

Branch Appointed to Council

Before leaving office, Governor Tim Kaine appointed Head Start Director **Jennifer Branch** to Virginia's new Early Childhood Advisory Council. In **Branch's** letter of appointment, Kaine stated, "Virginia succeeds when Virginians work together. Thank you for your willingness to serve and embrace an opportunity that will be both personally rewarding and beneficial to our Commonwealth."

The goal of the new council is to improve the quality, availability and coordination of services for Virginia's preschool children.

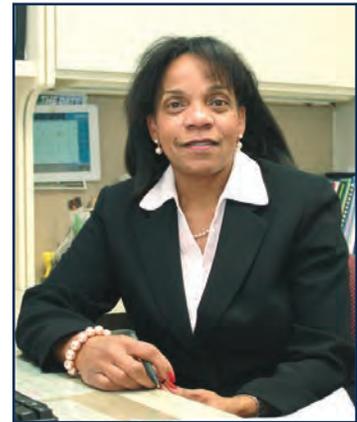
Branch will serve on the council with the Virginia Secretary of Education; the President of the Virginia Early

Childhood Foundation; the Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources; the governor's policy director; the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System; the Director of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and others.

"I'm very honored to have received this commission," **Branch** stated.

"I'm looking forward to working with the council to identify solutions that will ensure each child and family the opportunity to reach their fullest potential."

The council will conduct a progress report on school readiness in



Virginia. It will also make recommendations about professional development and career advancement for the early childhood workforce, and examine the effectiveness of Virginia colleges at supporting the development of child care professionals.

SACC "Goes Green" With Gunston

"Go Green With Gunston," developed by George Mason University and the National Energy Education Development Project, teaches young children fun lessons about

the Earth and energy conservation. The program partners with SACC and visits a different SACC center every Monday until late June.

"We wanted to develop a way to connect with this particular age group to get them excited about science and sustainability. Gunston was the ideal character for the job," says Traci Claar, GMU's director of community relations.

Gunston and "Mason," an actor/educator, visit SACC centers and engage children in songs, stories and games about "going green" and using the Earth's resources wisely.

Before Gunston visits each SACC center, children participate in two pre-visit lessons following a curriculum developed through the Mason/NEED partnership. Children can then visit a Web site which reinforces the lessons taught in the program: www.gogreenwithgunston.gmu.edu.

"This is a great initiative, and I am looking forward to the wonderful and creative things that our teachers and Gunston will be coming up with," said SACC Regional Supervisor Terry Johnson. "This is a topic that our educators will continue to teach the students long after Gunston and Mason leave the classroom."





SACC's Winter Program



Child Care Central

Child Care Central, the Office for Children's Web site, has one of the most popular destinations for people seeking county information online. The SACC home page ranks number 54 out of more than 12,000 pages of online content offered by Fairfax County agencies.

To make sure county agencies provide information the public wants, county communications staff track the terms that visitors type into the

search box at the top of the county's home page. Out of a vast number of possible words and phrases that could be typed into the search box, "sacc" is the 8th most-often typed term, and "child care" is number 15.

"We know that child care is a basic necessity for working families," said Office for Children Director **Anne-Marie Twohie**. "The fact that so many people search for child care information on the Fairfax County Web site confirms this."

Statistics also show that members of the child care community frequently access Child Care Central. Each month, "The Early Learning Guidelines" and the Institute for Early Learning training catalog are downloaded thousands of times.

"We're pleased to provide such useful resources for child care professionals," **Twohie** said.

The URL for Child Care Central is www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc.

Video Stars



Myra O'Leary

Head Start Coordinator **Anne Taggart** is a SpecialQuest ambassador, and the program she manages, the Greater Mt. Vernon Community Head Start Center, was selected to be featured in two SpecialQuest videos.

SpecialQuest Birth-Five is a national project that helps Head Start, Early Head Start and their community partners provide inclusive services for children with disabilities age birth through 5.

Staff members **Myra O'Leary, Safia Omar, Donyell Trapp, Yuri Villacorta, Maxine Maloney** and four parents of children enrolled at the Greater Mt. Vernon Community Head Start Center are featured in two SpecialQuest videos that are available online at www.specialquest.org.

The SpecialQuest Multimedia Training Library is a three-volume curriculum for teachers, families, child care providers and others. Used by more than 5,000 participants across the nation, the library includes 22 award-winning videos (with English and Spanish captioning), a facilitator's guide, training scripts, and handouts in English and Spanish. Greater Mt. Vernon Community Head Start Center staff were interviewed for the videos "Preschool Inclusion" and "Samantha."

