

Governor Hosts First Birth to 8 Summit on Early Learning

Dover, DE – More than 300 national and state education experts, practitioners and policymakers came together to celebrate Delaware's early learning achievements and illuminate the vision for a birth to third grade approach at the Governor's Birth to 8 Summit: First 3,000 Days in the First State.

"There are only 3,000 days between the time a baby is born and when he or she makes the critical transition from learning to read to reading to learn at the end of third grade – which we know is the best predictor of high school graduation and college and career success," said Governor Jack Markell, who was joined by Delaware Secretary of Education Steven Godowsky, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development Linda K. Smith, and other national leaders in early learning at the conference.

"The research is clear that investments in early childhood are one of the best ways to ensure our children's success in school and life and our state's future prosperity. We have made great progress in increasing access for all children to attend the high quality programs that have the biggest impact, but we cannot be satisfied until all Delaware children get the great starts they deserve."

The Governor pointed to evidence showing that children who have access to high-quality early learning experiences are more likely to finish school, less likely to need special education services, and more likely to have higher earnings over their lifetimes. They also are less likely to use welfare or go to prison. Leading economists and the Federal Reserve Bank say high-quality early learning is one of the best investments government can make.

The convening was an opportunity to highlight successes and focus on what work remains. Under Markell's leadership, participation in Delaware Stars for Early Success has increased by more than 300 percent in the past four years. Stars helps early learning programs improve quality and assigns a 1 to 5 Star rating to help families make child care choices.

Delaware also has been successful in increasing the number of children from low-income families enrolled in highly rated Stars programs: 59 percent were enrolled in 2015 compared to only 5 percent in 2011.

"A growing body of scientific evidence shows that development in the first eight years is rapid and cumulative and sets the foundation for all future learning. This is critical work that will benefit these children throughout their lives," Godowsky said. "They will start school better prepared to succeed and be healthier and more self-sufficient over their lifetimes."

Progress also has been made to ensure more children receive developmental screenings and mental health services as needed: More than 80,000 young children have received developmental screenings since 2011 – moving the state from last in the nation to 21st in the percent of young children receiving these screenings, which are critical for identifying and addressing developmental problems as early as possible. And more than 2,400 children have received Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation services, reducing behavioral challenges and achieving a 99 percent success rate in avoiding preschool suspensions.

Speakers and attendees today focused on challenges that remain as the state continues to strengthen its early learning programs. Breakout session topics ranged from building children's socio-emotional competence and transforming the early learning workforce to engaging nontraditional stakeholders through community partnerships and how parent

engagement can help reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

“To ensure the best outcomes for our youngest learners, we now must sustain and build on the great work that has been started with our partners across the state, and continue to ground our future work in the science of birth to 8 learning,” Office of Early Learning Executive Director Susan Perry-Manning said.

Attendees also celebrated six Delawareans who have made outstanding contributions to the state’s early learning progress. The six individuals were honored with Delaware Early Childhood Council 2016 Excellence in Early Childhood Awards.

“Each of these individuals has gone above and beyond to make a difference, many of them impacting thousands of young children statewide and some more locally in their own communities,” said Madeleine Bayard, who presented the awards on behalf of the Early Childhood Council.

Four award recipients were recognized for contributing to moving forward the pillars of the Early Childhood Council Strategic Plan, Sustaining Early Success. These recipients each were given \$1,000 to contribute to a nonprofit that works with children ages birth to 8. The funding is generously supported by the Social Venture Partners Legacy Fund. The four honorees were:

Attorney General Matt Denn, for contributing to “A Healthy Start for All Children.” Denn is a long-time advocate for Delaware’s children, working to provide better services to children with disabilities, engage parents, and expand families caring for children in foster care. He has served the state as Insurance Commissioner and Lt. Governor. He led efforts to create one of the nation’s most comprehensive developmental screening programs for infants and toddlers and to create a new health insurance program for children of low income working parents. He worked closely with the Governor on the Governor’s landmark early childhood education efforts,

chairing a policy review in 2009 and supporting the expansion of mental health consultants in recent years. He has been a champion of evidence-based practices such as the Nurse Family Partnership— and an advocate of young children for decades.

Evelyn Keating, for contributing to “High Quality Early Childhood Programs and Professionals.” Keating is a long-serving advocate for young children. She has worked around the country but most of her efforts have been devoted to Delaware, starting with The Family & Workplace Connection, where she was responsible for professional development, resource centers, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, AfterSchool Alliance, Capacity Grants, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood and other quality initiatives. She was a leader of the early United Way Success by 6 initiative and an early leader with the Early Childhood Council. She was one of the most significant catalysts to launching the Stars program, the foundation upon which our quality improvement is built today. She also has worked on professional development at the Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood. She most recently worked at the Office of Early Learning and is now at ICF International, providing technical assistance across multiple states.

Dawn Alexander, for contributing to “An Aligned and effective Early Learning System, Birth through Third Grade.” Alexander began her career as an educator in Colonial and earned the District Teacher of the Year Award in 2010 – among other awards including Superstars in Education. She went on to start and build the Red Clay Pre-K program, returning to Colonial recently as the preschool expansion coordinator. She has demonstrated leadership as the team lead of one of the most diverse and active Readiness Teams across the state.

Dr. Gwendolyn W. Sanders, for contributing to “Sustaining System Improvement.” Sanders is a Clinical Supervisor for the Master’s in Counseling Program (MEC) at Wilmington University. She is an early education consultant/facilitator for Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) at the

University of Delaware. She has many training, consultant, evaluation and certification roles in Delaware and nationally. She has served as a Head Start teacher and director and was the first African American dean at Delaware Technical & Community College, where she served more than 27 years first as the Dean of Student Services and then as the Dean of Development. Sanders is the chairperson of the Wilmington Early Care & Education Council (WECEC). During her career, she has assisted in the development and implementation of many programs designed to enhance the development of children and adult learners, including those for early learners, English learners, high school dropouts, and pregnant and parenting teens. She also started the Howard High School Rotary Interact Club.

Two individuals received new, non-monetary Champions for Young Children awards for their exceptional commitment over many years to young children:

Paul Harrell had a business career from which he retired to become a full-time education advocate. He spent most of his first career in the textile business and as an investor. Harrell moved to Delaware in 1989 and began pursuing his interests in education. He was the co-founder of a group called Social Venture Partners, which focused on providing quality early learning for children in Wilmington. He then went on to be the Delaware Department of Education's Director of Public-Private Partnerships, helping to shape the state's investment of \$22 million in early learning and the state's \$50 million Early Learning Challenge federal grant, among other initiatives. He is now on the board of EastSide Charter, which is providing pre-Kindergarten, and the co-chair of the Commission on Early Learning and the Economy.

Jennifer Ranji started her career in Family Court, where she is now a Justice, and in the meantime was the leading force behind early childhood in our state for several years. Ranji worked with the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council and in

the office of former Governor Tom Carper, in private practice as an attorney and as an issue advocate. As Governor Jack Markell's education policy advisor, she led a cross-agency, public-private collaboration to develop and implement the initiatives in the \$22 million state investment and the federal \$50 million Early Learning Challenge grant. Ranji was most recently the Secretary of the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families, focusing on child welfare, child care licensing and overseeing early childhood for the state.

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