

Spring 2015

# milestones

A Publication of  
the North Carolina  
Association for  
the Education of  
Young Children



**NCAeYC**

Promoting and inspiring excellence in  
early care and education for over 60 years!

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**We welcome comments & suggestions:** [generalinfo@ncaeyc.org](mailto:generalinfo@ncaeyc.org). Through *Milestones*, NCAeyc provides a forum for discussion of issues and ideas in our field in hopes of provoking thought and promoting professional growth. *Milestones* articles represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of NCAeyc.

*About the cover photo: Jenna Nelson, contracted project manager for Milestones, is the proud aunt of the two cuties on the cover. Kylee and Cody's other aunt, Stephanie, took this photo. NCAeyc wants to thank the twins' parents, Jared and Teresa Caron, for allowing us to use photos of their children (sister Sophia has been featured many times) through the years!*



Lorie Barnes

The theme of our Spring 2015 issue of *Milestones* is “Excellence in Action”. NCAeyc is excited to bring you a variety of articles, resources and announcements that we hope support and encourage you in the important work that you do with or on behalf of young children birth through age eight.

As NCAeyc’s Executive Director, I get to see “Excellence in Action” first hand in a wide variety of ways. Each day, I see it in the amazing support and leadership of a fantastic team. Chris Butler, our Coordinator of Operations and Conference is absolutely instrumental in helping to ensure NCAeyc’s success. Until just recently, Chris and I were NCAeyc’s only employees. Sometimes people would say, “Wow! For a staff of only two people, y’all sure do get a lot done!” I can assure you that Chris has been an essential part of this impact. We are fortunate to now have the support of three part-time Program Support Staff members: Jennifer Austin, Sarah Ferguson and Paige Moretz. We are overjoyed to have these three amazing young leaders join us. They have added a new source of seeing “Excellence in Action” in the committed work they do that helps ensure NCAeyc’s impact and engagement across the state.

There is another group of individuals who exemplify “Excellence in Action” in the volunteer leadership service they provide. **NCAeyc’s Board of Directors are a talented, passionate group of professionals who dedicate their time, energy and effort to ensuring NCAeyc has a positive impact in early care and education in our state.** These thoughtful, committed leaders are embarking on an exciting journey of growth and opportunity for NCAeyc. Through the generous support of Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, NCAeyc’s Board and staff are engaging in a two-year capacity building project that will result in a renewed strategic direction, enriching leadership development resources and a reflective focus on “Member Voice”. Through all three components of this project, we hope to create an even stronger, more positive impact in the professional lives of our members who exemplify “Excellence in Action” each day. We are honored to serve you and we are committed to supporting your professionalism and well-being. We want you to be assured that membership and engagement in YOUR professional association makes a difference in your work, in your community of practice, in North Carolina’s early care and education system and in the lives of young children and their families.

Like the children, families and professionals we are committed to serving, NCAeyc is continually evolving and growing. I invite you to check out our Local Affiliate and Chapter map on page **XX** for exciting updates. The leaders of our Local Affiliates and Chapters are instrumental in creating and connecting communities of practice and promoting professionalism across our state. Local engagement strengthens our statewide

*continued on page xx*

# From the President



Suzanne Hughes

In 2010, NAEYC initiated an intensive “National Dialogue” to hear from all Affiliate leaders, staff and members about NAEYC’s organizational strengths, challenges and needs. You may remember that we at NCAEYC hosted one of these sessions at our 2011 annual conference.

This past November, after years of collecting and analyzing data from all across the United States, the Strategic Direction for NAEYC was released at the Annual Study conference in Dallas, Texas. The National Dialog includes newly adopted statements of vision, mission, core values and beliefs, and strategic priorities.

**NAEYC New Vision Statement:** All young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

**NAEYC New Mission Statement:** NAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

## FIVE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES WITH GOALS AND DESIRED RESULTS:

1. *High-Quality Early Learning*—Goal: Children birth through age 8 have equitable access to developmentally appropriate, high-quality early learning.
2. *The Profession*—Goal: The early childhood education profession exemplifies excellence and is recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society.
3. *Organizational Advancement*—Goal: NAEYC is a highly valued, credible, and visible organization.
4. *Organizational Excellence*—Goal: NAEYC reflects excellence in all aspects of organizational health and vitality.
5. *Leadership and Innovation*—Goal: NAEYC cultivates leadership and incubates innovative strategies that propel the field, profession, and systems of early learning.

Since the release of NAEYC’s new Strategic Direction, NCAEYC board members and staff have begun carefully reviewing, reflecting on, and dialoging about the contents of the document and how it fits with the vision, mission, and values of NCAEYC. In keeping with our mission to *be the voice of early childhood professionals working with or on behalf of young children birth through age eight*, we at NCAEYC want to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to weigh in on NAEYC’s new strategic direction. **Below are three questions we would like you to consider.** Please email your thoughts, ideas, reflections, etc. to [shughes@ncaeyc.org](mailto:shughes@ncaeyc.org).

1. How well do the new vision and mission statements reflect the work and purpose of NCAEYC and could you see NCAEYC affirming these statements as our own?
2. What benefits might come from NCAEYC affirming and adopting the NAEYC Core Values and Beliefs which are grounded in the NAEYC Code of Ethics?
3. How well do you feel the five Strategic Priorities might guide and frame the work of NCAEYC?

The full NAEYC Strategic Direction can be found here:

[www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/NAEYC Strategic Direction 2014.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/NAEYC_Strategic_Direction_2014.pdf)

To reiterate the words of NAEYC’s Executive Director Rhian Evans Allvin, “I urge you to roll up your sleeves, lend your talent and your mind to make sure we reach our collective aspiration and obligation”

## WHY BEING ON MY LOCAL AFFILIATE IS MY NEXT STEP IN LEADERSHIP

My leadership interests continue to grow, as I grow in the field of early education. I am currently the Preschool Program Director at Duke School in Durham NC, and the Secretary in my local affiliate. Joining the DOCaeyc has provided opportunities to meet other teachers, to hear what they are interested in learning more about and how we as the local affiliate can bring those opportunities to the public.

## How can we support future leaders in early childhood education?

When thinking back to why I became a teacher, I think of the way children have such excitement about everything they see and experience; providing those experiences was what I wanted to do. At the age of 18, I began working for a childcare center as an afternoon assistant teacher, and was enrolled in an Early Childhood program at a Community College. I continued my education by enrolling in a B-K program and continued on to get my Master's in Early Childhood. I have taught in amazing schools where progressive education and professional development were of utmost importance, and also had the opportunity to work with home child care, small and large centers, providing technical support to improve quality of care. Along the way I was always encouraged to do more and learn more. In writing this I hope to pique the interest of those of you out there just starting out or even in your twentieth year of teaching. It's never too late to look for leadership and growth in the field of early care and education and a good place to start is with your local affiliate.

### HEAR FROM OTHER AFFILIATE MEMBERS

#### Pam Zornik, DOCaeyc Board Treasurer

I have been employed in the field of early childhood education for over 25 years. One of the many reasons I have remained in early childhood is because of the leaders in the field I have met along my journey. I have been inspired by others who have reached out to help me gain more information, told me about trainings, shared good reading resources with me and pointed me to higher education classes. It is my hope through our local affiliate group to continue to reach out to and inspire others in the field through our meetings, trainings and networking opportunities. By being involved in NAEYC activities and committees of all levels, national, state and local, I continue to be inspired by others and hope that I can share with others as they too continue their journey on in early childhood education.

#### June Shilote, DOCaeyc Board President

The DOCaeyc is up and running again. As your new President I am delighted to be working with a group of talented and dedicated teachers who are all committed to fostering the growth of our affiliate. Our mission is to serve on behalf of the needs, rights and well-being of all young children. We seek leaders to support the vision, mission and goals of NAEYC in our work at the local level. If you are interested in joining any of our committees please contact us via email at [DOCaeyc09@gmail.com](mailto:DOCaeyc09@gmail.com). We also encourage you to contact us with ideas and suggestions for how we can support you in your work with young children.



**This should be an eventful year for early education and care public policy at the state level.** The question is not whether there will be changes that affect our youngest North Carolinians, but what those changes will be. Several policy challenges are complicating the way forward to higher quality care and education for a greater percentage of young children in North Carolina.

