Supporting Our Profession
Challenges and Opportunities

Sharon Easterling, Executive Director

Sometimes it can be hard to tell if we are really making progress in our efforts to secure high quality early childhood education for all children. On the one hand, our federal Administration is promoting new investments in high quality preschool. On the other hand, the mid-term election results cast doubt on our ability to secure significant new funding at the federal level.

In Pennsylvania we have a new Governor who was elected on the issue of education. With a $2 billion state budget deficit and severely underfunded public schools, however, it will be more than a challenge to secure a big new ECE investment.

As we stand at the brink of some large scale shifts in the landscape, there are important questions that we would do well to address:

- What is the size and status of an adequate workforce? If we are successful in securing substantially more resources, what will it take for us to sufficiently staff up to deliver high quality ECE to many more young children?
- What are the skills and competencies it takes to make a good teacher? Pennsylvania has adopted a traditional model of certification, but does that give us the best teachers? Should performance-based assessments be an option?
- How can we recruit new talent to the field? Most of our efforts thus far, (T.E.A.C.H., tuition reimbursement, STARS professional development and technical assistance), have focused on upgrading the skills of our current workforce. What partnerships could bring new faces from a variety of populations?
- What does it take to sustain a high quality staff? The recent report, Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages, The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Staffing Study, confirms that child care is still the lowest paid/highest turnover profession in the nation. Can we make real progress without significantly increasing the resources necessary to operate a high quality program?
- Since the major thrust of the Affordable Care Act is providing federal subsidy to low wage workers, is there a new opportunity for the workforce to access health insurance?
- Where is our leadership pipeline? How can we support our many experienced and gifted directors, program directors and lead teachers to most effectively lead, mentor and coach a new generation of teachers?
- With so much focus on pre-K, what are the implications for those who work with our infants and toddlers? Do we need a different model from center-based care, where the cost for high quality infant care is so high? Can we find a creative mix that includes family leave, and home based care?

These are questions that a professional association is uniquely positioned to address. We look forward to engaging our members in the dialogue that will lead us in new directions, taking full advantage of the opportunities that lies before us – even in the face of all the challenges.

Better ECE Compensation Requires Better Basic Funding
PA Per-Child Spending, 2012

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*Source: PDE Statewide AFR Expenditures, average over 1,080 contact hours/year.
**Source: DPW Maximum Daily Child Care Allowance, average infant-pre-k rates and Keystone STAR add-on over 2,000 contact hours/year.
Advocacy

Congratulate yourself! This past year, the Pre-K for PA campaign spread the word about the importance of high quality early education at community festivals, at Kiwanis meetings, in preschools, on social media, at candidate forums, before school boards, in board rooms, and even down the shore. We lifted up the stories of pre-K supporters from all sectors of society. And we generated over 225 news reports and opinion pieces in print and on the air, matched by countless shout-outs on blogs and e-newsletters.

Pre-K for PA congratulates Governor-elect Tom Wolf and the General Assembly’s incoming or returning legislators. We appreciate Governor-elect Wolf’s public commitment on pre-K, as articulated in his campaign platform:

- “Too much of the battle for educational achievement is lost before our children enter kindergarten.”
- “Tom Wolf is committed to providing universal access for 3- and 4-year-olds to high-quality, publicly funded pre-k.”

We also appreciate the strong support for pre-K investment that is shared by the General Assembly’s Early Childhood Education Caucus — the largest, bipartisan and bicameral group in the legislature.

As we move into Year Two of the Pre-K for PA campaign, our attention is turning from raising the issue among the candidates and in the electorate at large to securing legislation and funding from Harrisburg. You can help by:

- Sending a welcome card to Governor-elect Tom Wolf, including signatures or other written contributions from each child in your class.
- Adopting your state legislator: sending news and artwork on a regular basis; inviting them to visit your program; taking a field trip to the district office with the children; visiting the district office with staff and parents. If you are interested, DVAEYC can provide support.
- Participating in the monthly campaign activities organized by Pre-K for PA and DVAEYC.

For more information about any of these possibilities, contact Pamela at the DVAEYC office (pamela@dvaeyc.org or 215-893-0130x228).

Dear Governor-elect Tom Wolf:

Congratulations on your victory in Tuesday’s General Election.

