

## Naturally Inspired!

Organizers of Fairfax Future's annual School Readiness Symposium looked to the outdoors for inspiration this year, focusing on sharing ways educators can promote meaningful nature experiences for children.

More than 300 early childhood educators were welcomed by speakers including Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova, OFC Director Anne-Marie Twohie, Fairfax County Public School's Deputy Superintendent, Robert Moniuszko, Fairfax Futures Executive Director, Dalissa Vargas, and Fairfax Futures Board Member and Vice President of PNC Bank, Matthew Sawyer.

Featuring seven seminars with topics such as "We Dig Dirt- Supporting Infants and Toddlers in

Outdoor Classrooms," "Growing Up Wild," and "Nature Inspired Indoor Spaces," participants learned a wealth of information about effectively using nature to provide learning experiences for young children. Workshop presenters included Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning through the Arts, Project WILD, Nature Explore, Project Learning Tree and Project WET.

"These workshops encouraged educators to build on children's sense of wonder to creatively engage them in learning about art, music, math and science through sensory exploration of the natural world." said



Matthew Sawyer of PNC Bank, Chairman Sharon Bulova, Schools Deputy Superintendent Robert Moniuszko, SACC Director Anne Goldstein, and OFC Director Anne-Marie Twohie welcomed educators to the symposium.

Fairfax Futures Executive Director, Dalissa Vargas.

The Ninth Annual School Readiness Symposium, held at the Mason Inn Conference Center on the campus of George Mason University, was hosted by Fairfax Futures in partnership with FCPS and OFC and made possible through a grant from the PNC foundation.



# Child Care Professionals Recognized by Board



The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors declared May 5 – 11, 2013 Child Care Professionals Week in Fairfax County. At their April 30 meeting, the board recognized the child care community for their contributions to the early care and education of young children in the Fairfax County community. The board's proclamation was in keeping with the commemoration of Provider Appreciation Day, which is celebrated across the U.S. on May 10, and Teacher Appreciation Day on May 7.

Members of the county's Child Care Advisory Council and child care professionals from the community were invited to come before the board for the recognition. The group included family child care providers, child care center and preschool staff, program staff from Head Start, the Virginia Preschool Initiative, and the School Age Child Care program, as well as members of

the Northern Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children, Virginia Star Quality Initiative and Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education.

Hugh "Mac" Cannon Chairman of the Child Care Advisory Council thanked the board saying, "Child care professionals and programs are critical support for working families in the county, and as small and large businesses they are an integral part of the economy. Working in partnerships with families, child care professionals promote children's ongoing growth and development. We are fortunate to have quality child care providers to care for our county's children."

The Child Care Advisory Council and OFC welcomed honorees at a reception following the presentation.

## VPI Offers Professional Development

The county's Virginia Preschool Initiative program offered a variety of workshops for early childhood educators this spring. Workshop topics ranged from including math in everyday experiences to using arts-based teaching strategies. These workshops provided



valuable opportunities for educators to enhance their professional skills.

In addition to educator workshops VPI hosted a program for families with children who will attend kindergarten in the fall. In her original opera "Music, Words, Action!" Wolf Trap teaching artist Mary Gresock uniquely blended music, drama, dance and visuals to share a new twist on the story of "Little Miss Muffet." Props such as a friendly spider, soft tuffet and a big bowl of curds and whey helped engage the audience in this tale. Learning new fingerplays, and singing and dancing to new versions of the beloved nursery rhyme delighted families and family child care providers alike.

"We are pleased to be able to provide these opportunities for families and early childhood educators," said VPI Director Carol Osborn. "At these events they are able to see fun ways to support children's love for language through music, arts and movement."

# Child Care a Popular Search on Website

Recent metrics released by the Office of Public Affairs indicate that more people visit the county website to search for child care information than ever before. Out of a vast number of possible words and phrases that could be typed into the search box on the county website, “SACC” is the 3rd most-often typed term, and “child care” is number 24.

In addition, OFC’s Website, Child Care Central, has one of the most popular destinations for people seeking county information online. The SACC home page ranks number 38 out of more than 12,000 pages of online content offered by Fairfax County agencies.

Other popular OFC pages include Child Care Assistance and Referral, Head Start and Virginia Preschool Initiative. “Working families need quality child care,” said Office for Children Director Anne-Marie Twohie. “The number of people visiting to search for child care on our website is a testament to the importance of the information to many residents in our community.”

Visits to resources for child care professionals also remain high including the Institute for Early Learning training catalog which is downloaded thousands of times each month.

Currently, a process is underway to make improvements to Child Care Central at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc). Information will be updated and arranged to make the site easier to navigate. We are committed to making the website as straightforward as possible for families and educators to find what they need.



## Laurel Hill SACC Receives Gold Star Award

For the second year in a row Laurel Hill SACC received the Outstanding Community Partner award along with the Lorton Senior Center at the Neighborhood and Community Services Volunteer Recognition Ceremony. For the past four years, this group of approximately 20 children from Laurel Hill SACC and 40 seniors from the Lorton Senior Center has come together as the Lorton Senior Club for a variety of activities and events several times a year. Laurel Hill SACC also received NCS’s Gold Star award which recognizes honorees for excellence in volunteer service.



The core project team representing OFC, DFS, DIT and DAHS includes Richard Yancy, Sandy Peterson, Patty Yates, Vickie Baitinger, Megan McNeal, Khamini Jassal, Paula Smith, Carol Keil, Lynn Thompson, Toya Bryant, Susan Jackson, Cindy Osborn, Linda Bentlin, Maggie Chavarria, Kristen Nicklas, Jason Mort, Catherine Sauer, and not pictured, Michael Asihene, and Xiaohang Luo.

## New Child Care Management System

Excitement is running high as efforts get underway to upgrade OFC's child care management system. The contract for this work was awarded to Creative Information Technology in April of this year, and immediately a multi-agency team began meeting with representatives from the company to map out the anticipated 17-month process to bring the new system on-line.

The integration of this new system will benefit staff in OFC Child Care Assistance and Referral, Community Education and Provider Services and the Department of Administration of Human Services Finance. CCAR will use the new system for eligibility determination and case management. The new system will

also provide a financial interface to Fairfax County payment systems. It will also be used by CEPS to manage the permitting component of its program.

CCAR Director Carol Keil and CEPS Director Catherine Sauer expressed their gratitude that the project has launched. Sauer said, "The project team has done a great job so far conceptualizing a system that will be an asset to our division. I appreciate the efforts of the staff members who will implement this in the coming months." Carol Keil said, "Thanks also to the staff members supporting the team by taking on an additional workload, so the team is able to give time and attention to this initiative."

According to Michael Asihene, OFC's lead on this initiative, the new program will replace an aging system that has been in operation since 1999. Asihene said, "The Fairfax Child Care Management System will be built on a technology platform that utilizes efficiencies inherent in other county information technology systems. This new system will also reflect changes in program business processes, workflows and interfaces that have evolved since the inception of the current system."

Asihene said, "We're very pleased to be working in partnership with DIT, and are fortunate to have such a strong project team."

### **O F C** Office for Children

This employee newsletter is published by the Office for Children, a division of the Fairfax County Dept. of Family Services. If you have any questions, contact Angela Morlu at 703-324-7528 or Nancy McDonough at 703-324-8042. [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc).



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