

Community Services for Children

Provider Link Newsletter ~ ELRC Region 12

February 2024

Serving Susquehanna, Wayne, Lackawanna, Pike, Monroe
and Carbon counties

To distribute this newsletter to others, copy and share this link:

Region 12 Updates

ELRC Offices Closed

ELRC offices will be closed on Monday, February 19th, in observance of Presidents' Day. All offices will reopen on Tuesday, February 20th.



Keystone STARS Movements

The following programs demonstrated their commitment to quality by moving to a higher STAR level since October 2023:

Congratulations to Countryside Daycare and Preschool who moved to a STAR 2.

Congratulations to the following providers who moved to a STAR 3:

- Inch by Inch Childcare
- Wee Wons Daycare and Preschool
- LLH Learn and Play Childcare Center

Congratulations to the following providers who moved to a STAR 4:

- Lehigh Valley Childrens Center at Palmerton Borough
- The Acorn Academy

Artwork Still Needed!

Child care providers are invited to partner with the ELRC to showcase children's artwork in our ELRC offices. Two providers per quarter will be featured and the art will be displayed with provider information. We are currently seeking providers to donate artwork for the upcoming seasons.



Please note the following guidelines:

- Art should be limited to 20 pieces per provider.
- Hanging art should not exceed 11x17. Small sculpture pieces or 3D art to hang from the ceiling may also be included.
- Art can be seasonal (beach art, fall leaves, etc) but not holiday related (no Santa, jack-o-lanterns, etc).
- Art must be dropped off to the ELRC office by the first of the month. Pieces will not be returned to the provider unless prior arrangements are made with your Quality Coach.

To donate, please email Melanie Gaughan at mgaughan@cscinc.org.

Provider Resource - Preparing for Emergencies

Emergency plans are an important tool in knowing what to do in the event that an emergency happens while children are in your care. Creating an emergency plan gives child care providers an opportunity to think of how to respond to various scenarios before they happen. Childcare Aware of America has a variety of resources available to assist you in deciding how you will handle the unexpected, such as, natural disasters, evacuations, and the need to shelter-in-place. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Community Resource - Free Tax Preparation Services

The United Way of Lackawanna and Wayne Counties is once again offering the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program to prepare local, state and federal income tax returns for FREE! To qualify for this service, households must have had an income under \$60,000 in 2023. Appointments can be made online by visiting www.uwlc.net or by calling 2-1-1. Click [here](#) to see upcoming dates and locations.



Thank you to all who attended our Director's Network on Tuesday, January 2nd. During this meeting, we reviewed the 2023 Keystone STARS Performance standards, highlighted areas of change, and answered provider questions. Thank you to all who attended and contributed to the conversation! To access a copy of our PowerPoint, please [click here](#).



Please do not hesitate to reach out to your Quality Coach with any questions. This month we will be collaborating with ELRC 13 for our Director's Network. Please join us for a virtual Data Management Systems fair on February 21, 2024 from 1:00 - 3:00 PM. Please [click here](#) to learn more and register now!

ELRC Updates

Child Care Works Reminders

Communications with your ELRC Provider Specialist are critical in keeping your payments accurate and timely. Remember to report:

- When a child stops attending
- If a location is closing
- If children transfer to a different location within your legal entity

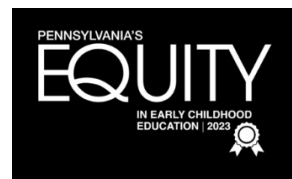
40 Day Absence Policy

Remember to report child absences accurately on your invoice each month. CCW enrolled children are allowed up to 40 absences from July 1 - June 30th. Failure to report absences timely may result in enrollees exceeding the 40 day limit, thus making those days ineligible for payment to the provider.

2024 Equity in Early Childhood Champion Awards

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning is now accepting applications for the Third Annual Pennsylvania Equity in Early Childhood Education

Champion Awards. The award recognizes the work of the early childhood education programs and professionals on behalf of Pennsylvania children and their families through embracing diversity and full inclusion as strengths, upholding fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and working to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities



Applications must be completed by February 23, 2024. Click [here](#) for the application. Any questions can be directed to Mary Hall at marhal@pakeys.org.



Continuous Quality Improvement Grant

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) has announced a new grant opportunity for STAR 2, 3 & 4 providers. This one-time award will allow programs to maintain and invest in quality activities and expenditures that will positively impact the children in their care.

Please read through the [ELRC Policy Communication](#) and [FAQ document](#) for full award eligibility and grant details. Let your Quality Coach know if you have any questions.

Eligible providers should have received their award letter. If you have not received it, please reach out to your Quality Coach who can forward the letter to you. This grant must be accepted or declined by **February 15, 2024**.

Once you have reviewed the award letter, please sign the acceptance and return to elrc-ksgrants@cscinc.org.

Keystone STARS Reminders

OCDEL Approved Curricula & Assessment Tools

STAR 3 and 4 providers use an OCDEL-approved curricula and child assessment in order to earn points in EC 3.4.1 and EC 3.4.2. Only current OCDEL-approved curricula and developmental assessment tools will be accepted in meeting these standards.

To verify that your selected curriculum and child assessment tool is still approved, you can reference the Department of Education listing [here](#).