Throughout this election season, supporters of the pre-K for PA campaign have been working tirelessly to make increased access to high-quality pre-kindergarten a top priority among candidates for governor and the General Assembly. Given our efforts, we were pleased to see you outline a vision for expanding pre-K in the Commonwealth because, as your campaign stated, “too much of the battle for educational achievement is lost before our children enter kindergarten.”

As you likely know, only 1 in 6 of Pennsylvania’s 3- and 4-year-olds benefit from high-quality, publicly funded pre-K, despite its many proven,

Pre-K for PA turns toward Harrisburg for Year Two

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Pre-K for PA

The Story of Two Families

Mary Ellen Mannix, DVAEYC Public Policy Field Coordinator

Congratulations, Pennsylvania early learning community! Your hard work in the classroom, in the community, and on the steps of the Capitol successfully elevated the awareness of and appreciation for PreK in PA!

The November 2014 election showed us that young children do matter to voters. Elected officials are increasingly being asked to speak to the issue of high quality early learning in Pennsylvania.

Every day we see young children laughing, reading, creating, sharing, crying, feeling, growing, and headed into your high quality programs. We all see many of them cry at the end of the day, too – because they don’t want to leave. However, there are many children in Pennsylvania without these experiences. They are not in high quality early learning programs.

Meet four-year-old Luna. Her single mother worked full time managing a local store, but the dad did not provide any child support, and she felt she could not afford the tuition to send Luna to preschool. Luna’s mom noticed that her daughter was demonstrating early literacy skills at two and three years old. She was always curious and eager to learn and do more. Her mom wondered if she was doing enough at home to keep Luna’s rapidly developing brain appropriately engaged. She questioned herself, knowing that every hour her daughter was not in a high quality center was an hour lost.

A close friend, a first grade teacher in the local school district, made it very clear: Without a high quality pre-K experience, Luna will arrive at kindergarten unprepared. She will be behind the other children and will most likely be labeled “delayed” and require remedial services. She needs to have phonemic awareness and know her alphabet. The friend urged Luna’s mom to make the sacrifices and get her into a good pre-K.

Instead of using her money to move to a neighborhood with a lower crime rate, Luna’s mom invested in Luna’s early education. She is now paying out of pocket for a pre-K program at the 4-STAR, NAEYC-accredited Delco Early Learning Centers. Luna is happy there. According to her teachers, Luna’s energy and enthusiasm for learning is infectious. She is well on her way to being ready for kindergarten next year.

We wish every child’s story had a happy ending. But high quality programs like Delco ELC have waiting lists, and can’t serve all the families who would like to enroll their children. Parents who get support through child care subsidy may still have difficulty keeping up with the co-pays. Delco ELC, a 70-year-old well-established program, still struggles to maintain high quality because of cost and student turnover when parental income status changes.

Doreen Yeremian of Delco ELC shares, “We believe all children deserve a great first start, and pre-K is that! But, simply put, these quality programs require money.” Having the appropriately trained and certified teachers also requires being able to provide a livable wage, and she would like to see additional mentoring programs to maintain the high quality staffing.

Fortunately for little Luna she is in one of those seats at this high quality program, happily preparing for kindergarten. She is very excited and curious about learning, while growing friendships in a play-based, child-centered environment!

This is just one program. One family. One student. Yet these stories are replicated throughout the state. Less than a sixth of Pennsylvania’s three and four year olds have access to high quality publicly-funded pre-K. We need to do better.

After the election, a Pennsylvania grandmother shared that she voted for a new governor, “based on one reason only — his support of Pre-K for PA”. If she had not known about Pre-K for PA, she would have voted differently. She went on to explain how important the early learning issue is right now for her and her daughter, a new single mother without child support. “My grandson is a newborn,” she said. “It is critical that we get access to quality pre-K by the time he turns three, so that he will then transition nicely to full day kindergarten in his school.”

