

ECCC and School Readiness

This month, a number of children who were enrolled in the Fairfax County Employees' Child Care Center last year will spend their first few weeks in kindergarten. They will most likely enjoy a smooth transition into their new environment because of the ECCC's expertise at supporting school readiness.



Kim and Emma Bassarab

Kim Bassarab agreed that the ECCC played an important role in her children's success in kindergarten. "My children entered kindergarten at the developmental level that most children enter first grade," she said. "Emotionally, they were well-prepared to

participate in activities and projects so that little redirection was needed. They were familiar with kindergarten concepts and learning methods, and transitioned into kindergarten as they would another year at the ECCC."

The ECCC's program supports school readiness by providing experiences that will enhance children's social, emotional, cognitive and language development. The ECCC uses a curriculum, developed by Teaching Strategies, Inc., that is a nationally recognized, research-based curriculum for children age birth to 5.

The ECCC's strong partnership with families has resulted in parents who are pleased with how well the ECCC helped prepare their children to transition into school.

"The ECCC did a fantastic job of preparing my son Carter for kindergarten, especially academically. The preschool teachers are outstanding, and I highly recommend the ECCC to everyone I talk to," said **Aimee Brobst**.

Jesse Ellis agrees. "On our first visit to Paige's kindergarten classroom during the school's open house, we quickly noticed they had the same games, the same toys, the same learning stations, and the same books as ECCC. The transition was incredibly smooth because ECCC had done such a good job exposing Paige to the types of situations and activities she would be encountering in kindergarten."



"By integrating what children are supposed to know for kindergarten with developmentally appropriate practices, my children were able to start school ready to learn."

Debbie and CeCe Weigand



All Eyes on Early Head Start

The Office for Children’s Early Head Start program has been receiving lots of national attention.



Celia Williams and **Karle Finley**

A few weeks ago, **Karle Finley**, OFC’s Early Head Start coordinator, and **Celia Williams**, an Early Head Start child care specialist, were featured presenters at the federal Head Start office’s first national seminar

on family child care, which was held in Nashville, TN.

OFC’s Early Head Start program is offered in three settings: in child care centers, in elementary school classrooms, and, since 1998, in family child care homes. Currently, 112 children age birth to 3 are served by the family child care option. **Finley** and **Williams** explained how the program is administered in Fairfax County.

Williams was also part of a panel that featured a parent and a family child care provider from Fairfax County.

The information about OFC’s program “has generated a number of calls from people in Head Start programs in other areas who want to learn how we make it work.” said OFC Head Start Director **Jennifer Branch**.

OFC was also highlighted in a recent webinar offered by the federal Head Start office. “Supporting Infants, Toddlers, and Families Through the Family Child Care Program Option” featured OFC Child Care Specialist **Juanita Lazo** and an Early Head Start family child care provider. The webinar, which was available to Head Start programs across the U.S., explored the benefits of the family child care option and showed how it has been implemented successfully.



Juanita Lazo

Ready to Respond

Office for Children staff have completed updating OFC’s emergency operations manual, just in time for National Emergency Preparedness Month.

Moe Gaines, the director of Community Education and Provider Services, is the lead on OFC’s emergency planning efforts. **Gaines** worked with OFC Continuity of Operations Coordinators **Mindy Beamer, Bronwyn Dean, Cindy Gonzales, Angela Jones, Asria Rafiqzad** and **Karen Waller**, who updated each program area’s COOP plans.

Carmen Belmonte, the continuity of operations coordinator for the director’s office, worked with **Gaines** to pull the program area COOP plans together to create OFC’s emergency response/COOP manual. She explained that the finished product is “an overall plan that is inclusive of all the programs and the mission-critical services that OFC provides citizens.”

“The plan is first about how to continue offering support or services to the public, but we can only do that if

we have developed a plan that protects and supports staff who do the work,” **Gonzales** said. She added that the plan “provides a way for staff to know where to go to work [if an emergency requires working at an alternative location]; outlines the necessary materials and supplies, describes how to get updated information, and helps ensure that efforts across the county are being coordinated.”



Jones said that while working on OFC’s emergency operations plans, the committee had to “think about every aspect of day-to-day operations and how we’re going to carry it out should something happen.”