Alternative Pathway Providers

Programs who hold accreditation through an OCDEL-approved Alternate Pathway accrediting body can apply for a Keystone STARS designation. See the tip sheets below to assist you in applying for this designation in the PD Registry:

- [Submit Accreditation for Keystone STARS Alternative Pathways Designation](#)
- [Apply for Keystone STARS Designation Through an Alternative Pathway](#)

ECE Data Management Software

Are you interested in finding out more information about data management software to help you track attendance, child illnesses, invoicing, communications, staff schedules and more?



ELRC Region 13 will be hosting a virtual Data Management Systems fair on February 21, 2024 from 1:00-3:00 pm. Five vendors will be available to explain their program and answer any questions you may have.

Click on the flyer below for more information. Pre-registration is required for this FREE event.

- [Data Management Systems flyer](#)

Play Development Study

Teachers are invited to take part in a Play Development study by the McNichol Early Childhood Education Lab at Drexel University. Teachers will have opportunity to practice identifying play skills, support and enhance a child's play development and take part in validating an education assessment tool for future implementation. At the end of the study, there will be incentives provided.

Teachers can complete the interest survey [here](#).

NEW Asynchronous Program Observation Instrument PD Available



The Program Quality Assessment (PQA) Team has announced the addition of three asynchronous professional development sessions to the PD Registry. The sessions are:

- Online Self-Paced Foundations of the Environment Rating Scale, event ID# 361128,
- Online Self-Paced School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale - Updated (SACERS-U), event ID# 361129
- Online Self-Paced Pennsylvania Foundations of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), event ID# 361130.

Register for these online self-paced PD sessions by visiting the [PD Registry](#). These sessions will also be translated into Spanish in the future.



OCDEL Early Childhood Conference - March 25-26, 2024 *Stable and Secure: Supporting Children Through Trauma Sensitive Approaches*

Registration is now open for the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) Early Childhood Education Conference. This two-day conference is scheduled for March 25-26, 2024, at the Hershey Lodge in Hershey, PA and is free for attendees. This conference is for directors and teachers of PA licensed child care centers, group child care, family child care homes, and after school care. Registration is limited to two staff per program.

[Click to see more information and how to register](#)

Parent Project Podcast

Community Services for Children has been hosting the Parent Project Podcast to engage families in areas of common concern for parents. Experts provide perspectives on topics of health & safety, mental health, child transition and other important subjects.

Please consider sharing these podcasts with the families in your program!

This month, we are joined by Dr. Brown from the Children's Clinic at LVHN. Dr. Brown discusses promoting healthy sleep habits in young children. Click [here](#) to

listen.



Health & Safety

STAYING HEALTHY DURING THE WINTER SEASON

for Early Learning Professionals



Share information about new and/or updated health policies and practices with colleagues and families. ([Better Kid Care](#))



Support outdoor play at your early learning program during the colder months. ([Penn State Extension](#))

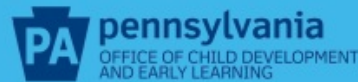
Support staff in taking steps to maintain their mental health, like getting outside and exercising, keeping up healthy eating and sleep habits, having a support system and staying connected, and practicing mindfulness and meditating. ([Lifespan](#))
All Pennsylvania early childhood professionals have [free access](#) to the Healthy Minds app, Healthy Minds@Work.



Practice recommendations to keep staff and children healthy. ([CDC](#))

- Remind families and staff about policies for ill children and staff.
- Stay home when sick.
- Ensure proper ventilation.
- Practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Clean surfaces at least once a day to reduce the risk of germs spreading by touching surfaces. Establish a Routine Schedule for Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting, Appendix K from Caring for Our Children, updated July 2022. ([nrckids.org](#))

Check the expiration date and batteries of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and expiration dates of fire extinguishers in your facility. Replace as necessary. ([National Fire Protection Association](#))
Certified child care in Pennsylvania can get two free carbon monoxide detectors for their facility. ([The Pennsylvania Key](#))



National Children's Dental Health Month: February 2024

February is National Children's Dental Health Month. This month-long national health observance brings together thousands of dedicated professionals, healthcare providers, and educators to promote the benefits of good oral health to children, their caregivers, teachers, and many others. The 2024 theme is "Healthy Habits for Healthy Smiles." The American Dental Association has free downloadable posters, postcards, and flyers available on their website. You can also order physical copies of these materials to be shipped. [Click here for more information.](#)

Oral Health - Choosing Healthy Drinks for Young Children

Providers should be mindful about what drinks are served to children

while in care. Limit drinks with natural or added sugar. Even 100% fruit juice is full of sugar that can lead to tooth decay.



Tips for Choosing Healthy Drinks:

- Give children plain water with fluoride. Water from the tap (faucet) is safe and cheap.
- Give children milk at scheduled meal and snack times.
- Do not lay a child down for nap with a bottle or sippy cup. If you do, the bottle or sippy cup should contain only water, nothing else.
- Give children cut-up or whole fruit instead of fruit juice.

Click [here](#) for additional resources that can be shared with families.

Want to add staff or other members of your team to this newsletter? Email estair@cscinc.org and specify which Regional Newsletter you would like. Requests will be added to next month's distribution.

[Visit ELRC Region 12](#)

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