We hope so, too! We can do better. Luna’s mother shouldn’t have to sacrifice so much to get her child into a good program. A grandmother shouldn’t have to worry every day about the fate of her little grandson. With your help, we will do better, and ensure that all three and four year olds in Pennsylvania have access to the high quality preschool programs that they need and deserve.
As a field, we have been remarkably successful over the last several years in raising awareness about the importance of giving all young children access to high quality early education. To the extent that this success translates into significantly greater investments in the field, it brings the challenge to build our capacity to deliver high quality services to many more children. What must be done to meet the need for a larger, more diverse and better qualified workforce in the early childhood field?

DVAEYC’s mission is squarely focused on supporting the ECE profession and the professionals who make it up, so these issues are deeply important to us. Over the past year, our strategic planning process has helped us to develop a more focused approach to workforce development. As we look toward the future, elements of this approach include:

**Strategies to retain high quality teachers:**

Much of this involves advocacy with the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) to increase the resources that can be used directly by programs for compensation, and to add flexibility to how the quality of a program’s staff can be assessed.

We are looking to provide more flexibility in the career lattice at all levels. Here are some ideas:

- For directors, rather than expecting one person to hold all the expertise in business, leadership and ECE, make sure that such expertise is present in the overall leadership of an alliance or multi-site program, or a program with a director and assistant/program director.
- For lead teachers, count degrees rather than credits; accept closely-related degrees without question, other related degrees with a demonstration of competence, and less-related degrees with additional ECE content; provide opportunities to get credit for experience.
- For teachers, provide an alternate way of earning a Teacher’s Credential in lieu of academic transcripts, for those who are 45 years old or older with over ten years of experience in the field: i.e., classroom ERS or CLASS assessments; portfolios or lesson plans; PD transcripts; letters of recommendation.

In addition, we are advocating to amend the merit-award process to give programs more authority on how to use funds to maintain and improve quality; and to revise the ERA eligibility requirements to increase rationality, access and equity.

**Strategies to increase the skills of the current workforce:**

This is an area in which DVAEYC is heavily engaged, with sixteen Quality Improvement Coordinators offering professional development and technical assistance. We continue to learn more about the importance of integrating these two aspects of quality improvement, and are excited about creating more professional development opportunities that allow for on-going contact, reflective practice, network building, and practical application. Our Nature Study Group, one example of this type of opportunity, has been an enormous hit. We are eagerly looking forward to launching a second study group on Play early this year, and anticipate more in the future.
Strategies to increase the pipeline for new workers:

In addition to increasing the skills of the current workforce, we need to be looking for new pipelines for future workers, and for the partnerships and programs that can help draw them in.

To get good candidates from the pool of higher education graduates, a loan-forgiveness program would help defray the costs of getting educated for a low-wage field. Changes in the student teaching models of higher education institutions would help weed out some candidates and prepare others better for work in early childhood programs.

High school students are another obvious pool. We are excited about our work supporting Parkway West High School to start a new CDA program and matching their students with STAR 4 centers for summer internships. We would love to replicate this high school CDA model more broadly, identify a larger pool of STAR 4 programs that will accept high school interns, and work with new partners to maximize the potential of summer work-ready programs.

For the pool of adult job seekers, in addition to supporting access to high-quality, affordable and accessible CDA programs, we are continuing to explore the possibilities of apprenticeship/coaching models and look for partners in other workforce development organizations.

Strategies to support and build the leadership capacity of directors

DVAEYC is working actively, with local higher education partners, on the development of a new directors’ credential, with courses on leadership, financing and data, all geared specifically to an early childhood audience. We also hope to assess the current provision of ongoing support to directors, and develop plans to increase capacity and fill gaps. Finally, as we gear up for the sixth cohort of our popular year-long ECE Fellowship, we are looking at how that might be replicated and offered more broadly.

DVAEYC’s commitment to the ECE professionals in our region is absolute. As we start a new year, we stand ready to continue the support we have traditionally offered to individuals and the programs in which they work. At the same time, we are preparing to reach out in new ways to support the ECE workforce of the future.

Health Care Help

Early Childhood and the Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”)

With new regulations going into effect for small businesses, many ECE programs are learning that the best and most cost-effective way to help their employees get health care coverage is by encouraging and supporting individual enrollment in Marketplace Insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

This opportunity to get low cost individual health insurance has emerged as one of the few silver linings in the cloud of our low-wage field—and all of our low-wage parents can benefit as well. Now is the time to sign up and encourage others to do the same.