Both **Jones** and **Belmonte** emphasized that the most important thing they’ve learned as COOP coordinators is that staff “need to be prepared to stay calm in an emergency and follow instructions from OFC emergency personnel.”

COOP coordinators will brief staff about emergency preparedness plans in upcoming program staff meetings.

Head Start and Health

The Office for Children’s Head Start program recently held a closing celebration for its “I Can Help My Child Stay Healthy” project. The health education project, which was launched in February, was designed to “help educate parents on how to properly manage the health care needs of their children,” said **Anne Taggart**, coordinator of Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start.

Early this year, OFC’s Head Start program received a \$3,000 grant funded by the national Head Start office, Johnson & Johnson, and the UCLA Anderson School of Management, and \$5,000 from Kaiser Permanente. Nationally, the project has provided training programs for more than 10,000 parents of children enrolled in Head Start. As a result of the training, there has been a significant decrease of Head Start families visiting clinics and emergency rooms for common conditions such as fever, earache and runny nose. In addition, parents who received the training missed 42 percent fewer days of work, and their children missed 29 percent fewer days from school.

More than 100 Fairfax County families participated in the local project. As part of the project, OFC Head Start staff also visited families each month for three months to discuss what parents had learned and how they were using the book “What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick.”



The project’s closing celebration included a puppet show presented by Kaiser Permanente and a health fair. Each family received activity kits to use when their children get sick; the kits were donated by Pal-Tech.

SACC Goes Hollywood

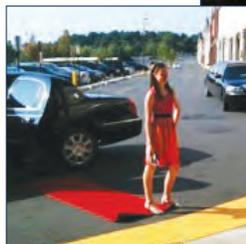
It took dozens of children from eight School Age Child Care centers almost 18 months to create the 85-minute film that was screened at the Cinema Arts Theater in Fairfax City two weeks ago.

“Times Destination” is a movie about the lessons learned by a group of children when their trip to the future has consequences in the present.

Danny Commander, a teacher at the Lane SACC center, was the film’s producer and director.

“The students learned valuable skills in script reading and writing, and the movie-making process, as they worked with computers, cameras, lighting and various audio equipment,” **Commander** explained.

Reston Limousine provided complimentary transportation for the film’s lead actors to the movie premiere. A



One of the movie’s stars strikes a pose.

crowd of “paparazzi” made up of parents, staff and local media greeted the children as they made their red-carpet debuts. A short video about this SACC event is running this month on Channel 16, Fairfax County government’s cable TV station.



Film fans at the movie premiere.



SACC Director **Anne Goldstein** interviewed by Channel 16.

Leader Leaves a Legacy

This month the Office for Children bids a fond farewell to **Betsi Closter** as she departs to work for the national nonprofit organization ZERO TO THREE.

Closter joined OFC in 2001 as the Early Head Start Coordinator, and she became the School Readiness Coordinator in 2007. She has led the county's School Readiness Council; directed OFC's Virginia Preschool Initiative; overseen the Institute for Early Learning and the Employees' Child Care Center, as well as several state initiatives in our community, including the Virginia Quality Rating and Improvement System and the Infant and Toddler Specialist Network in the northern region.

One of **Closter's** signature programs was the Neighborhood School Readiness Teams. The teams are made up of child care professionals, parents, teachers, school administrators, and representatives from county agencies and community organizations. They work to help make sure that:

- Children successfully transition from home and child care programs into kindergarten;
- Families have the support they need to help children transition into kindergarten;
- Schools are ready to receive new kindergarteners and their families;
- Communities have information and resources to support school readiness.



The teams are based in nine Fairfax County neighborhoods that have a large percentage of children who are at risk. The teams create a continuum that supports families as they prepare their children for school. This includes encouraging early registration for kindergarten and before- and after-school care, and helping families understand medical forms and vaccination requirements.

Last year this program resulted in nearly 500 preschool children participating in kindergarten classroom visits during the school registration period. Early kindergarten enrollment went up by 20 percent, and parent participation in kindergarten orientation increased by 40 percent.

“The relationship that early education professionals and community members establish with families enables them to successfully transition to kindergarten,” **Closter** explained. “These early connections position the child for success.”

The Neighborhood School Readiness Teams are a collaboration of OFC, the public school system and Fairfax Futures. The teams were part of OFC's school readiness initiative that won a National Association of Counties award in 2008.

