

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

REACH

A newsletter for early childhood education professionals

Dear Early Childhood Professionals,

Whether you are navigating the start of a new school year, adjusting classroom routines, or laying the groundwork for program-wide goals, your daily commitment sets the baseline for quality early learning experiences across Delaware. In this edition of REACH, we bring you targeted updates, fresh classroom strategies, and practical tools to support the vital work you lead every day.

Inside this issue, you will find actionable guidance in Coach's Corner, essential updates on Quality Improvement Planning and Award requirements, and key details on upcoming professional learning opportunities. We also share news from the field and important reminders from the Office of Early Learning. We hope these resources spark practical ideas for your program and provide steady inspiration as you continue guiding Delaware's young learners.

Warmly,

The DIEEC Team

DIEEC ACTION ITEMS

Children's Book Week Registration is Open Through September 30th!

Join DIEEC this fall in supporting early literacy and instilling a lifelong love of reading! We are offering early childhood programs two flexible ways to participate and receive free books for your collection:

- **Host a Guest Reader:** We invite center administrators and family child care educators to host a DIEEC guest reader at your program. Your guest reader will bring several brand-new books for your classroom to keep and enjoy. As of 9/14, we are almost at capacity for guest reader requests.
- **Share your Favorite Read-Aloud:** We invite educators to submit their favorite read-aloud book recommendation. The first 100 eligible programs to share a recommendation will receive a free new book by mail (limit one book per program).



Register today:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf6ODKwcxLhvpWsXdfJbwUK4i5ACufkeEZtMFOE7hNcUYGoSw/viewform>

Let's GROW Outside! Special Cohort for Zip Codes 19801, 19802, and 19805

This fall, Let's GROW Outside! returns with a cohort specially designed for programs in Wilmington zip codes 19801, 19802, and 19805.

During this extended professional development experience, participants will learn about the benefits of connecting children and gardening, gain knowledge and skills needed to develop and sustain a garden, understand how to use a supplemental gardening curriculum, and plan for age-appropriate garden activities with children. See the program flyer for details.



Image credit: Christian S. Ferrell/DIEEC

This year's Let's GROW Outside! cohort is offered in partnership with the Ginsburg Institute at Nemours Children's Health. **Apply today:** https://delaware.cal.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_aWd4ElBbm6LuCwe

Leader Link-Up: Connect, Share & Learn

DIEEC offers a variety of opportunities for center-based and family child care leaders to connect, share ideas, and learn from one another. Leader Link-Up is a monthly opportunity designed just for you!

Each month, we'll make space to talk about the topics that are most on your mind, connect with other leaders, and share ideas and experiences. This year, we'll also offer focused conversations to help leaders better understand the CDA from a leader's perspective. **Join us for the next Leader Link-Up here:**

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeq8vt8fx1DtE6tetqut-kgqjRmttrfcjNE8JVU250ZPxUleg/viewform>

Quality Improvement Award (QIA) Application Support for Family Child Care Educators

Need help completing your QIA application? Join one of our scheduled QIA Support Sessions, where a family child care network coordinator will be available to provide individualized guidance and assistance.

[Check out the flyer to learn how to sign up and get the support you need!](#)

DIEEC Welcomes New Faculty Director: Dr. Anamarie Whitaker

DIEEC is thrilled to introduce our new faculty director! [Dr. Anamarie Whitaker](#) is an associate professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Delaware with a research focus on early childhood policy. Dr. Whitaker's leadership will focus on DIEEC's strategic vision, elevating our work across all of our key focus areas: supporting the early childhood workforce, serving children and families, and driving research that advances the field. As always, DIEEC will remain your dedicated partner in quality improvement, coaching, and professional growth.



Visit DIEEC at Community Day in Newark and Coast Day in Lewes

Stop by the DIEEC tables at [Community Day in Newark on Sept 20th](#) and [Coast Day in Lewes on Oct 4th](#)! We'll be sharing interactive fun for young children and spreading the word on why investing in early childhood builds stronger communities. Drop by to say hi, and please share the information about these FREE fun events with your families!



Join us at Newark Community Day (Sept 20) & Lewes Coast Day (Oct 4) for FREE family fun and interactive activities. Stop by and say hi!

Block Party Fun!