Here is some practical information from the PA Health Access Network, a well-respected local group that is leading the effort in the Philadelphia area to encourage enrollment:

You can apply for Marketplace Insurance during Open Enrollment (November 15, 2014 – February 15, 2015).

Top 5 things to know about the health care law:

- You can’t be denied because you’re sick or have been sick.
- All plans cover prescriptions, doctor visits and hospital care.
- You can find a plan that fits your budget.
- If you don’t have insurance, you may pay a penalty.
- You can get free help near you to enroll in a plan.

You can make an appointment at a library near you:

Pennsylvania Health Access Network Helpline
1-877-570-3642 or helpline@pahealthaccess.org

For more resources, including flyers to share, go to: http://pahealthaccess.org/GetHelp

An innovative employer healthcare option: Direct Primary Care

How can you provide affordable healthcare that your employees love? Direct Primary Care is a growing national movement of employers partnering directly with primary care physicians to take control of healthcare quality and cost. DPC physicians deliver comprehensive primary care, preventive care, urgent care and care coordination amongst specialists for one flat, monthly membership fee.

Over 30% of the money spent on healthcare is wasted. Primary care physicians are uniquely positioned to change that. At the core of DPC is a strong personal relationship with a physician who is focused on keeping people healthy, instead of waiting to treat them once they are sick. Empowering this relationship is the key to keeping your team healthy and making sure they get the right care, at the right time, for the right price.

For more information:
215-600-4590
info@rhealthconnect.com
The Success by Six program (SB6) at United Way has been going on for many years, but United Way staff and managers keep reflecting on what is working and not working and coming up with new ways to make improvements. Since SB6 is for ALL children, the question is not whether or not the programs they are in are ready for the initiative, but how the initiative can be ready to work with them. We have programs with little experience, who have only been in STARS for a year, and others that are NAEYC accredited; they are facing different challenges—new directors, staff turnover, owners who advocate for non-developmentally-appropriate materials—and all need to be thought about creatively.

Two new elements have been introduced in the last few years. The director’s learning circle has been a really amazing addition that allows directors to meet and collaborate outside their programs. They have the support of technical assistance, but it’s helpful to also have time to discuss things like standards and ways to meet them with other directors.

After reflecting on what was keeping programs from staying in SB6 all 18 months, and what was present in programs that were successful, there is also a new track for programs that would benefit from advancing their administrative practices before enhancing the classrooms. Instead of starting immediately with technical assistants coming to the program and focusing on STARS or ERS standards, we spend time preparing them in a workgroup. We address issues like supervision challenges, DPW regulations, an introduction to ERS, budgeting and financing. We talk about communication, looking at how directors communicate and how staff responds, and trying out different ways. The Institute for Family Professional’s Steps of Growth model helps people understand how adults learn, that you don’t know what you don’t know, and you can’t go straight from knowing it to application. The directors get to see the timeline that is required for staff to be able to understand what they’re suggesting: coaching, revisiting, discussion, reflection. Directors can better understand their role in leading their staff through the program.

A pre-acceptance site visit is now used to identify gaps and determine which track will be more appropriate. Though it’s still very new, directors in the workgroup seem to be more prepared once TA starts to roll in. They are finding that the Steps of Growth are especially helpful in understanding how complicated the process of quality improvement is.

I am most satisfied when I see directors who start out a little reluctant then go to a training and get really excited, or start a CDA or BA program and get a fresh look. Recently I was working with one center with a lot of long-time masters-level teachers who have been doing the same units every month for years. It’s been a big triumph for them to rethink their learning centers, take a different approach to teaching, and start to see the value of free play or center time as a learning experience. I’ve had a lot of great feedback. One teacher who was close to retirement was so unsure if she would be able to do the work and anxious about being assessed, that she was considering retiring early. She now talks about how rejuvenated she is, how she loves her job again, how happy the parents are, how much easier the developmentally-appropriate classroom is to manage, and how much the children are growing!

I get excited when I see an owner of a program, who got into it as a business, deciding that she needs an ECE degree. I also really like getting to work with programs in my neighborhood that have been there for decades but are just now opening their doors, with this as the first quality initiative they are interested in getting involved in. It’s also great seeing a program that has gone through SB6 emerging as a leader in the field, and getting toured as a good center.

