

Delaware Awarded \$5.5 Million Grant to Expand Services for Infants and Toddlers


Allows state to build on work to increase access to quality early childhood programs

Wilmington, DE – Earning an opportunity to build on recent commitments to expand quality early learning services for its youngest residents, Delaware was notified today that it has been awarded a \$5.5 million dollar federal grant to offer more services for infants, toddlers, and their families. The state is projected to receive \$1.1 million per year for five years under this award, which will help low-income families receive high quality, comprehensive services for their children.

“We know children begin to learn the day they are born, and progress made in the first months and years is vital to their life-long success,” **said Governor Jack Markell**. “As a state, we have made great strides in increasing access to quality early childhood programs for kids from disadvantaged communities. This grant supports our increased focus on infant and toddler care by providing better health, educational, and other services for children and families who need our help the most.”

The funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced today at the White House Summit on Early Education, will help the state expand on [efforts announced earlier this year to make infant care a special priority](#), recognizing the importance of helping top early childhood programs subsidize the high cost of this work and provide more opportunities for low-income children.

Through the grant, infants and toddlers will participate in full day, year-round programs with comprehensive services that

include: health and developmental screenings; expanded family engagement opportunities such as home visits and conferences; support for parents' education and other needs; and health and nutrition services. 

Beginning in January 2015, partnerships with identified early childhood providers will increase Early Head Start (EHS) services for 72 children. Twenty-four new slots will be added to either EHS or other early childhood programs, based on waiting lists and identified need areas in Kent and Sussex Counties. The remaining 48 slots represent enhancements of existing early childhood services for children with need in all three counties.

Families qualify based on eligibility for the federal Head Start early childhood program. Early Head Start helps families care for their infants and toddlers through early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive services, helping children age 0-3 and their families.

“We are extremely pleased to receive this award,” said Secretary Jennifer Ranji of Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, which oversees the state’s early learning efforts. “This grant will enhance infant – toddler programs, while also ensuring families have access to valuable services to help them with their daily needs as they work toward brighter futures.”

In addition, the grant offers the opportunity to expand the specialized infant-toddler workforce by offering professional development and site-based technical assistance to staff who work with the State’s youngest population. This announcement follows the commitment announced by Governor Markell in February to provide additional funding for programs serving the state’s youngest kids. Through a pilot initiative, the state is allocating a pool of resources to be divided among qualifying programs – those rated with four or five out of five stars.

“This federal grant will help Delaware children and their families with the care, education, screenings and other needed assistance to help ensure our youngest residents get a great start in life,” **said Delaware’s Congressional Delegation of Senators Tom Carper and Chris Coons, and Congressman John Carney (all D-Del.)**. “We know that focusing on a child’s education from the very beginning can set them on a path toward success throughout their life. These federal dollars will build upon the great work that Delaware is already doing and help the many families that rely on these important early education programs.”

Grant partners include:

La Fiesta at the Latin American Community Center (NcCo), Our Future Child Care, LLC (NcCo), Telemon Early Head Start (Kent Co), Sunshine Home (Kent Co), Parents and Children Together at Tech (Sussex Co), Primeros Pasos (Sussex Co). Technical Assistance will be provided by: New Directions Early Head Start, Telemon Head Start and Early Head Start, and the Delaware Early Childhood Center. State Level Partners include: DHSS – Purchase of Care, Birth to Three Part C.



Governor Markell visits La
Fiesta Child Care Center

Background on Delaware Early Childhood Progress

The grant award allows the State to build upon the successful early learning work started as a result of the state’s increased investments, as well as funding won through the federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTTT – ELC). Governor Markell proposed, and the General Assembly passed, a \$22 million investment in 2011 to increase early childhood’s budget by a third. That funding was the start of an effort to significantly upgrade the state’s STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) by increasing the number

of high-quality early learning programs and giving the best programs the support they need to accept kids who could otherwise not afford to enroll.

Some of the state's accomplishments in the past three years include:

- Increasing the total number of early learning programs participating in Stars from 134 to 463 since 2012.
- Increasing the percentage of high-needs children in the STARS Top Tier programs from 27% in 2012 to 49% in September 2014, with the number of high-needs children receiving follow-up services increasing from 4,900 to 6,060.
- Enrolling 69% of Delaware's children with high needs in all Stars programs (10,404 students).
- Increasing the percentage of programs in Stars Top Tiers (Stars 3 – 5) from 41% in 2012 to 59% in 2014.
- Increasing the number of children receiving developmental screenings from 22,755 to 27,880.
- Focusing on teacher retention/education through the distribution of CORE awards. The awards encourage teachers in early childhood programs to obtain credentials or college credit. In the first year, \$4.6 million in academic incentives were disbursed to more than 1,600 early learning teachers.
- Becoming one of 13 states implementing a kindergarten readiness assessment, called the Delaware Early Learner Survey. This year, more than 80% of kindergarten teachers used the survey with more than 8,500 children; next year all public kindergarten classrooms will participate.