First, there is the ongoing challenge presented by slow revenue growth; a trend exasperated by recent tax cuts for larger contributors. Second is the ongoing challenge that low industry pay presents for training and workforce development. Together, these challenges continue to restrict access to high quality childcare and pre-k across the state, threaten the adequate provision of resources in centers and schools, and deny opportunities to improve our early childhood workers.

How the budget challenge is met will, in the short- and medium-term, dominate the funding discussion. But history suggests that when details are made public of actual state budget details, it usually comes late in the process allowing for minimal public scrutiny. This has been a bi-partisan feature of the budget-making process, with few exceptions. It pays, therefore, to make your views known to your local legislator before the process gets into the peak budget-making season in early summer.

A third set of challenges involves the ongoing review of rules by the Child-care Commission, a review made necessary by legislative action. This month, the CCC submitted a report that categorized rules as either necessary with substantial public impact, necessary but with little impact, or unnecessary as required by recent legislation. The report will be found on the Office of Administrative Hearing website at [www.ncoah.com](http://www.ncoah.com).

In the spring the CCC will review most of the rules governing childcare. These include staff qualifications and other requirements to enhance care quality. The CCC underwent substantial membership changes in the fall of 2014, and now has a preponderance of private child-care owners or representatives. Regulatory changes are highly likely. The next meeting is on March 16 at 9:00 am, at the William G Ross Environmental Conference Center, 121 W. Jones Street, Raleigh. NCAeyc will be monitoring the reviews and report back to members.

NCAeyc is committed to high quality, developmentally appropriate early care and education. That is why we care about public policy. But our success in letting our views known to policymakers ultimately relies on the activity of our members. Let your voice be heard! Your state legislator can be found on [ncleg.net](http://ncleg.net), and the bills they support and how those bills are progressing are all easily tracked on that website. Information about Child Care Commission activities and membership can be found at [http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/general/..%5Cparents%5Cpr\\_sn2\\_ccc.asp](http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/general/..%5Cparents%5Cpr_sn2_ccc.asp).

## BILLS ALREADY FILED AFFECTING ZERO TO EIGHT

There are several local bills already filed in the House and Senate that would allow local school boards greater control over their school calendars, be it to allow for longer summer breaks, to align with community college schedules or to allow locals complete flexibility. It remains to be seen how, or if, these bills will be consolidated. Some have been sent to Rules Committees, a place colloquially known as the places where bills go to die. But the number of systems seeking flexibility suggests some kind of legislative response is possible. Changes in the school calendar have implications for summer-care and child transitions into pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.

- **House Bill (HB) 35** would establish a Task Force on Education tasked with studying the need for a permanent administrative entity within NC government to promote educational innovation. If this is to pass, it will be present in the budget. Similarly, HB 45 and SB 20 are budget provisions with Democratic backing that fund Child Advocacy Centers.
- **House bill (HB) 20 and Senate bill (SB) 27 (Reegan's Rule)** would require well-child visit providers to perform diabetes screenings at least once either at birth, one or two years. This, too, has budget ramifications and its success will rely on dollar availability.

There are several Senate bills that impact K-3 but are highly unlikely to move. SB 30 recalculates school grade scores to place greater weight on achievement growth. It is now in Senate Ways and Means, a committee that almost never meets. SB 79 mandates that all teacher preparation programs have some kind of school-based internship or clinical experience. It is now parked in Rules. SB 94 reintroduces a proposed constitutional amendment to abolish the State Board of Education and the elected State Superintendent position and replace it with a Governor-appointed Secretary of Education. Similar proposals in the past have died in the Rules or Ways and Means Committee, and this effort promises to be no different. The bill is now in the Rules Committee. SB 95 compels school districts to use performance considerations when making teacher lay-offs due to shrinking budgets or student numbers. It is now in Rules. Finally, SB 108 restores the pay supplement for teachers with MA degrees. It too, is in the Rules Committee.

## CORE BELIEFS AND VALUES DISCUSSION

In the wake of the NAEYC adoption of a new set of core beliefs and values (go to [naeyc.org](http://naeyc.org) for more) our board has been in intensive discussion since the winter vacation over its core beliefs and strategic priorities as well as its future policy outlook. We urge members to contact your board representative for more details and to give your input.

# NC's Demonstration Program

## A PRE-K/KINDERGARTEN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE: DEMONSTRATING EXCELLENCE

There seem to be a number of opportunities to hear about best practice in early childhood. We attend conferences and workshop sessions where we hear about research and are told about appropriate environments for young children. What is sometimes missing is the opportunity to see best practice in action along with meaningful opportunities for reflection and discussion. The NC Office of Early Learning decided to address the issue. NC's Demonstration Program teachers offer professional development at various conferences and meetings and in addition, offer the authentic opportunity to observe best practice in action, including facilitated discussion, reflection, and follow up.

The guiding mission of the NC Preschool and Kindergarten Demonstration Program is to lead by modeling, sharing, promoting, and articulating effective learning environments, curricula, and instructional practices to ensure optimal learning and development for all children. At this time, there are 12 demonstration classrooms representing a variety of geographically and economically diverse communities. These classrooms located across the state are available

to anyone who is interested in scheduling a guided observation. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Early Learning is proud to offer this initiative, supported through funding from Exceptional Children and Title 1 programs, and appreciates the opportunity to meet state board of education goals in a realistic and engaging way.

The demonstration program was created in 2000 as a best practice model for teaching emergent literacy to preschool children with special needs. Over the years, it has expanded into a broader evidence based practices model with a comprehensive approach, including collaboration with Kindergarten. During the 2010-11 school year, five kindergarten classrooms joined the program as phase two of the Power of K: NC Kindergarten Teacher Leader Initiative, a three-year professional development initiative established in 2007 to strengthen North Carolina's kindergarten classrooms. Currently there are six preschool and six kindergarten teacher leaders participating in the demonstration program with plans for additional classes over the next several years.

These dedicated teacher leaders offer authentic opportunities for visitors to observe best practice in action in their own classrooms and in other venues, including but not limited to:

- Guided observation sessions and facilitated discussions with teachers and administrators
- Additional follow up, professional development, and technical assistance
- Presentations at local, state and national conferences including NAEYC and NCAeYC, states who are working on Pre-K and Kindergarten reform, and local and state boards of education.

The teacher leaders involved in the demonstration program are committed to displaying high quality in a variety of ways. These teacher leaders effectively model, share, promote, and articulate evidence-based practices as indicated in NAEYC's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, *The NC Guide for the Early Years*, and *SEFEL*. In addition, the demonstration classes implement practices based on the latest developmental science and brain research.



North Carolina's Division of Child Development and Early Education evaluates child care centers and NC Pre-K programs using a star rated licensing system. In preschool classrooms program standards emphasize the quality of the environment, staff-child ratio, interactions between and among children and adults, space, health and safety, and licensure. The education and experience of the teachers in the classroom is also criteria for the 1–5 star rated licensing system in NC. All Pre-K demonstration classrooms have a NC 5 star rated license and their Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) scores range from 5.73 to 6.39 which demonstrates high quality across all aspects of program standards.



An emphasis is also placed on using individual classroom data to guide and inform practice within the demonstration program. The Classroom Assessment Scale (CLASS), an observation measure designed to rate ten dimensions of quality on teacher-child interactions across three Domains (Emotional Climate, Classroom Organization and Instructional Support) was administered for a full day in each pre-K and kindergarten classroom in the spring of 2014. The data revealed high quality across all demonstration classrooms and was shared to help demonstration program teachers identify their strengths and challenges, and to guide their professional growth. The aggregate data are used by the Office of Early Learning staff to provide evidence, support and professional development opportunities for the demonstration teachers and administrators. Obviously, the NC Office of Early Learning is proud of the number of measures that indicate the high quality found in NC's Demonstration Program classrooms.

## The Voices of Two Demonstration Program Teachers

### Shari Funkhouser, NC Demonstration Program Pre-K Teacher

As a pre-k teacher in a demonstration classroom, my team and I are committed to creating and maintaining a high quality environment for our students. Our classroom is a mixture of children at risk for educational failure, dual language learners and children with special needs. Research based practices take us back to guiding principles that were the very foundation of our own early childhood educational experiences. Yes, those things we learned on the way to becoming teachers and instructional assistants and yes, those same guiding principles found in North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development. It really is that simple. The part that is not so simple, is translating those principles into practice.