There are certainly challenges as well. The career lattice continues to be a big hurdle, though the changes we made this fall have really helped. It’s still hard to find teachers with the credentials that are needed, in all neighborhoods. Directors struggle to balance standards and paperwork with the mission of the program and the values they want to continue.

For a while we were getting programs that were brand new, and it’s difficult when they’re still trying to work on the basics of getting up and running. Many in the current cohort are well-established. Maybe they’re realizing that STARS is here to stay, and if that’s the game in town they’ll have to figure out how to play it. With more established programs, we’re focusing our technical assistance less on room arrangement and more on areas like curriculum, learning standards and why we crosswalk our lesson plans.

When my programs reach STAR 3 and I close them out of SB6, many have the idea of moving to STAR 4 in their minds. Some might be close to attaining STAR 4; others would have more work to do. We always talk about things that are left to do to move forward. They may be starting with a lot of behaviors that the ERS is looking for, but the director is faced with the challenge of how it all will be maintained. Personal care routines can take years to get refined and effective. Using more authentic assessments, and deciding on a curriculum and using it effectively are a big leap for many at STAR 3.

New SB6 cohorts will be starting later this year; information sessions are usually held in the spring and fall. If you’re interested in moving beyond the quality you’re at now, but the idea of STAR 3 and the ERS and creating that binder is overwhelming, SB6 is there to support you.
Winter 2015

What’s Got To Do With It?

Danielle Marshall from the Alliance for Childhood, where she is working on a Play-Based Experiential Study Group on Play-Based Learning

Join us March 20 and 21 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center for our annual conference where we will take a deep dive into this year’s theme: “Early Learning: What’s Play Got To Do With It?”

The ever-increasing pressure for young children to perform academically is troubling. While it is true that school readiness includes basic content knowledge gained from emerging literacy and math skills, success in school and beyond is also about the development of the whole child. Of critical importance is the development of social and emotional skills including attachment, identity, self-regulation, resilience and executive functioning. These are not skills that can be taught in traditional formats. They must be learned experientially, and thoughtfully offered play opportunities are the ideal context in which children can develop them.

We have planned the conference to offer a wide variety of speakers and sessions that will give participants ideas and strategies for play-based learning experiences. We hope those who attend will gain deeper understanding of the role of adults in fostering healthy play. We want to generate a powerful movement to protect every child’s right to play both indoors and outdoors.

Our dynamic keynoters will include Steve Gross, who is the founder and chief playmaker of the Life is Movement to protect every child’s right to play both indoors and outdoors.

Following the conference we will create an ongoing learning circle for practitioners who want to study group on play-based learning.

As of December 1, DVAEYC membership now stands at 18511

Thanks to all those who have renewed since September 1st, and welcome to the 94 new members:

Enjoy your Member Benefits:

Be sure your current membership is valid through the end of March 2015 to be able to benefit from the Early Bird Conference rate.

NAEYC Journal

Discounts on NAEYC Conference trainings

Discounts on DVAEYC Conference and trainings

20% discount on products in NAEYC’s catalog/store

Free Membership to SharedSource PA

Receive 15% discount at any of Becker’s Parent/Teacher Stores when you show your membership card.

Free Membership to MembersWalk PA

Receive 15% discount at any of Becker’s Parent/Teacher Stores when you show your membership card.

Many thanks to our presenting sponsor:

PNC Grow Up Great

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The voice of early childhood education

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www.dvaeyc.org

Who?
This conference is for educators, administrators, early intervention specialists, Head Start staff, health care professionals, child advocates, therapists, and parents of young children.

What?
The DVAEYC Conference brings together over 1500 early childhood professionals from the region to engage in two days of networking and professional development with nationally-known presenters and exhibitors.

Where?
We will be in the expanded Pennsylvania Convention Center located at the intersection of Broad and Cherry Streets in Center City, Philadelphia. Registration will take place in the Broad Street Atrium.

For More Information
www.dvaeyc.org/events/annual-conference
215-893-0130

DVAEYC champions high quality early care and education for all young children (birth-eight) in Southeastern Pennsylvania through professional development, advocacy, and public engagement.

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