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who joined us at our block party in August, celebrating our new home on UD's Children's Campus. From UDairy ice cream to guided tours and shared stories, the party brought together 130 educators, researchers, policymakers and advocates from the early childhood community for an evening filled with both fun and reflection. Read the full story here: <https://dieec.udel.edu/2026/09/01/impact-insight-and-ice-cream-dieec-welcomes-the-community-to-its-new-home-on-uds-childrens-campus/>



Thank you to our partners, colleagues, and community leaders who helped make our Block Party celebration so special. Pictured from L to R: State Representatives Kamela Smith, Cyndie Romer, and Mara Gorman with CEHD Dean Rena Hallam. Photo by Jason Hustedt/HDFS

Provider Spotlight: Celebrating Our ECE Community

DIEEC recently launched a new project focused on helping early childhood professionals to feel seen, valued, represented, and connected. Our journey began at our August block party, where our guests had an opportunity to share their stories with us. In this month's Provider Spotlight, we share some of those stories and voices from the field with you- and in future months, we hope to keep gathering and sharing your stories! **Read here:**

<https://dieec.udel.edu/provider-spotlight/celebrating-our-ece-community/>



Photos by Courtney Foster/DIEEC

Coach's Corner: Using Photos in Early Childhood Education

Creating a sense of belonging is an important part of building a welcoming early childhood environment. This month's Coach's Corner looks at one simple but meaningful way to support connection: displaying photos of children in their program spaces. Seeing themselves and their peers helps children recognize that they are valued members of their classroom community. **Read**

Coach's Corner: <https://dieec.udel.edu/quality-improvement-system/dieec-resources-for-you/coachs-corner/>



iStock Credit: Zarina Lukash

Monthly Raffle for Early Childhood Educators

This month, we're raffling off two kits full of fun physical activity materials! [Read this month's Coach's Corner about using photos of children in your program, then answer our survey question](#), and you'll be entered to win. **Deadline is September 30th.**

Here are our lucky August raffle winners:

- **Center-based classroom educator:** Dionne Beckett, Delaware State University Early Childhood Laboratory School
- **Family child care educator:** Gale Dutton, Riverview Place

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



Meeting the Needs of All Children: Actionable Strategies for Building Strong Family Partnerships

Connecting with families is essential to meeting the diverse needs of every young child, as families hold the deepest understanding of their own children's unique strengths, routines, and cultural background. When we build strong, reciprocal relationships with families, we gain insights that help personalize care, bridge home and classroom environments, and ensure every child feels secure and valued.



Image Credit: Getty Images Signature

This NAEYC article, [Five Rs for Promoting Positive Family Engagement](#), outlines five principles- respect, responsiveness and reassurance, relationship, reciprocity, and reflection- to help deepen these critical partnerships with families, and actionable strategies for listening, collaborating, and creating an inclusive community where every child can thrive.

Office Hours to Support Programs and Educators

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](#).

- Wednesday, 9/23, from 1:00-2:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, 10/13, from 10:30-11:30 a.m.

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

- Monday, 9/21, from 1:30-2:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, 10/6, from 1:30-2:30 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

CDA Scholarship Applications are Now Open!

Child Development Associate (CDA) scholarship applications reopened on Tuesday, September 1, 2026. Whether you are beginning your CDA journey, ready to take the next step toward earning your credential, or preparing for renewal, there is a scholarship opportunity to meet your needs. Applications will be available for CDA Comprehensive, CDA Voucher Only, and CDA renewal options. [Visit the Early Childhood Innovation Center's CDA webpage](#) for more information and to start your application!

If you previously completed DIEEC's interest form for participating in a CDA cohort, you will need to complete the CDA scholarship application as the next step in the process.

Once you have completed the application, be sure to monitor your account to ensure that no additional documentation is required before your application can be approved.

The WECEC Resource Center has Reopened at Stubbs Elementary

The Wilmington Early Care and Education Council is pleased to share that they've moved back into their refreshed and reorganized space at Stubbs Elementary School at 1100 N Pine St, Wilmington, DE 19801. The center is open Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

Now Available! Fiscal Year 2027 Quality Improvement Guide

The Delaware Department of Education, Office of Early Learning has released the [FY27 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). Co-creating a QIP with a DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp) is a prerequisite for applying for QIA funds. Licensed early care and education programs may request quality improvement planning support from a DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist through the [Delaware Early Care and Education \(ECE\) portal](#).