So what does the high quality environment look and feel like? In a snapshot, we believe that development and learning during the earliest years are the most important for long-term success in school and life, so our time with these children is important. Ours is an active language, math, and literacy rich environment that includes conversations and interactions throughout the day. This environment helps children make connections and enhances brain development. Each child is unique in his or her own level of development on each domain. We individualize our planning so that each child progresses to the next level and the next, etc. Each activity is experienced differently by each child depending on level of functioning and goals on the developmental continuum. We integrate learning throughout the day during routines, transitions, small and large groups, projects, centers and outdoor play. Yes, play. We are play-based, because we understand that hands on, play based learning is effective and a standard of quality in a pre-k classroom.

Relationships matter, those with the families, those with the children, and those between children. We work diligently to create a nurturing environment with a sense of community in which each child feels safe and a part of the group. We are inclusive of our children with special needs. Our rules are: be kind, be safe, be helpful, and be respectful, to which we hold ourselves as well as the children.

# NC's Demonstration Program *continued*

Being a demonstration program teacher has not changed me per se, but rather has kept me from changing. The guiding principles of high quality pre-k experiences have not changed. Rather, the pressures of “getting children ready for school” have increased. The thirst for data, measurement and accountability that is somewhat easier to acquire in upper grades, has led to the tendency for administrators, and ultimately teachers, to look at isolated fact and skill measurement. This in turn leads to teaching isolated facts and skills, instead of focusing on integrated foundational skills. As a demonstration program teacher, charged with demonstrating high quality teaching, I have the strength to continue integrating foundational skill and knowledge development throughout the curriculum and enhancing brain development; thereby, rejecting inappropriate practices. My role as a demonstration program teacher allows me to continue to learn and to share what I know with others. This reciprocal relationship helps to ensure that children have a high quality preschool experience.



## Amy Blessing, NC Demonstration Program Kindergarten Teacher

When I was first asked to join the NC Demonstration Program, I was deeply honored and excited for this new challenge in my teaching career. But then my fears and insecurities rose to the surface. Why were they asking me? There are far more talented teachers in NC, teachers who “have it all together” far more than I do. Teachers who can articulate and defend their teaching practices better than I can. I have real struggles. I have a seemingly never ending list of things I want to accomplish in my classroom, I am sometimes overwhelmed with requirements and assessments, and I do not always handle situations in my classroom with perfect grace and patience. It has taken some time for me to realize, however, that these struggles are what make me a successful demonstration classroom teacher.



Teachers who visit my classroom experience real life...they see that I face the same challenges and frustrations that all teachers face. But they also see that these challenges and frustrations do not have to dictate the climate of our classrooms. As a demo teacher, I strive to implement daily the things that research shows us are best for young children. Research shows us that children learn best in a playful, social environment. My daily schedule and classroom layout reflect this belief, with long stretches of time dedicated to play in a room focused on centers such as blocks and dramatic play, not seat work. Research also shows us the importance of choice and autonomy in our students' lives. Over the years I have let go of the control that I used to think was necessary in order to have a well-run, well-behaved class. My shift away from dictating control to building community and fostering independence has actually created classes that are more successful, both socially and academically. While I may not handle every situation that arises in my classroom with perfect grace and patience, classroom community is something that cannot be staged. Visitors in my class experience a caring and respectful environment, not just between me and my students, but among my students as well.



One of my favorite questions to ask myself is “if I believe... then why am I still doing...?” If I believe in a hands-on, child-centered classroom, then why am I still sending home worksheets for homework? If I believe in building classroom community and independence, then why am I limiting opportunities for my students to strengthen those skills? This simple question has helped to shape and change my teaching practice in profound ways. It forces me to look at what research tells us is best for young children and align what I do each day in my classroom to that research.



As for that seemingly never ending list of things that I want to accomplish, I've come to realize it is a part of every successful teacher's life. We are never satisfied with the status quo. We are always reflecting and making goals not only for our students, but for ourselves. My hope is that teachers who visit my classroom see me not as a teacher who "has it all together"; but as someone who faces the same challenges, the same mandates, the same expectations that they do in their districts, schools, and classrooms. We are all in this together. We are here to learn from and support each other to make our classrooms the best they can be, the classrooms that every North Carolina kindergartner deserves.



Research over the last two decades has shown that learning begins early, that brains develop most rapidly in the earliest years, and that early learning experiences are critical for the long-term success of children. The National Research Council Report "From Neurons to Neighborhoods" (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) makes the compelling case that the earliest year—birth through the primary grades—are critical to the long-term educational and life success of all children. The NC State Department of Public Instruction's Office of Early Learning understands the importance of these early years and is dedicated to supporting prekindergarten and kindergarten educators across the state as they strive to provide the most engaging and appropriate early learning experiences for its youngest citizens. We invite you to schedule a visit and to continue your own professional journey of providing and supporting high quality programs for preschool and kindergarten children.



Please visit the NC Demonstration Program website at: [www.earlylearning.nc.gov/DemoSites/AboutOELDemo.asp](http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/DemoSites/AboutOELDemo.asp) for additional information.

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# Cultural Competence: Bringing Culture into the Classroom



**A preschool classroom is a tapestry of diversity.** It can be filled with places for exploration and activities that promote respect for all children. The environment is structured to make every child feel welcomed and valued. But, how well are we ensuring that our children and families feel validated? Teachers and administrators may be unaware of the role that cultural competence plays when interacting with children and families. The National Education Association (NEA) defines cultural competence as “having an awareness of one’s own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families.”<sup>1</sup> It involves a willingness to examine the uniqueness of each child and an understanding of how a culture plays an important role in the classroom.

The word “culture” connotes many things depending on a person’s background and exposure to experiences that may be different from what is common to them. In a classroom, a teacher may think it involves the addition of multi-cultural dolls, pictures of different races on the wall, or culture-specific foods in dramatic play. While those materials are important to include in any learning environment, how the materials are used is more important. If they are simply integrated into the classroom without any explanation about their significance, a tremendous teachable moment could be missed. Culture goes beyond being aware of the differences of children. It is an understanding of the differences that exist and how those differences can bring a richness to the classroom. It involves race, gender, socio-economic class, family structure, customs, beliefs, and values. It goes beyond what a teacher sees when she looks at a student to knowing the background of each child in the class. This includes knowing things that may be important to a family, such as specific traditions, expectations regarding learning, and values.

An important step to becoming culturally competent is to become aware of what influences our views. The messages we receive from family, friends, past experiences, our community, and the media can shape how we perceive other cultures. These messages may not always be accurate and can sometimes only show a culture from a stereotypical perspective. Those unexamined prejudices can create barriers to learning by devaluing the significance of each child’s background. We must be aware of how our perceptions can influence our interactions with children. This will allow teachers to change any behaviors that may inhibit cultivating relationships with families. It will also allow for more effective advocacy because teachers will have a realistic view of what the needs are within the classroom community.

As teachers are educated on the importance of accurate, respectful representations of culture in the classroom, we become more aware of the long-range implications surrounding the need for positive cultural identity. Something as simple as having each family bring articles that are significant to them can initiate a journey of learning and



discovery for other children who may be unaware of the differences in culture among their peers. For this to be done appropriately may require additional training for the workforce. This has led to the development of the Cultural Competence Breakthrough Series Collaborative. Their focus is increase the quality of early childhood education for all children by supporting cultural and linguistically responsive practices and policies.<sup>2</sup> Through the development of a curriculum promoting a purposeful approach to cultural competence, the CCBSC has increased awareness of the importance of family engagement. This strategy is being used to improve program policies and teaching practices.



One of the architects of the curriculum, Rosemarie Vardell, has been involved in early childhood education for more than 35 years. She saw the project as an opportunity for teachers, administrators and professional development staff to become more culturally competent in order to teach and lead in ways that are responsive to the children and families in their programs. This was important to her because the disparity in educational opportunities for children creates the conditions under which the “educational gap” occurs. In terms of seeing this from an advocacy perspective, the “social capital” or potential for our children’s futures is directly influenced by the opportunities they receive in the early learning environment.

This project is promoting excellence in the field of early care and education by equipping teachers with the skills to be successful caregivers through intentional, meaningful practices. Rosemarie believes that early childhood professionals continue to elevate their commitment to children by incorporating new knowledge and skills in their teaching and leadership. “This promotes best practice and allows for effective, relationship rich, and compassionate care for young children.”<sup>3</sup> Learning to be responsive to variations in culture, language and economic circumstances enriches the workforce and the experiences of children and families.

