication to meeting the evolving needs of every child in their care. By celebrating their excellence, we not only honor individual achievements but also elevate the profession as a whole and inspire others to reach for new heights.

This year's winners were nominated for the award, completed a written application, and submitted letters of support from colleagues or parents. Applications were de-identified and reviewed by an external panel, which selected the winners. **Congratulations to all, and thank you for making a difference in the lives of Delaware's children.**

Center-based educators:

Winner: Aaronasha Bruton-Gasby, The Preschool at St. Georges

Runner-up: Janiece Sugick, Delaware State University Early Childhood Laboratory School

Special recognition: Gina Zarrilli, St. David's Episcopal Day School

Family child care educators:

Winner: Cherie Johnson

Runner-up: Shakira Waples, Next Generation Childcare, LLC

Special recognition: Stephanie Jackson, Sheila's Dreams Child Care, LLC

Early career award:

Ugochi Akinmoladun, Delaware State University Early Childhood Laboratory School

In addition, **13 educators were named as 2026 Excellence in Early Childhood honorees:**

Jexavely Alicea Aviles | Pequeñas Manitas Early Learning Center, LLC

Kirisha Brooks | La Petite Academy

Tressa Clemow | Love Bug Lane Learning Academy, LLC

Iris Coleman-Buckner | Mini Miracles Playschool, LLC

Sierra Fletcher | Neighborhood House Early Learning Center

Kelly Gomez-Manzano | Bilingual Pedagogy Childcare

Esther Grullon | Linda's Angels Childcare & Development Center

Tracy Franklin | Lil Red Hen Nursery School, Inc.

Dahlie Hao | Dolly's Family Care

Karen Hickman | Indian River School District Early Learning Program

Brandi Johnson | Wilmington Head Start, Inc. - West 3rd Street Center

Becky Mills | Indian River School District Project Village/TOTS Program

Christy Pollack | St. David's Episcopal Day School



From left to right: Karen Hickman, Stephanie Jackson, Iris Coleman-Buckner, Cherie Johnson, Aaronasha Bruton-Gasby, Janiece Sugick, Brandi Johnson, Ugochi Akinmoladun, Kelly Gomez-Manzano, Shakira Waples, and Esther Grullon.

(Photo credit: Courtney Foster/DIEEC)

Monthly Raffle for Early Childhood Educators

This month, we're raffling off two garden totes filled with child-friendly tools. [Read this month's Coach's Corner about summer programming with school-age children](#), then answer our survey question, and you'll be entered to win.

Here are our lucky **May raffle winners**:

- Center-based classroom educator: Lori Bigalow
- Family child care educator: Tressa Clemow

Congratulations! 🎉 Check your email- we'll reach out soon to get your prizes to you.



[Enter for a chance to win! Deadline is June 24](#)

A Commitment to Continuous Growth: Celebrating DIEEC's 2026 Cohort Participants

We are thrilled to celebrate all of the programs that have recently reached a major milestone! A DIEEC cohort is a multi-month journey of reflection, collaborative learning, and hands-on practice. Over the last several months, these dedicated educators have worked hard to bridge the gap between theory and real-world application.

Through a combination of learning opportunities and coaching, participants are deepening their understanding of effective teaching practices, strengthening their interactions with children, and gaining strategies to support high-quality early childhood experiences. Congratulations!



We extend a heartfelt **thank you** to these programs for their partnership. We can't wait to see how they carry the momentum into the months and years ahead.

Coach's Corner: Summer Programming with School-Age Children

Believe it or not, summer is upon us! Along with warmer weather, summer typically brings a change in schedules and activities for many early childhood education programs. For many, summer means welcoming school-age children into the mix. With thoughtful planning, having older children in your summer camp can add new elements of energy and fun. [In this month's Coach's Corner, Meghan Pallante shares tips](#) to help ensure smooth sailing through the sunny months ahead.



Image/iStock credit: SanyaSM

Meeting the Needs of All Children: Building Connections Between Adults

A new book by Gillian Sandstrom, *Once Upon a Stranger: The Science of How “Small” Talk Can Add Up to a Big Life*, explores how adults benefit from stepping outside their comfort zones to talk to unfamiliar people. [In the article The Hidden Power of Talking to Strangers](#), an interview with Sandstrom highlights some of these benefits.



Image/iStock credit: Oscar Martin

In early childhood education, a child thrives when the adults around them are deeply connected. Consider the many “strangers” you meet in your work: a new family touring your program, a new co-worker, or consultants working with you or with the children you care for. Building relationships is essential, and learning to connect with unfamiliar people is a powerful tool. This skill improves our professional work, inspires new perspectives, models healthy social skills for the children watching us, and even has the power to enhance our mood!

While “stranger danger” is a vital safety lesson for the children we care for, as adults and professionals, we enhance “our own well-being, as well as society at large,” by connecting with new people. (Note: Sandstrom emphasizes that this is about everyday, low-stakes adult interactions in safe, public spaces—like chatting with a fellow professional at a conference).

Check out the interview for Sandstrom’s ideas for starting conversations and making connections.

Office Hours

DIEEC offers regular drop-in office hours for FCC educators and center-based administrators, with DIEEC staff ready to provide technical assistance and help get your questions answered. No appointment needed- just stop by!

Upcoming office hours

Center-based programs [use this Zoom link to join all center-based office hours.](#)

- **Tuesday, 6/9** from 10:30-11:30
- **Wednesday, 6/24** from 1:00 - 2:00

Family child care educators [use this Zoom link to join all FCC office hours.](#)

- **Tuesday, 6/2** from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.
-

DIEEC Summer Hours

From May 25 through September 4, DIEEC will be on summer hours. Our main phone line, 302-831-3239, will be staffed **Monday through Thursday, 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**, and **Fridays, 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.** You may also email us at your convenience at ecinstitute@udel.edu and you will receive a reply during business hours. You can visit our website anytime at www.dieec.udel.edu.

We're Growing Our Professional Community on LinkedIn

We're growing our professional community! DIEEC has joined LinkedIn to better connect with Delaware's early childhood workforce and partners. Our page is a dedicated space for us to share news from the field in Delaware and beyond, highlight the vital work of early childhood professionals, and foster leadership within our field.

How to follow us: Visit this link, then click the blue "Follow" button under our page name.

<http://linkedin.com/showcase/uddieec>

DIEEC Public Calendar: Stay Informed, Stay Connected

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

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.

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.**

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

Wrapping Up the Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Quality Improvement Cycle

As we approach the close of FY26, we want to recognize the hundreds of programs that worked alongside DIEEC to develop and implement Quality Improvement Plans. Your dedication to this process exemplifies your commitment to learning and growing in the name of serving Delaware's children.

As you finalize your work for the year, here are your next steps:

- Ensure that you complete your post-assessment and upload your pre- and post-assessments in the [Delaware Early Care and Education Portal](#) to officially close out your quality improvement cycle.
 - If looking at your data feels overwhelming, you don't have to do it alone! Your Quality Improvement Specialist is available to help you break down your results, understand your progress, and start thinking about your next areas of focus.
- Submit documentation of your Quality Improvement Award (QIA) spending by June 30. Information on completing this process is outlined in the [FY26 Program and Policy Guide and the Quality Improvement Award \(QIA\) 2026 Application Guide](#).

Professional Development Opportunities

DIEEC's 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](#).