The Office of Early Learning (OEL) values feedback from the early care and education community. To improve policies, supports, and data systems, programs are encouraged to share suggestions or questions through the [FY27 QIS Feedback and Questions Form](#). Feedback will be used to update the [FY27 QIS Frequently Asked Questions and Suggestions document](#), updated at least twice monthly.

Quality Improvement Planning for FY27 is Underway

The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE), in partnership with the Early Childhood Excellence Team, has identified strengthening the workforce as Delaware's priority focus area for FY27. This year, quality improvement planning connected to Delaware's Quality Improvement System (QIS) will focus on upskilling staff, with an emphasis on the attainment of Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. Investing in staff professional growth supports stronger teaching practices, more positive interactions, and better experiences for children and families.

As always, DIEEC is here to support your program through the process. With guidance from a DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp), programs will reflect on program strengths, consider opportunities for upskilling, and develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) focused on workforce goals.

As in prior years, programs must be actively engaged in quality improvement to be eligible for a FY27 Quality Improvement Award. 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 or [click here to learn how to request QISp support](#) (see p.11). Connecting early ensures you have the time and support needed to complete your QIP and stay on track.

Quality Improvement Award Application Deadlines for FY27

- September 15, 2026
- November 15, 2026
- January 15, 2027
- March 15, 2027

**State-funded (SFECEP), Early Head Start, and school district programs must apply by the November 15, 2026, deadline.*

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Strengthen Your Leadership: Join “Growing Programs Coaches”

Take your leadership skills to the next level! We invite child care program leaders to enroll in Growing Program Coaches: A Practice-Based Coaching Book Study for Leaders. Built around the Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) framework, this 4-month cohort blends shared learning with personalized support to help you drive continuous quality improvement in your program. Gain the practical tools, clarity, and confidence needed to empower your team and elevate your care. **Register today to reserve your spot:**

<https://dieecpd.org/registry/calendar/training/8878>

Using Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment Data to Drive Quality Improvement

Assessment data can be a powerful tool for supporting instruction, tracking individual progress, communicating children’s growth with families, and understanding the overall effectiveness of an educational program.

DIEEC is offering a self-paced course, **Worth Its Weight in GOLD: Unlocking Teaching Strategies GOLD Reports**, focused on using Teaching Strategies GOLD/SmartTeach reports to support continuous quality improvement. Designed specifically for administrators, this monthly course will guide participating program leaders in downloading, reviewing, and analyzing their program’s data to inform improvement efforts.

This self-paced course from DIEEC guides administrators in downloading, reviewing, and analyzing Teaching Strategies GOLD/SmartTeach data to drive quality improvement. Participants must be administrators, with administrator-level access to their program's TS GOLD account.

The course will be completed on the Schoology platform. Enrollment opportunities are available monthly; course credit may be received only once. The link below is the course beginning in October; search for “Worth Its Weight in GOLD” on the registry calendar for additional opportunities. **Sign up here:**

<https://dieecpd.org/registry/calendar/training/8897>

Professional Learning Experiences (PLEs) with DIEEC

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](#).

Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential Attainment Options

Strengthening the workforce has been identified by the Delaware Department of Education as a priority focus area for fiscal year 2027. For educators interested in pursuing a CDA, multiple pathways and financial supports are available to you.

For educators who have completed the 120 hours of training required for the CDA, there are two options:

- Enroll in a Portfolio Preparation cohort
- Work independently to complete the portfolio components

For educators who have NOT completed the 120 hours of training required for the CDA, there are a few options:

- Enroll in an iCDA cohort
- Enroll in a Professional Preparation: Early Childhood Education (PP:ECE) cohort
- Work independently to complete the training hours and portfolio components

Educators who are interested in enrolling in one of the cohort options (iCDA, PP:ECE, or Portfolio Preparation) should complete a [Child Development Associate \(CDA\) scholarship application](#). The application serves a dual purpose: it allows you to apply for available financial supports, and it acts as the placement tool to enroll you in a cohort that meets your needs.

Early Education Pathways

Head Start's iPD Portfolio has transitioned to Early Education Pathways (EEP). If you previously had an iPD account, you should be able to log in to EEP with the same credentials. [Visit the EEP webpage and learn more.](#)

Accessing Core Trainings on 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.

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](#). Need additional information? This [brief overview and toolkit](#) can be used to guide you through EdAccess account creation and requesting help.

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.