To become more effective educators, we must think of how we can include families in the classroom. One approach to establishing a home-school connection is the creation of a “third space” or a learning community that accommodates the ideas and approaches of both the staff and the family. This involves communication between both parties to establish a “space” in the learning environment that is neither a copy of home, nor an addition to a classroom. It is the integration of both home and school to create a space that is inclusive of both. The uniqueness of this space is as specific to each classroom as the children in it since it is a melting pot of differences. It encompasses philosophies and ideas from families as well as brainstorming by teachers to determine how the classroom can be adapted.

Another approach is through the process of reflective practice. This is an ongoing process of looking, observing, and recording one’s own teaching practices and taking action to make positive changes in the classroom for young children.<sup>4</sup> This method allows the teacher to introspectively approach classroom engagement. When the teacher can step back and evaluate their effectiveness, improvements can be made that enrich learning.

Cultural competence is the first step in ensuring that our communities have access to services that create opportunities for success. By building relationships with families from different racial and cultural groups, we improve outcomes and promote an atmosphere of respect.

<sup>1</sup> National Education Association (2015). *Why Cultural Competence?* Retrieved from [www.nea.org/home/39783.htm](http://www.nea.org/home/39783.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Cultural Competence Breakthrough Series Collaborative (2014). *Cultural Competence*. Retrieved from [https://wiggio.com/?#tpl=folderlist\\_1953260](https://wiggio.com/?#tpl=folderlist_1953260)

<sup>3</sup> R. Vardell, personal communication, February 12, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Rice, M. (2013, February 15). *Can reflective practice guide me in making better decisions for my early childhood classroom?* Retrieved from [www.nea.org/home/39783.htm](http://www.nea.org/home/39783.htm)

# Our Year of Healthy Living: Fostering Consistent Health Messages Between Child Care and Home

**Our Year of Healthy Living is a new program that promotes a partnership between parents and teachers to encourage nutritious eating and active play in preschool-age children.** Its healthy messages travel through activities, food, songs, and celebration of healthy living. Developed by experts at UNC-Chapel Hill, the program is part of a research study scheduled to roll out this fall! Participation in the program is free, and the research team will begin recruiting child care centers in Wake, Johnston, and Harnett counties this June.

Key elements of the program include a Kickoff event, the Fit Family Promise, Activity Cards, a *My Healthy Family* magazine, and a Wrap-up party. The program is easy to implement, fun, and flexible. Centers can choose from a menu of options for implementation of the program based on their time and needs.



“The project supports children’s development and well-being through engaging activities. Additionally, the framework of the project provides early educators with flexibility in selecting the project components that best match the needs of the children and families in their classrooms.”

*Lorie Barnes, NCaeyc Executive Director*

## FOR CENTERS THAT TAKE PART, HERE IS WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT:

In October, the program is launched with a tailored Kick-off including a banner, posters, and song provided by the program. Teachers, children, and families sign the *Fit Family Promise* and commit to take a “just try it” approach to healthy food and exercise.

From October through March, teachers cover four units including topics like drinking healthy beverages, outdoor play, healthy snacks, and watching less TV. Teachers lead two activities a week for four weeks, using the unit’s Activity Cards as a guide. Activities are designed to contribute to academic goals, and were carefully planned to complement



North Carolina's principle resources for early learning—NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development and Head Start Education and Early Childhood Development Performance Standards. At home, families do activities that are linked to those done in class. An issue of *My Healthy Family* magazine is sent home at the beginning of each unit with those activities, infographics, and other entertaining, readable material for adults.

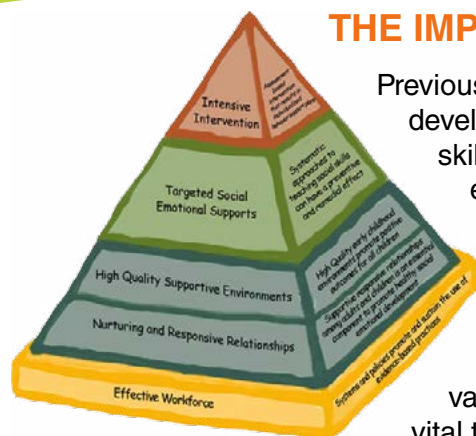
“ Our Year of Healthy Living program and materials have been thoughtfully developed with children, families and early childhood professionals in mind... Engagement between early educators and families is strengthened through high quality, user-friendly resources. This new program has tremendous potential to make positive differences.”

*Lorie Barnes, NCAeyc Executive Director*

The research study will be looking at the impact that *Our Year of Healthy Living* program has on children's activity levels, diet quality, and weight. Participating centers and families will be asked to provide some information about their current habits before and after program rollout. The research team welcomes your support of this program to help our state's children become healthy, fulfilled grown-ups! Be on the lookout for more information in the next issue of Milestones. If you are interested in this project and have questions, feel free to contact the project manager, Sydney Henson, at [OurYear@unc.edu](mailto:OurYear@unc.edu) .



# Pyramid Corner: Embrace the Pyramid!



## THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Previously in the Pyramid Corner we explored the importance of social-emotional development and of building positive relationships. The definition of social-emotional skills included the ability to form relationships, and posited that social and emotional skills are learned within the context of nurturing, secure relationships. This foundational keystone of the Pyramid Model, developed by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), means that, while education in early childhood is important, children and families don't care how much their teacher knows until they know how much their teacher cares. But that caring and education does not occur in a vacuum, and the environment we create for these relationships and learning is vital to whether or not our efforts flourish. So let's take a look at the elements of a quality environment that is supportive of a young child's social-emotional development.

### What are environmental strategies that promote positive social interactions?

Environmental strategies are changes that can be made to a classroom's environment, schedule, activities and materials to encourage positive interactions between children. These strategies include providing visual cues to guide children, providing materials that promote cooperation, commenting on positive behaviors, etc. Environmental strategies require little adult assistance once the planning and organization are complete. Additionally, more positive interactions between children will help create a happier classroom for children and teachers!

### Why is it important to use these environmental strategies?

Children whose needs and interests are being met do not have the time or inclination to use challenging behaviors as often. Defined, organized learning centers with a variety of choices and visual cues to help children understand how to use the materials will prevent many behavior problems. Although environmental strategies require time and planning, the results are often seen with little direct teacher involvement with the children. Positive results are truly a result of a teacher's best behavior management tool and partner...a well-structured, developmentally appropriate environment! All classrooms have materials that can be used to support social interactions and any material that can be used by more than one child at one time is a resource. Your role is to intentionally plan and structure how the materials will be used to increase the likelihood that positive interactions will take place.

### What can you do in your classroom? Put Excellent Ideas Into Action!

Arrange the physical environment and select activities and materials that encourage children to work together; for example:

- **Use toys and materials that promote cooperation and sharing:** By replacing toys and materials made for individual use with toys and materials made for cooperative use, you help increase the opportunities for children to play together. Many materials work best and tend to be more fun when two or more children use them together. Materials such as teeter-totters, rocking boats, wagons and other large play items require children to work together to coordinate their actions. Replace the art easel with large pieces of paper taped on the classroom wall or on a table so that children can paint and create together.
- **Keep toys and materials novel and interesting:** Rotating materials is an excellent and cost-effective means of maintaining the 'newness' or novelty of your classroom. Simply storing materials for a few weeks greatly increases the children's interest in them when they are returned to the classroom. Make sure there are enough choices of materials and activities for the number of children in your class. If children are bored and not engaged, they are more likely to use challenging behaviors.
- **Give positive attention to children who are playing nicely together and be specific in your feedback:** This helps children understand that social interactions are valued in your classroom (e.g., "You two are doing an awesome job building that zoo together!").

- **Pair children who have good social skills with children who have less developed social skills:** Just being near more socially competent children can increase positive interactions and reduce problem behaviors. Encourage this close contact by making sure that planned activities are meaningful and enjoyable for all children and give children time and attention when they are playing together. Instead of having two children stand next to each other on one side of the water table, arrange the water table so children play across from each other. This promotes increased talking and sharing...and fun!

**Here are some more specific Excellence In Action ideas about classroom centers and routines you can use to create a supportive environment for social-emotional development:**

### THE PLAY-TOGETHER TABLE:

You will need one small table, two chairs, an activity to work on together and a visual that indicates that the area is reserved for two children at a time. Introduce the table as a new learning area or center and explain to the children that they must find a friend to join them at the table to play. Materials can be a basket of manipulatives, a large puzzle, a doll house with props, a road map with vehicles, a puppet theatre, a magnifying glass with materials to study, a joint art project, etc. Your imagination is the limit! Remember to change the materials frequently to keep the children interested and wondering what is coming next to the play-together table.



