



Investing in School Readiness

READY!

News for Early Childhood Educators • Winter 2007

Governor's Start Strong Council Calls for Quality in Early Childhood Programs

Study after study has reported that improving access to high quality preschool programs reduces crime, strengthens school and job performance, and spurs the economy. With those goals in mind, Virginia Governor Tim Kaine commissioned the Start Strong Council to identify practical, cost-effective ways to ensure a high-quality preschool experience for all children in the Commonwealth.

The Council's initial report, released in December, 2006, offered recommendations including the development of a voluntary Quality Rating System (QRS) to help strengthen the educational effectiveness of child care programs in the Commonwealth. While current state regulations address minimum standards for facilities and program operation of child care programs, they do not fully

address the quality of the learning environment in which many children spend significant hours during their formative years.

Under a QRS, family child care providers interested in achieving a higher level star rating would likely be required to document such features as the professional education and competency of staff and the characteristics of the early learning environment and curriculum, as evidence of the quality of their early childhood education program. The proposed five-star system would help parents assess the programs they are considering.

The report is available at: www.education.virginia.gov/Initiatives/EarlyChildhood/StartStrong/index.cfm.



Third Annual Symposium Addresses School Readiness in a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community

Over 100 languages are spoken by children within Fairfax County Public Schools. Fairfax Futures' third annual School Readiness Symposium will share current research and best practices on supporting school readiness in this culturally and linguistically diverse community.

The event will take place on Saturday, April 14, 2007, and will feature Dr. Eugene Garcia, Vice President,

Education Partnerships, at Arizona State University. Dr. Garcia is the Chair of the National Task Force on Early Education for Hispanics and former director of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs.

Invitations and registration information for this free event will be mailed in March. For more information, visit www.fairfaxfutures.org.



Dr. Eugene Garcia

New Award Recognizes School Readiness Educators

Fairfax Futures has announced the creation of a new award that will be given annually at the School Readiness Symposium to recognize outstanding educators for their commitment to create partnerships and connections that support young children's successful transition to kindergarten in Fairfax County.

Eligible applicants may self-nominate or be nominated by someone else. The deadline for nominations is Wednesday, March 21. Nominees must be either:

- ▶ An early childhood educator from a licensed or permitted Fairfax County community program; or
- ▶ A Fairfax County Public School principal, teacher or education specialist.

The award will be presented at the April 14 symposium by Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerald E. Connolly and Dean Klein, Senior Community Relations Manager at the Freddie Mac Foundation.

This award and the School Readiness Symposium are made possible in 2007 through a generous grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation. For nomination form and award information, visit www.fairfaxfutures.org.



New County Study Shows Child Care Workforce Committed to Education

A new study—released this month by Fairfax County’s Office for Children and the county’s Child Care Advisory Council—reports that most of the county’s child care workforce (those teaching and caring for children in child care settings) have not completed their education beyond high school.

Yet many of the county’s early childhood educators respond enthusiastically to opportunities for professional training in their field, with many ready to participate in training far beyond the hours required by state and county regulations. Professional development workshops for child care professionals are in great demand, filling up quickly, often with long waiting lists.

The study notes that, just as “Fairfax County is known for its world-class K-12 educational system,” it is critically important to support

and encourage the skills and professional development of its early childhood educators. While 1,500 hours of training are required to obtain a beautician’s license in Virginia, family child care providers in the Commonwealth are only required to complete six hours of training in order to obtain a state license, and six additional hours annually thereafter. Teachers in child care centers are required to have only 16 hours of training.

The study also benchmarks several areas in which improvements are sought. These include education, turnover, salaries and benefits.

A list of current training opportunities and the full report, “Caring for Our Children: Findings from the Fairfax County Child Care Workforce Study,” are available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/childcare.

“I Was in Awe!”

Teri Ruttenberg, a kindergarten teacher at Freedom Hill Elementary School and a participant in the School Readiness Collaborative grant, sends this message to readers of Ready!

“Elizabeth Page, the director at Falls Church/McLean Children’s Center, invited me to visit the center. The first thing I noticed during my visit was the warm and loving tone of the classrooms and interactions between the teachers and the children. Then I began to notice how similar the classroom design and experiences were to kindergarten. There were dramatic play and reading areas, tabletop manipulatives, and blocks, as well as circle time and free play — just like I have in my kindergarten classroom.

The children were very curious about kindergarten and asked me lots of questions. Mainly they wanted to know if they would still have toys to play with in kindergarten. They were happy to hear me say ‘Yes!’ It touched me how in awe of me these children were, when I was in awe of the wonderful experiences they were having before they came to kindergarten.

I strongly recommend that all kindergarten teachers take the time to observe a center that will be sending children to their school.”



