

Governor Markell Honors 100th Early Learning Program to Achieve Highest Quality Rating

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Christina Early Education Center Achieves 5 Stars and Joins More Than 550 Programs Voluntarily Committing to Raising Quality

Newark, DE – Recognizing the tremendous commitment early learning programs across the state have made to raising quality, Governor Markell joined Department of Services to Children, Youth and Their Families Secretary Jennifer Ranji and other leaders today to celebrate the 100th early learning center in Delaware to achieve 5 Stars – the highest rating in Stars for Early Success, the state’s voluntary quality rating and improvement system.

Speaking at the Christina Early Education Center in Newark, Governor Markell said the center exemplifies the state’s commitment to supporting quality education experiences for all children beginning at birth. A total of 550 programs, representing more than 75 percent of the state’s early learning centers, and a third of licensed home-based programs are now participating in the Delaware Stars for Early Success initiative, which helps early learning programs improve quality and assigns a 1 to 5 Star rating to help families make child care choices. That’s up 300% from 2011 when, despite budget challenges, the Governor proposed and the General Assembly passed a \$22 million to increase early childhood funding by one third and boost the Stars system.

“All young children should have access to high quality early education experiences that help them realize their potential and succeed in school and life,” said Governor Markell, who has worked with the General Assembly to allocate significant additional resources to early learning since 2012. “I applaud the Christina Early Education Center and all of our community and school-based early learning programs in Stars for stepping up to meet higher quality standards.”

“We are so proud to be the 100th center to achieve 5 Stars. Our center is a fully inclusive program serving 428 children ages 3 and 4 years. About 30 percent of our children have identified disabilities and most are from low-income families. Stars has helped us improve our practices with all children and strengthen our commitment to continuous quality improvement,” said Rebecca Ryan, principal of the Christina Early Education Center.

According to research, children who experience quality early learning programs start school more ready to



succeed and are healthier, more self-sufficient and less likely to enter the criminal justice system over their lifetime. Young children from low-income families or with other risk factors benefit most – and Delaware has made tremendous gains in ensuring its vulnerable children have access to high quality early learning experiences. More than 58 percent of children with high needs in child care are enrolled in highly rated Stars programs, up from just 5 percent in 2011.

To support early learning programs, the state has provided:

- Increased professional development to assist early learning center staff in curriculum development, assessments, and other areas
- Aid for teachers to raise their education levels and pursue additional relevant degrees
- Assistance with child development screenings and mental health consultations.

Eligible centers have also received increased reimbursements from the state for accepting low-income students, and the level of reimbursements increases with a program's quality rating.

Secretary Ranji noted that Stars for Early Success was one of several major state efforts over the past several years to support families in raising healthy, successful children beginning at birth. "Delaware has made great progress in raising the quality of early learning programs and supporting children's healthy development. In addition to our Stars successes, over the past four years we provided more than 28,000 developmental screenings for young children– moving the state from last in the nation to 21st in the percent of young children receiving these screenings, which are critical for identifying and addressing developmental problems as early as possible. We also served more than 2,400 children with intensive Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, reducing child behavioral challenges and achieving a 99% success rate in avoiding preschool suspensions – which disrupt families' lives and children's early learning progress."

The state's early childhood initiatives have been led by the Delaware Office of Early Learning and rooted in the growing body of scientific evidence that shows early experiences shape the brain's architecture and set the foundation for a child's lifelong health and success in school and career.

"The Office of Early Learning is dedicated to continuing to work with our public and private partners to create evidence-based early learning services and policies that strengthen the critical role that families, early learning programs and schools, and communities play in a child's life," said the Office of Early Learning's Executive Director Susan Perry-Manning. "Delaware has a proven track record of leadership, partnership, and success in early learning that our office is honored to support."

Mary Kate Mouser, Chair of the Governor's Early Childhood Council, noted that the state's early learning progress has been accelerated by a combination of increased state funds and a nearly \$50 million, four-year federal Early Learning Challenge award Delaware won in 2011.

"Delaware's early learning progress must be sustained if we are committed to raising outcomes for all young children. The Council is proud of the achievements in early learning over the past four years, and has an aggressive strategic plan it plans to continue to advance to ensure that every child in Delaware gets a great start in life."

The Delaware Office of Early Learning contracts with the University of Delaware's Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) to provide training, technical assistance, assessment and validation for early learning programs to help them improve quality and achieve and maintain the top tiers in Delaware Stars.

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