### DRAMATIC PLAY:

Dramatic play naturally fosters opportunities for children to play cooperatively together. You can facilitate this by joining children's play initially and helping them select roles that are part of a theme. Turn your dramatic play area into a mechanic shop and children can be mechanics working together to fix a vehicle, the customers and/or the service manager. Change the themes in the dramatic play area frequently to facilitate continued positive interactions. Consider props and materials that create a veterinarian's office, fire station, grocery store, doctor's office or airport. This strategy develops teamwork, problem-solving, planning, respect for other's ideas and peer relationships. These projects can take days or weeks as children come up with new ideas. Be ready to record a list of materials as the children ask for them. Don't forget that this strategy can be implemented outdoors as well; your sandbox can become a construction site, with hard hats, tools, and a wide variety of other construction materials.



### CLASSROOM JOBS:

Review your helper chart and incorporate jobs that require more than one child to accomplish. Two children can set tables for meals working cooperatively on one table at a time or two children can be door holders. Incorporate jobs that require social interactions among children such as a classroom greeter who welcomes each child upon arrival; a child who asks each person, 'How are you feeling today?' and indicates their answers on the Feeling Chart; children can help each other get their cots ready for nap, or rub backs for a while before they lay down.



## RESEARCH ON THIS TOPIC

When teachers work to build strong relationships and supportive environments, 85% of the children in their classroom will achieve the social-emotional development they need to be successful (CSEFEL). But some children need a little extra support. In the next issue of *Milestones* we'll explore some targeted teaching strategies which can be effective with those children needing that little extra support.

Adapted by *Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers*, from CSEFEL *What Works Brief #6*. Additional strategies can be found at <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>.

# The Mindful Classroom: Cutting-Edge Training for Early Childhood Professionals

**Tuesday, May 12, The National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute is offering a new workshop based on a fresh approach to help teachers improve their well-being—and their interactions with students.**

With significant implications for early childhood education, new research shows that a mindful disposition is associated with alleviating lasting physical and emotional effects of childhood adversity. The groundbreaking study is the first to examine relationships between childhood adversity, mindfulness, and adult health—and the new evidence is fueling work on a professional development and coaching approach to improve the health of teachers.

Robert Whitaker, Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics at Temple University, said the findings are especially important because adults who faced adversity as children typically experience poorer health.

“Previous research has shown that childhood traumas worsen adult health through changes in how the body responds to stress,” said Whitaker, who led the new study. He added that some people might adopt poor health behaviors, like smoking, to cope with stress.

As a visiting scholar at FPG, Whitaker collaborated with scientist Kathleen Gallagher on the study, which surveyed over 2000 adults working for Head Start. According to Gallagher, one of the study’s most striking features is its focus on the very teachers and staff who are responsible for teaching and caring for some of America’s most vulnerable children.

“It’s essential for adults working with young children to be well—physically and emotionally,” said Gallagher. “Better health enables better relationships with children, and research has long demonstrated that good relationships are crucial for children’s learning and social-emotional development.”

Not surprisingly, early childhood professionals often experience intense stress. In addition to supporting children’s development and learning, they must guide children’s behavior and social-emotional learning, support positive social interactions, and interact with similarly-stressed families and colleagues.

Whitaker explained that providing services to children who are experiencing trauma also reactivates in adults an unhealthy stress response to their own childhood adversity. “This can potentially worsen the health and functioning of these adult caregivers,” he said.

Studies have shown the health benefits of learning to be more mindful—focusing on and accepting your reactions to the present moment—but nobody had explored whether mindfulness in adulthood could offset the effects of adverse childhood experiences.



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**“Mindfulness training may help adults, including those with a history of childhood trauma, to improve their own well-being—and to be more effective with children.”**

*Robert Whitaker, Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics, Temple University*



The researchers surveyed 66 Head Start programs, asking teachers and staff if they experienced specific types of adversity as children. The team also asked teachers and staff about their current health, as well as their mindfulness—the tendency in daily life to notice what happens as it happens and to be aware and accepting of their thoughts and feelings.

“Nearly one-fourth of our Head Start respondents reported three or more types of adverse childhood experiences,” said Whitaker, adding that almost 30 percent reported having three or more stress-related health conditions, such as depression, headache, or back pain.

However, Whitaker and Gallagher found that the risk of having multiple health conditions was nearly 50 percent lower among respondents with the highest level of mindfulness, compared to those with the lowest levels—even for people with multiple types of childhood adversity.

In addition, regardless of the amount of childhood adversity, Head Start workers who were more mindful also reported significantly better health behaviors, like getting enough sleep, and better functioning, including fewer days when they felt unwell mentally or physically.

“Mindfulness training may help adults, including those with a history of childhood trauma, to improve their own well-being—and to be more effective with children,” Whitaker said.

The findings compelled Whitaker and Gallagher to begin developing *Be Well to Teach Well*, an online professional development program designed to help teachers improve their well-being and classroom interactions.

**This May, at the National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute in Chapel Hill, Gallagher will co-lead a special pre-Institute workshop, based on the new approach, with longtime mindfulness instructor Karen Bluth.** In this interactive workshop, participants can reflect in person on how stress from working with children and families impacts health and relationships, as well as learning more about how mindfulness contributes to well-being and positive relationships. During the workshop, participants can explore practices that support the development of mindfulness. In addition, Gallagher and Bluth will foster opportunities to develop a personal and professional plan for integrating mindfulness into daily life and professional activities.

Registration for Gallagher and Bluth’s workshop on integrating mindfulness is separate from the full array of programming at the National Early Childhood Institute, and anyone can attend their workshop, regardless of participation in the Institute. The \$50 workshop fee includes both a continental breakfast and a lunch.



Kathleen Gallagher, educational psychologist and  
Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education, UNC

You can read more and register for Gallagher and Bluth’s special workshop on mindfulness at <http://inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu/node/612>

On a related note, the Institute’s regular programming (which requires registration for the full Institute) will include a session from co-keynote speaker and mindfulness guide Kate Turnbull on mindfulness training for young children with self-regulation challenges: <http://inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu/node/620>

# NC Infant Toddler Quality Enhancement Project: Observations from the Field



Since 2004, the NC Infant Toddler Quality Enhancement Project Specialists (ITS) have provided a variety of supports to teachers, directors, licensing consultants and other community technical assistance practitioners to promote evidence-based practices so that infants and toddlers experience responsive relationships and developmentally appropriate practices in high quality group care environments. The statewide team recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of the project and the many improvements made by programs after working with their regionally-based Infant Toddler Specialist. Many stories about the highs and lows of this work were told. Implementation science encourages us to accept that things may not always go as planned and by reflecting on these stories we learn to nurture a continuous cycle of quality improvement for our team and for NC's workforce who provide the early experiences that matter so much to infants and toddlers. Some observations from the field are shared here as acknowledgement of and encouragement for your own efforts to support and advocate for what every baby needs.

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

As our team continues to challenge ourselves to strengthen our own practices, we have seen many infant and toddler teachers make improvements in their practices. Overall, we find that most adults caring for infants and toddlers have not had an opportunity to learn what these very young children in group care need. Many are willing to adjust their own language and behavior when they have the support of someone with this knowledge and experience to teach and coach them throughout the process. Following are some additional observations that warrant ongoing attention so that every infant and toddler in child care can expect to have a great beginning.



## Infant-toddler targeted supports are essential to improving and maintaining the quality of group care for this age group.

Over the years, we've seen an increase in the number of infant and toddler teachers going back to school. In addition to this good news, EDU 234, Infants, Toddlers and Twos, is now a required course for an AAS degree in NC's Community College System. Less positive is the minimal availability of courses that focus on the birth to three age range available to students in 4-year ECE programs. It is no surprise that we find most teachers with degrees have a preschool-focused preparation for working in child care. As one teacher at the start of NC Foundations of Infant Toddler Care courses (developed with RttT-ELC funds) shared, it felt like she was "drowning" in her new role as a toddler teacher because her 4-year ECE degree had not prepared her. The reality is that infants and toddlers in child care today are still more likely to have a teacher without any specialized infant/toddler knowledge, with less education overall and lower compensation. This essential part of the ECE workforce must continue to have access to training specific to the age-group they are teaching as well as access to directors or other program staff and/or infant toddler specialists who can provide both targeted training and coaching support for implementation of best practices.

