

## Overview: Early Childhood Education November 2015

### Introduction

The first years of a child's life are the most critical for their long-term intellectual and social-emotional development. Through state and federal investments in recent years, Delaware has made significant strides in improving our early learning infrastructure. By increasing access to quality early learning opportunities, more than 10,000 children with high needs have been served by highly rated Stars early learning programs.<sup>i</sup> This investment is critical as economists estimate a \$4-\$9 return for every dollar spent on high-quality early education—in reduced health care, special education, incarceration costs, and increased productivity and tax revenues.<sup>ii</sup>

### Current Early Learning Landscape

Early childhood education encompasses learning time that happens between a child's birth and the age of eight. Under the current system, education of young children extends across two largely unconnected systems—a mostly private birth to age five system and a mostly public kindergarten through third grade system.

Over the last decade, Delaware has made significant investments in early childhood education. In 2011, Governor Jack Markell and the state legislature allocated \$22 million to raise the quality of and increase access to early learning programs. This investment helped support Delaware's application for the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant competition which awarded our state \$49 million to support this work. These time and monetary investments have helped identify opportunities, make improvements, and build stakeholder buy-in to support the Delaware early learning system.

#### Achievement gaps start early.

Differences in the size of children's vocabularies first appear at 18 months of age, based on whether they were born into a family with high education and income or low education and income. <sup>ii</sup>

### *High-Quality Early Childhood Programs and Professionals*

- Early childhood programs are a **mix of public and private providers** that meet all the basic licensing standards, but quality varies.
- **The Delaware Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a rating system on a one to five scale that was implemented to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early education and school age settings.** The system helps to increase the quality of care by identifying opportunities for improvement within individual centers and increasing access to high-quality care as centers work to make improvements over time.<sup>iii</sup> Delaware Stars is a voluntary program. Some states require programs receiving public funding to participate in the state QRIS system.
- **Early childhood professionals are a key component of our early learning system and education and professional development are critical to their success.** Fewer than half of all early learning employees possess a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>iv</sup> To help encourage continued professional development, the state has implemented the Compensation, Retention, and Education (CORE) awards, which have offered financial incentives to early childhood educators based on Career Lattice and program Star level, with the intention of recruiting and training qualified educators in the field.<sup>v</sup>



### *Aligned and Effective Early Learning System, Birth through Third Grade*

In order to prepare our youngest learners to enter the K-12 system, **the state has begun putting supports in place to align the early childhood and K-12 systems.**

- The state has **engaged hundreds of Delawareans in 21 readiness teams**, which bring together early childhood programs, educators, and community and business leaders to help build strong links connecting children's growth from birth through their early education.<sup>vi</sup>
- Alignment of expectations across systems is measured by the **early learner survey that has been implemented in schools across the state** as of the fall of 2015. This will give parents and educators a sense of where every child stands as they enter kindergarten. Ultimately the results of the early learning survey will help the state develop policies that improve early childhood education, K-12 education, and the transition between them.

### *Sustainable System Improvement*

- In order to make improvements to the system, we need strong coordination and collaboration between components of the early learning system.
- At the state level, **three state agencies oversee Delaware's early learning system** (Education, Health and Human Services, and Services for Children Youth and their Families), making coordination difficult.<sup>vii</sup>
- Other groups such as **the Early Childhood Council, the Office of Early Learning, the Office of Management and Budget and others also play significant roles in advising on and coordinating** Delaware's early childhood programs.
- Locally, **communication between early learning centers and the K-12 system is limited.** Readiness teams are beginning to expand and strengthen early childhood partnerships and promote the value of early childhood education. For a map outlining the government agencies and offices with oversight over early learning, see follow-up slides.

### **How the Delaware System Compares**

Nationally, nearly 11 million children under the age of five are in child care settings every week, providing a critical opportunity to support a child's long-term intellectual and social-emotional development.<sup>viii</sup>

It is difficult to measure the quality of early educational experiences across states because there is no common metric or measurement. Delaware's recent investments in early childhood education have helped increase quality and access to services; however, Delaware rates about average on many national comparisons of enrollment, cost of care, early learning teacher compensation, and academic performance.

- **Enrollment:** Early childhood education in Delaware mirrors national trends. In 2012, high-income families were disproportionately more likely to enroll children in early care and education than low-income families, at 72 percent and 52 percent respectively.<sup>ix</sup>
- **Types of centers:** Similar to the national average, about 83 percent of Delaware's children in formal care settings are enrolled in licensed child care centers while 17 percent are enrolled in licensed family child care centers.<sup>x</sup>
- **Annual cost:** Delaware's average annual fees for fulltime care in a center are comparable with other states.<sup>xi</sup> Delaware's early childhood workforce, which supports the work of these centers, receive an income similar to the national average at \$21,530 and \$21,710.<sup>xii</sup>
- **Aligning early childhood and K-12 education:** Delaware is one of 26 states plus Washington D.C. that requires a Kindergarten Entrance Assessment, which is used to evaluate whether a student is developmentally on track.<sup>xiii</sup>