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Learn About Guidelines

Fairfax County's Early Learning Guidelines are now available for download in their final version at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/childcare/src. Early childhood educators interested in learning how to apply the guidelines in their programs are encouraged to register for courses given by the Office for Children's Institute for Early Learning. In addition to its 40-hour School Readiness Certificate classes, the Institute will offer two new courses this summer: "Introduction to the Early Learning Guidelines" and "Introduction to School Readiness for Directors."



Language of Child Care Connects Communities

Thanks to last year's successful pilot project and renewed support from the Freddie Mac Foundation, Fairfax Futures will once again support a unique training program that combines English language and early childhood education for Latina family child care providers. This year, twice a week for seven months, participants will be able to build the English language skills essential to effective communication with parents and children in their child care programs. Participants also will learn the fundamentals of supporting young children's school readiness, using Fairfax County's new Early Learning Guidelines.

The 2007 program will begin in April. This exciting project gives Fairfax Futures the opportunity to bring together the expertise of Fairfax County Public Schools' Office of Adult and Continuing Education and Fairfax County's Office for Children to the benefit of participating family child care providers and the children in their care.

To learn more, visit www.fairfaxfutures.org.

Head Start Reaches Out to Share Transition Strategies

Head Start programs around the country have used creative strategies to help children, families, and early childhood educators make connections with schools to support smooth transitions to kindergarten. Fairfax County Head Start is reaching out to early childhood programs to share some of the successful strategies used locally to support school readiness.

Fairfax County Public Schools has expanded its Transition Team. Representatives from Head Start and the Family and Early Childhood Education Programs (FECEP) are now joined by representatives from the School Readiness Collaborative and local child care centers to share useful strategies to help early childhood education programs connect with kindergarten teachers.

One of the team's first strategies is the use of a "transition form" similar to one currently used in classrooms at the end of a child's Head Start experience. The Transition Team has drafted a sample form to help educators share written information about a child's early learning experience with the child's new kindergarten teacher. The information on this form can help principals and kindergarten teachers:

- Make placement decisions as children enter kindergarten;
- Plan learning experiences that immediately meet the needs of incoming kindergarten students; and
- Create a sense of continuity between child care and kindergarten for parents.

Sample forms for child care centers, family child care providers, preschool programs, and parents are available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/childcare/src.

Handy Tips

Principals and kindergarten teachers can download a list of child care programs in their neighborhoods at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/childcare.

Child care programs can help their parents learn the dates of Kindergarten Orientations by checking the Fairfax County Public Schools web site www.fcps.edu. Parents can also link to profiles of each elementary school to learn more about their programs.

News from the School Readiness Network

Capital One Supports School Readiness



creating opportunities

Capital One salutes the efforts of Fairfax Futures and its partners throughout Fairfax County that recognize the need to positively impact the youth in our community and are committed to helping our area's youngest residents prepare for school and for life.

We believe that, as business leaders, we have a unique opportunity to provide children and families in low- to moderate-income communities with access to educational resources and opportunities through our philanthropic and in-kind support as well as our associate involvement.

Our associates are passionate advocates of this philosophy, serving as mentors and tutors to more than 1,000 children in Fairfax County each year through academic enrichment and early education literacy programs. Together, we recognize that helping to build strong and healthy communities – good places to work, good places to do business and good places to raise families – benefits us all.

For more information, go to www.capitalone.com

Capital One is a 2006 Honor Roll Business Partner in Fairfax Futures' School Readiness Network.

Capital One

As a Business Partner in Fairfax Futures' **School Readiness Network**, Capital One is committed to helping Fairfax County's youngest children prepare for school and life. Capital One continues to provide philanthropic and in-kind support to help ensure that children in low- to moderate-income families have access to the educational resources and opportunities they need to build a better future.

Together with Fairfax Futures, Capital One and its associates support early childhood literacy and academic enrichment programs. Its educational initiatives are based on the belief that every family should have the opportunity to provide for their children in ways that ensure future success.

In 2006, Capital One hosted the launch of Fairfax Futures' **School Readiness Network** and, as a Business Partner, sponsored an early childhood literacy program for early childhood educators that featured award-winning children's author and illustrator, Mo Willems.



Fairfax Futures is dedicated to ensuring that our county's youngest children are well prepared to succeed in school and in life. In collaboration with partners across the county, we invest in early childhood education and school readiness by bringing attention and financial resources to sustain our region's future.

Headquartered in McLean, Virginia, Capital One Financial Corporation (www.capitalone.com) is a financial holding company, with more than 693 locations in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Texas, and Louisiana that offer a broad spectrum of financial products and services to consumers, small businesses, and commercial clients.

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Fairfax Futures
12011 Government Center Pkwy
Suite 920
Fairfax, Virginia 22035

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