## Leadership is essential for quality.

Our project has always included program administrators in the quality improvement work, but with variable success. Over the years we have seen many directors who are stressed with the many demands of managing a child care program or just not willing to be involved in our work with classroom teachers. We have learned that those administrators who are “all in” the process with us are better prepared to support their programs once we’ve moved on to another program. As a result, our team has recently agreed to be more intentional about engaging administrators to enhance their understanding of best practices for infant-toddler group care and their role in supporting teachers to maintain high quality in their infant-toddler program. In addition to developing classroom action plans, the ITS also develops an administrator action plan with each program participating in one of our TA programs to guide this work. Administrators are part of the workforce that can benefit from targeted infant/toddler professional development. A .6 CEU Webinar, *Leading the Way: Implementing High Quality Infant Toddler Care*, is offered several times a year by our project to support any program “leader” to increase their knowledge in this topic area. For more information, contact Stephanie Granek at [stephanieg@childcareservices.org](mailto:stephanieg@childcareservices.org).

On-line registration for the next event starting May 5<sup>th</sup> is available at  
[www.childcareservices.org/ps/training.html](http://www.childcareservices.org/ps/training.html)

## Shifting from “quality for a day” to a culture of continuous improvement is challenging.

Making this shift isn’t something that can happen overnight and would probably benefit from systems change to support it. Most of our requests for TA support come when a program has a rated license assessment due. The program’s goal is to prepare to “do well!” The Infant Toddler Quality Rating Improvement Program (ITQRIP) is designed to support programs preparing for ERS, and the team continues to struggle with the best way to approach this work when the official assessments “count” for so much. Virtually every meeting or conversation with our team includes mention of how important it is that we keep our TA focused on what infants and toddlers need and how implementing best practices in group care settings impacts early learning and development. In 2010, the team added a Social Emotional Technical Assistance (SETA) program to provide an approach to quality improvement using a different lens, the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children. Other approaches may be needed to support this important shift.

Meanwhile, we acknowledge the constraints of real-world infant toddler settings, and the challenges this presents for making some of the desired changes or for maintaining improvements made. The ITS team continues to be motivated by the “little things” and know that small changes can make a big difference to a very young child. Looking back provides important information upon which to build and strengthen a culture of continuous improvement. Whatever your role, please consider seeking opportunities to add to your knowledge about best practice for infant and toddler group care. NC’s youngest children in child care depend on all of us to make certain that nurturing and responsive relationships and positive early learning experiences are available to them every day.





**My name is Julie Anne Crawford**, and I am graduating in the Spring of 2015 with a degree in Birth-Kindergarten Education from Appalachian State University. Interning with Ncaeyc this semester has been an invaluable experience as a part of my educational career. The work I have done has been truly meaningful because it has contributed to my knowledge base and has provided a platform to contribute to the field through NCAeYC's work. It has been an incredible experience, but if I had to choose, these are the top 3 things I've gained from interning at NCAeYC this semester.

## AMAZING MENTORS

I have received incredible words of wisdom and encouragement from the individuals at NCAeYC. As I graduate and move out into the field, if I ever have any questions or concerns, I know that I could call Lorie Barnes or any of the staff at NCAeYC and receive great advice.

## PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS

I have met many individuals in my local area that are passionate about early childhood education. I was aware of the many organizations that serve young children around my university but was unsure of their counterparts in my home town. Interning with NCAeYC has allowed me to meet experts in the field that work in the area I hope to soon become employed.

## INSIGHT/ INCREASED KNOWLEDGE BASE

I was aware of the many decisions politicians make about early childhood that effect young children in our state. However, I had no idea how these decisions were made in North Carolina. Thanks to the experiences NCAeYC has given me I now have a richer understanding of how decisions about policies regarding young children are made and how I, as a practitioner, can impact the field by staying informed about public policy.

## NCAEYC CONGRATULATES DR. DEB CASSIDY ON HER ELECTION AS PRESIDENT-ELECT OF NAEYC GOVERNING BOARD!

NCAeYC is delighted to congratulate Dr. Deborah J. Cassidy on being elected to the seat of President-elect of the NAEYC Governing Board!

Dr. Cassidy is a Professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. She previously served as the Director of the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education.

Dr. Cassidy will spend one year of service as President-elect, two years as President, and one year as Past President.

**Thank you Dr. Cassidy for your leadership service!**



# Conference and Congratulations

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RFPs for presentations are available on our website. With link... it's a blog post I THINK! To learn more about Vendor opportunities, contact Chris Butler at [cbutler@ncaeyc.org](mailto:cbutler@ncaeyc.org).

Preconference Session: Extraordinary Care—Making the Most of Every Day in the Lives of Babies, Toddlers and Two's

Animoto video: <http://animoto.com/play/0OWREdketKVGAPfc8YBzHQ>.

  
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## Magic of Everyday Moments Materials

ZERO TO THREE has released a new set of materials that show how adult interactions shape the growth and learning of infants and toddlers. The set includes four videos that explore key aspects of early childhood development for use in work with families and professionals, including:

- **Brain Wonders:** Nurturing Healthy Brain Development From Birth
- **Literacy Skills:** The Roots of Reading Start at Birth
- **Power of Play:** Building Skills While Having Fun
- **Temperament:** What Makes Your Child Tick?

The videos are all available to view online at no cost  
[www.zerotothree.org/parenting-resources/MOEM](http://www.zerotothree.org/parenting-resources/MOEM)

# Centers in Kindergarten: When Do You Have Time For That?



## Blocks, sand, and dramatic play in kindergarten?

When asked, many current kindergarten teachers and their administrators view developmental centers as a thing of the past. The typical responses...“there isn’t time for that” or “that’s what they do in Pre-k.” The prevailing mindset is that was how kindergarten was done years ago. Today’s kindergartens are dominated by intense pressure to have children fluently reading, adding, and subtracting by the time they leave kindergarten. Interestingly, a possibility rarely ever considered is whether a developmental, constructivist approach can be paired with the content included in state standards in order to meet the developmental needs of children and the expectations of today’s accountability system. As one of six demonstration kindergarten teachers for the NC Office of Early Learning, I can, from first-hand experience in my classroom and from observation of demonstration colleagues as well as a handful of dedicated teachers I have taught with, say that center or play-based instruction and standards and content are not mutually exclusive. In fact, in each of these classrooms, the two seemingly polar opposites co-exist seamlessly.

## A DIFFERENT APPROACH

As a demonstration teacher, one of my responsibilities is to host teachers, instructional specialists, and administrators in guided observations of my classroom. As visitors observe, they notice quickly my classroom is not today’s traditional kindergarten classroom. Children spend very little time sitting at tables quietly completing seatwork. Instead, much of their time is spent working in teacher-led small groups, content-based stations, or in the hour and a half block of time for developmental centers. Children move about the classroom independently, gathering materials they may need for a project. There is the constant ebb and flow of busyness and noise as children settle into a task at hand, often of their choice. During literacy and math stations, children have the autonomy to select which content-based station activity they want to engage in on a given day. They understand the process of learning such that eight or more stations might be going on simultaneously, and once finished, they will then independently transition themselves into developmental centers without much more than a hiccup. In our classroom, children do A LOT of talking and asking questions, and as for myself, I spend a lot of time listening, observing, and asking questions that encourage children to think deeply about their own or others’ questions, areas of interest, and yes, content. We have built a community of learners—an environment in which everyone is respected for the strengths we bring and the growth we are all making, teachers included.

Why are developmental centers so important for young learners and what can teachers learn about children while they are in centers? Why is choice an important part of the day? Why do children need opportunities to talk to each other? The answers lie in what we have known about play and its implication in children’s development along with more recent research about executive function and



self-regulation. Opportunities for play in developmental centers provide children with time to make sense of their world. In dramatic play, they role-play their interpretation of what it is like to be a particular community helper, for example, exploring a future career endeavor. In puzzles and games, they practice waiting for and taking turns, counting as they move spaces on a game board, or expanding their visual-spatial abilities as they piece together floor puzzles. Every center, with purposeful planning by teachers, can provide children with opportunities to further develop not just social, emotional, and language skills. These centers are a prime opportunity to engage children in content in a manner that invites children to be active participants in the learning process. In every center, teachers who know the curriculum and know their children are able to observe children's ownership of skills and what has truly become a part of who they are as a learner. Teachers can also gain significant information about children's abilities to sustain attention to self-selected tasks, interactions with peers, and children's personal interests. Teachers' careful questions and comments can scaffold children's thinking to move them forward in all developmental domains. The teacher makes all the difference in the level of play and learning that takes place during this period of the day.