"It's wonderful to be featured in a resource that we hope will help programs, children and parents across the U.S.," **O'Leary** said.

Early Head Start Lending Library

The Office for Children's Early Head Start program was recently invited to inform the readers of WETA's Reading Rockets newsletter about the Early Head Start lending library, which provides popular children's books for Early Head Start child care providers and the families they serve.

Each of the 30 Early Head Start child care providers has multiple copies of various books, including well-known stories like "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle and "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak. Books have been selected to represent the cultures of children enrolled in the Early Head Start program; many are available in languages that support parents' use of their home language with their children. Different books are rotated through the collection throughout the year.

Early Head Start gives providers two types of "libraries" the providers can use in their homes. One option is a colorful vinyl wall hanging on which books are displayed, and the other is a wire rack that fits on a desktop and displays books in clear plastic holders. The provider keeps a log book where parents sign out and sign back in the books they borrow.

"The lending library encourages providers to read to children throughout the day; duplicates are available for the families to 'check out' and return when finished," explained **Juanita Lazo**, an Early Head Start child care specialist.

Sharing a book together is a special time between a parent and child, and even if a parent isn't a reader, they can make up a story following the pictures.

Lazo's coworker **Sheila Holtzman** added that the lending library helps encourage the love of reading, and also builds the language and vocabulary skills of both the parents and their children.

"It's been a wonderful way to support families' reading together," **Lazo** said.

Early Head Start child care specialists have been working with WETA to develop workshops for families enrolled in the Early Head Start program. The workshops will focus on how families can use books to introduce literacy, math, science, art and music concepts. At the end of each workshop, families will receive books to start or add to their own home library. The workshops are scheduled for February, March and April in Herndon, Annandale and Alexandria.





ECCC a Model Program

visiting early childhood educators. Trister Dodge has sent delegations from China and Bermuda to visit the ECCC.

“Trister-Dodge now acknowledges ECCC as a model program in Creative Curriculum implementation,” said **Karen Quist**, who provides administrative oversight of the ECCC.

For many years, ECCC staff pulled from a variety of curricula to develop lesson plans for the children. The result was effective, but the process was time-consuming. Then a few years ago, curriculum consultant Sarah Semlak mentored the staff in the use of the Creative Curriculum.

“Sarah spent many hours in all of the classrooms observing and offering guidance. She met with parents to help them understand this philosophy, as well,” **Quist** explained. “Sarah contributed to the ECCC staff’s recent QRIS rating of four stars. It is her

intense work with ECCC that prepared them for this quality rating.”

(The Virginia Quality Rating and Improvement System awards one to five stars to local child care programs, based on an extensive assessment. The ECCC is one of a very few Virginia programs to receive four stars in its first assessment.)

Over the past few summers, the ECCC has been involved in helping Teaching Strategies with validating their new infant-toddler assessment tool, and this past September, ECCC began using the Creative Curriculum’s online child assessment system. “It is a wonderful approach to capturing each child’s progress,” **Quist** said.

Using Creative Curriculum tools has helped streamline and unify staff effort. “Our time is spent more productively now,” said ECCC Infant-Toddler Coordinator **Helen Satterfield**, who has worked in the ECCC more than 20 years.

“So often, people ask us where they can they go to see the Creative Curriculum implemented well, and now we know without a doubt that we can send them to the ECCC in Fairfax!” said Diane Trister Dodge, founder of the Creative Curriculum and president of Teaching Strategies, Inc.

Because of the work the Employees’ Child Care Center has done with the Creative Curriculum, the ECCC has become a popular destination for

Great Transitions

The Office For Children partners with Fairfax County Public Schools and Fairfax Futures in Neighborhood School Readiness Teams to help ensure smooth transitions for children from child care programs to kindergarten. These transitions work best when child care programs, elementary school staff, parents and others work together to prepare children for school.

Recently, more than 70 family child care providers attended the OFC Community Education and Provider Services’ “Great Transitions” workshop at the Gum Springs Community Center. The workshop’s presenters included a kindergar-

ten teacher, an assistant principal, and members of the Neighborhood School Readiness team. Panel members shared experiences that preschoolers will encounter upon entry into kindergarten, as well as activities to help children become comfortable and familiar with their new school. Child care providers were recognized for the assistance that they provide their parents in assisting them in completing the necessary registration papers.

“The workshop was very successful. It is an excellent example of how the community and public schools can work together to ensure children have a suc-



cessful school beginning!” School Readiness Coordinator Betsi Closter stated.

O F C Office for Children
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