- **Academic progress:** Reading proficiency in elementary school is often used as an indicator for a child's future success. Research has shown that one in six children who are not reading proficiently by third grade fail to graduate from high school on time, four times the rate for children with proficient third-grade reading skills.<sup>xiv</sup> The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), estimates that only 37 percent of Delaware's children are reading proficient at the end of fourth grade. A child's ability to read in elementary school is largely influenced by their early education. Although Delaware's fourth grade reading proficiency is slightly higher than the national average, fewer than four out of 10 fourth grade students are proficient.<sup>xv</sup>

## Potential Action Steps

Delaware has made great strides in early childhood education in recent years, but we can take steps to further strengthen the work already underway and provide additional supports to improve the education of our youngest citizens.

Category	Potential Action Steps	Progress Underway	Supporters
<b>High Quality Early Childhood Programs and Professionals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require all early childhood programs to participate in the Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System</li> <li>• Require programs receiving public subsidies to achieve a required Star level of quality</li> <li>• Increase required professional qualifications, associated compensation, and incentives to align with K-12 educators</li> <li>• Expand access to existing options by increasing the incentives and supports to professionals and programs in low-income areas</li> <li>• Strengthen higher education partnerships to strengthen rigor and access of early childhood programs</li> <li>• Establish and incrementally expand voluntary, full-day, high-quality prekindergarten for three-and four-year olds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System</li> <li>• Compensation, Retention, and Education (CORE) awards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• State Board of Education</li> <li>• Vision Coalition of Delaware</li> </ul>
<b>Aligned and Effective Early Learning System, Birth through Third Grade</b>	Develop birth to third grade assessment systems to measure success and target necessary interventions for children as early as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Learner Survey</li> <li>• 21 readiness teams established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• State Board of Education</li> <li>• Vision Coalition of Delaware</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable System Improvement</b>	Develop streamlined state governance structure to assure efficient decision-making and ongoing system review	Significant public funding invested to support early-stage infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Vision Coalition of Delaware</li> </ul>

## Additional Resources

- Great Starts Delaware: <http://www.greatstartsdelaware.com>
  - Delaware Early Childhood Council: <http://decc.delaware.gov>
  - Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood: <http://www.dieec.udel.edu>
  - Child Care Aware: <http://childcareaware.org>
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### Sources:

- <sup>i</sup> Delaware Office of Early Learning. (2014). 2012-13 Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Annual Performance Report: Delaware. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/annual-performance-reports/de2013apr.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> Harvard Center on the Developing Child. (2013). Five Numbers to Remember about Early Childhood Development. [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/interactive\\_features/five-numbers/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/interactive_features/five-numbers/)
- <sup>iii</sup> Delaware Stars. (2015). Welcome to Delaware Stars for Early Success. <http://www.delawarestars.udel.edu/>
- <sup>iv</sup> Delaware Office of Early Learning. (2014). *Data on employee educational attainment and average salary for early learning teachers with a B.A.* <http://www.greatstartsdelaware.com/>
- <sup>v</sup> Delaware Association for the Education of Youth Children. (2015). Compensation, Retention, and Education Awards. <http://www.daeyc.org/core/>
- <sup>vi</sup> Great Starts Delaware. (2015) Delaware Readiness Teams. <http://www.greatstartsdelaware.com/readiness.html>
- <sup>vii</sup> The Finance Project. (2010). Mapping Fiscal Resources to Map Early Success in Delaware. <http://decc.delaware.gov/files/2015/03/2010-Fiscal-Mapping-Report.pdf>
- <sup>viii</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2015). Child Care in America: 2015 State Fact Sheet <http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy/reports-research/statefactsheets/>
- <sup>ix</sup> Child Trends. (2014). Early Childhood Program Enrollment. <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=early-childhood-program-enrollment>
- <sup>x</sup> See citation <sup>vi</sup>. Estimate based on data provided by Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies for Child Care Aware® of America's 2015 State Fact Sheet Survey. Data reflects the 2014 calendar year.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid. Data are provided by the State CCR&R Network and are derived from CCR&R data or are provided by state licensing offices. National totals are rounded estimates. Some states reported cost of care based on their state's most recent market rate survey. Costs and prices from prior to 2014 are converted to 2014 dollars.
- <sup>xii</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2013). Occupational Employment Survey. [http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nat.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm). Does not include child care administrators, preschool teachers, special education teachers, or self-employed workers such as family child care business owners.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Education Commission of the States. (2014). Kindergarten Entrance Exams. <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquestRT?rep=Kq1407>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2012). Double Jeopardy. <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-DoubleJeopardy-2012-Full.pdf>
- <sup>xv</sup> National Assessment on Education Progress. (2015). State Snapshot. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>