## WHAT IS IT CALLED?

Recently, I hosted a team of visitors from a neighboring county who are, as many districts in the state, trying to define what constitutes a high-quality kindergarten program in preparation for the roll-out of the Kindergarten Entry Assessment which will begin in Fall 2015. The question was posed to me, "What do you call your approach to teaching?" The question caused me to pause for a moment, and suddenly, 17 years of training, experiences, and self-reflection flashed through my mind. What is my classroom? What has influenced me to make the decisions I have made as a kindergarten teacher to create the type of environment that invites children to thrive – not just cognitively but in all domains of development?

One thing I knew for sure—my approach didn't come packaged in a brightly colored box or in shrink-wrapped plastic. It came from learning about child development as a

B-K student at East Carolina University. It came from working with multiple principals who were grounded in the fundamentals of early childhood education and who understood the significance of filtering mandates to meet the needs of kindergarten children. It came from professional development opportunities like Power of K, FirstSchool, and the NC-OEL Prek-K Demonstration Program that encouraged me to examine my practices and make changes according to research. In essence, it came from understanding what we have always known about how young children learn and meshing it with current research, mandates, and standards. According to Graue (2009), "a high-quality program is a hybrid of yesterday's and today's kindergarten." Yesterday's kindergarten focused on the developmental domains of learning including physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive development. Today's version focuses on how children learn content and the teacher's role in supporting the learning.



**“A high-quality program is a hybrid of yesterday's and today's kindergarten.”**

# Centers in Kindergarten: When Do You Have Time For That? *continued*

## IS THE PENDULUM SWINGING?

At a recent KEA training while we were discussing best practices, a district director said, “It sounds like the pendulum is swinging the other direction.” I responded by saying, “I don’t think the pendulum is swinging all the way back the other way. Perhaps the pendulum has found its center.” By utilizing a ‘hybrid’ or balanced model of what we have known about children’s development, academic content, and what we have learned in more recent years, we are responding to children’s development and instructional needs, focusing on where children are at present, what they need, and where they are headed in the future.

## FINDING COMMON GROUND AND UNDERSTANDING

How do we help administrators and teachers who have become so accustomed to focusing almost exclusively on reading and math begin to understand why a shift in thinking about children’s education in a broader context is crucial? Although my understanding has evolved over time with several unique experiences, I feel strongly that others can achieve a similar level of understanding with time and clearly defined, focused, ongoing professional development and supportive administration.

The introduction of the Kindergarten Entry Assessment is a wonderful start. Every NC school district has a team of district and school leaders as well as at least one kindergarten teacher who is being introduced to this formative assessment, which includes information about the five domains of development. The assessment is truly formative in nature, and encourages teachers to observe children through the lens of developmental domains in their everyday routines and teaching, not as a pull-aside assessment of progress. Resources and information related to best practices have been highlighted and made available. Perhaps most significant is the emphasis from the Department of Public Instruction for districts to consider a different approach to teaching our youngest school-age learners.

I have been incredibly moved by the outpouring of interest from neighboring districts who have scheduled visits to my classroom to observe this ‘hybrid’ model in action. Districts are sending groups of teachers, coaches, principals, and district-level leadership to observe and investigate how this type of daily instruction allows children to learn in a manner that is relevant to children while still insuring benchmarks and standards will be met by the end of the year.







A reading coach stated after observing in my classroom, “You actually taught reading and literacy-based content ALL morning, not just one block of specified time.” That is the beauty of this approach. Children receive instruction in literacy and math in a relevant, integrated manner all day long, not just in isolated blocks of time. The result is happy, eager-to-learn kindergartners who are well-prepared for the challenges of first grade by the end of the year.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, so often, the question is posed, “How do you have time for centers?” Perhaps very soon, the question will be “How do you not have time for centers?” Children are more than academic beings. They face many challenges in today’s world. If we are only nurturing the academic part of their cognitive development, how are we preparing them for the many challenges of life they will face in their future? Kindergarten sets the stage for at least 12 more years of formal education. We owe it to children to make time in kindergarten for what is important so that every child is fully educated in every domain of development.



### Links:

[www.earlylearning.nc.gov/DemoSites/DemoProgramNEW.asp](http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/DemoSites/DemoProgramNEW.asp)

[www.earlylearning.nc.gov/InfoforEducators/index.asp](http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/InfoforEducators/index.asp)

[www.aasa.org/schooladministratorarticle.aspx?id=8450](http://www.aasa.org/schooladministratorarticle.aspx?id=8450)

[www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/Reading\\_Instruction\\_in\\_Kindergarten.pdf](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/Reading_Instruction_in_Kindergarten.pdf)

[http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports\\_and\\_working\\_papers/working\\_papers/wp11/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp11/)

# Be Active Kids: What is the Early Childhood Physical Activity Institute (ECPAI)?

**Be Active Kids®**, a signature program of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, has teamed up with Dr. Diane Craft of Active Play Books and other international, national, and local experts in the fields of Health, Physical Activity, Recreation, Physical Education, Play, Nature, and Community Environments to provide an extensive physical activity training experience to individuals working with child care providers, preschool teachers or others who interact with large groups of young children on a regular basis.



## ECPAI STRUCTURE:

### Day One: Opening Session (9:00 am – 12:00 pm)

The Opening Session may be attended by ANYONE who is interested in learning more about physical activity and play for young children. This is a unique experience to hear from leading experts from all over the world in one location. Previous audiences have included parents, school teachers, child care providers, school administrators, public health staff, children's museum staff, parks & recreation staff, YMCA staff, Boys & Girls Clubs staff, legislators, funders, local and state government employees, and more.

### Day One: Continuing Education Workshop (1:00 am – 3:00 pm)

This two-hour workshop is provided by one of our featured experts from the Opening Session which makes it different each year. This workshop is intended for past graduates of the ECPAI and newly selected candidates but other individuals may be approved based on available space. Previous topics included increasing movement in infants and toddlers, integrating physical activity and play throughout the day, and Choosy Kids/I am Moving, I am Learning.

### Days Two and Three: Intensive Training (9:00 am – 5:00 pm)

These two, fun-filled days are facilitated by Richard Rairigh of Be Active Kids and Dr. Diane Craft of Active Play Books and is ONLY for 15 previously selected candidates. Interested and committed participants need to register and provide references. Topics covered over these days include defining physical activity and play, motor skills, movement concepts, active role modeling, planning for physical activity, managing an active environment, using appropriate equipment and loose parts, observing and assessing movement, and more. Participants will be actively engaged in the play and learning experience using various instructional methods and interacting with young children and peers.

## WHY THE NEED FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INSTITUTE?

### Concern 1: Lack of Knowledge about and comfort with physical activity

- Solution 1: To provide participants with ongoing knowledge and skills needed to transfer developmentally appropriate physical activity and movement experiences to early childhood educators.
- Solution 2: To provide hands-on experience teaching and playing with preschool children.

### Concern 2: Lack of opportunities and financial support to learn from the best

- Solution 3: To provide access to international, national, and local experts that may be otherwise inaccessible to various parts of North Carolina.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INSTITUTE (ECPAI) OUTCOMES?

- Increase knowledge about physical activity, motor skills, movement concepts, and active play for young children (All Participants).
- Increase teaching/training skills to transfer developmentally appropriate physical activity strategies to child care providers (Alumni and 15 New Candidates).
- Increase participation in various types of physical activity experiences (Alumni and 15 New Candidates).
- Demonstrate the use of new knowledge and skills by providing regular physical activity experiences to child care providers, directors, or parents in their community (a minimum of one within the next six month) (Alumni and 15 New Candidates).





Here are three things you can do today to build the father-child relationship you want and your child needs.

1. In the morning, **touch physically**. Make contact with a pat on the back, a soft hand on the shoulder, or a “good morning” hug or kiss.
2. At noon, **touch intellectually**. Think about each child. What is he or she going through that day?
3. In the evening, **touch emotionally**. Ask how he or she is feeling about the day’s events. Were there any fears, joys, successes, frustrations, excitements, or disappointments? What was the best thing that happened today (and maybe the least favorite thing)? Listen with a compassionate heart. When appropriate, share your day as well.

Why these three? They basically have to do with feeding your child’s father-hunger. This is your child’s innate and very real need to have an emotional attachment to his or her father.

Over the years, I’ve talked with lots of guys who had experienced an unmet father-hunger growing up. Most didn’t have a father who loved them, or they had one who was aloof and didn’t “touch” them with any real care and compassion. As a result, they told me they didn’t want their children to experience the same hunger. So they pledged to make that important emotional connection with their children.

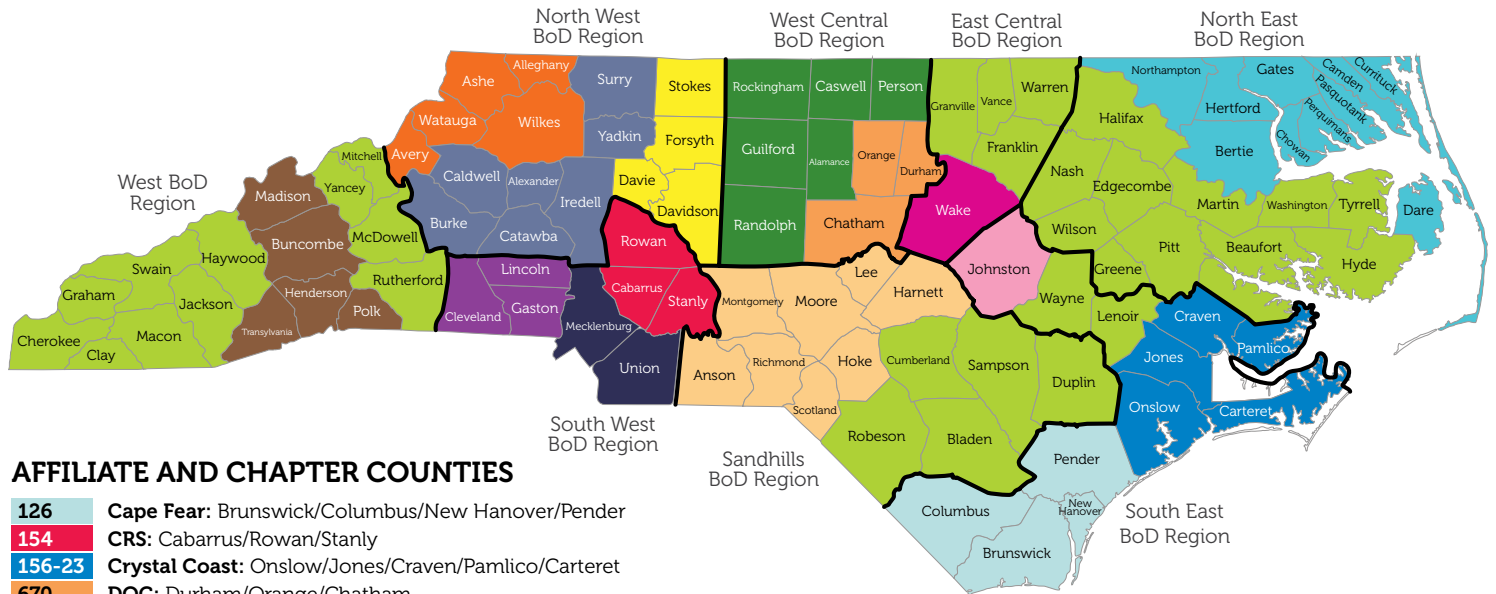
You may have the same determination. If so, tap into your own father-hunger. As a child, where and when was your father-hunger not fed? What worked and what didn’t work for you? Then, be the father to your children that you wanted as a child. Using these three ways to “touch” each of your children will help you do just that.

*Doug Spangler has over 30 years of writing and teaching about fathering, and shares tons of ideas, tips, and information for all ages and stages of fathers. Check his website out at [fathertalk.wordpress.com](http://fathertalk.wordpress.com) .*



# North Carolina's Chapters and Local Affiliates

## NCAEYC AFFILIATE AND CHAPTER MAP



### AFFILIATE AND CHAPTER COUNTIES

- 126** Cape Fear: Brunswick/Columbus/New Hanover/Pender
- 154** CRS: Cabarrus/Rowan/Stanly
- 156-23** Crystal Coast: Onslow/Jones/Craven/Pamlico/Carteret
- 670** DOC: Durham/Orange/Chatham
- 156-24** JoCo: Johnston
- 156-11** Land of Sky: Buncombe/Henderson/Transylvania/Polk/Madison
- 537** NC²: Rockingham/Guilford/Randolph/Alamance/Caswell/Person
- 156-22** North East: Northampton/Hertford/Bertie/Chowan/Perquimans/Pasquotank/Dare/Camden/Currituck/Gates
- 673** North West Foothills: Iredell/Alexander/Catawba/Surry/Yadkin/Burke/Caldwell
- 156-18** North West Mountains: Watauga/Avery/Ashe/Wilkes/Alleghany
- 127** Piedmont: Forsyth/Stokes/Davie/Davidson
- 671** Sandhills: Moore/Lee/Montgomery/Richmond/Scotland/Hoke/Harnett/Anson
- 128** South West: Mecklenburg/Union
- 536** Southern Piedmont: Gaston/Lincoln/Cleveland
- 186** Wake: Wake
- 156-01** Served locally by NCAeYC

**NCAeYC Board of Directors (BoD) Regions are noted with black outline**

**NCAEYC ANNOUNCES THE FORMATION OF TWO NEW CHAPTERS**

Congratulations to the newly formed **Johnston County (JoCo)** and **Crystal Coast** chapters of NCAeYC! Our newly updated state map reflects these exciting changes. Shown on the map as well are parts of the state that NCAeYC is expanding its service to members in their local areas.

To learn more about opportunities to get engaged in your local group, please contact: [affiliates@ncaeyc.org](mailto:affiliates@ncaeyc.org) or call our office at 919-510-5034.

# Board of Directors

## EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

<b>President</b>	Suzanne Hughes
<b>Past-President</b>	Dan Tetreault
<b>Vice President/Public Policy &amp; Advocacy/Membership</b>	Beth Moore
<b>Secretary</b>	Consuellis Hawkins-Crudup
<b>Treasurer</b>	Joanie Oliphant



## MEMBERS AT LARGE

<b>Western Region</b>	<b>West Central Region</b>	<b>North East Region</b>	<b>North West Region</b>
Lori Caudle	Dr. Stephen Jackson	Sarah Prezioso	Lisa Mabe Eads
<b>East Central Region</b>	<b>South East Region</b>	<b>South West Region</b>	<b>Sandhills Region</b>
Gina Soceanu	Deborah Saperstein	Ashley Reid	<i>To be appointed</i>
<b>LAC Representatives</b>			
Resha Washington, Myra Burrell			

To contact any NCAeYC Board member, please send an email to: [generalinfo@ncaeyc.org](mailto:generalinfo@ncaeyc.org). **NCAeYC is excited to highlight a brand new webpage ([www.ncaeyc.org/board-of-directors](http://www.ncaeyc.org/board-of-directors)) designed to help you get to know the NCAeYC Board of Directors.** The commitment, dedication and volunteer service of these leaders helps ensure the success and positive impact of our organization. We thank and honor each of them for their leadership service!

### NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS FOR NCAEYC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Please ensure both your membership and email address are up to date! Call NCAeYC at 919-510-5034 or email Chris Butler at [cbutler@ncaeyc.org](mailto:cbutler@ncaeyc.org) to update your information. You can join or renew your membership at: [www.ncaeyc.org/membership](http://www.ncaeyc.org/membership). Members will receive an email in March with an application for Nomination to the NCAeYC Board of Directors. This summer, the ballot of nominees and link for voting will be sent via email so that all members can submit their electronic vote.

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connections, furthers the mission of our parent affiliate NAEYC, and creates a synergy that maximizes our collective impact. We hope you will seek leadership opportunities to help ensure an effective organization living out a vibrant mission. We hope that engagement within all three connected components of local, state and national you see “Excellence in Action.”

Show your commitment to professionalism!

**Download and print our poster!** [\[link to blog post\]](#)



We continue to get fantastic feedback about our digital format! Readers tell us that the live links throughout the articles bring the entire publication to life, extending and deepening the reader’s experience. Through our digital format, Milestones is being used in college and university classrooms, team meetings in early education programs, in professional learning communities, and beyond.

**All issues of Milestones can be accessed at our ever-growing website:**

**[www.ncaeyc.org/milestones](http://www.ncaeyc.org/milestones)**



**Ncaeyc**

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