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Shapiro Administration Celebrates Third Annual Early Childhood Education Equity Champion Award Winners During Month of the Young Child

These awards recognize early learning and child care programs that act as an invaluable resource for educational and social development for our youngest Pennsylvanians and are a catalyst for a healthy, vibrant economy.



Harrisburg, PA – Today, **Secretary for the Department of Human Services (DHS), Dr. Val Arkoosh**, and **Secretary for the Department of Education (PDE), Dr. Khalid N. Mumin**, celebrated the Third Annual Equity in Early Childhood Education (ECE) Champion Awards with recipients from across the Commonwealth in the Capitol Rotunda. More than 35 award recipients, including individual professionals and exemplary programs, were awarded based on their ability to enhance equitable

practices within their program as part of providing quality services for children and families, promoting strong starts and life-long benefits of education for all children.

“Healthy and inclusive learning environments give our children a strong foundation to grow and thrive. Every child regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background should have the opportunity to celebrate their individual identity and feel welcomed while in our early education programs,” said **Secretary Arkoosh**. “I am grateful to the dedicated professionals honored today who, through their work, demonstrate their steadfast commitment to Pennsylvania’s children and their future by creating inclusive and safe spaces for them to learn and succeed.”

“Today and every day, I am proud to celebrate the inspiring professionals in early childhood education, for they are truly the architects of our children’s futures,” said **Secretary Mumin**. “Through their dedication, they pave the way for every child to have the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed. Their unwavering commitment to quality care ignites hope, transforms lives, and builds bridges to a brighter tomorrow for all.”

Early learning and child care programs are an invaluable resource that foster educational and social development for our youngest Pennsylvanians and are a catalyst for a healthy, vibrant economy. These benefits are not possible without a dedicated workforce of child care professionals. **Governor Josh Shapiro’s** proposed budget provides a \$96,000 investment of state funds for child care providers participating in the Child Care Works (CCW) program, which will leverage \$62 million in federal funding to raise rates to the 75th percentile. CCW eases affordability for lower income, working parents, helping them to navigate the access barrier that could otherwise prevent them from building a career and a better future. This investment will help close the gap between private pay and CCW, providing operational support to providers serving lower-income, working families and helping these parents go to work in high-need careers and fields. This commitment allows CCW providers to invest in quality of care and their workforce amid the continued challenges of operating following the pandemic.

The intention of Pennsylvania’s Equity in ECE Champion Award is to bring awareness to and highlight the equity work being done within Pennsylvania’s early childhood education and afterschool settings, and by child care, evidence-based home visiting and early intervention professionals, as it aligns with the position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement](#). Equity is part of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) larger framework and is a priority of Pennsylvania’s educational continuum. The combination of all four concepts allows for innovative diversity initiatives that seek out barriers and act to mitigate or dismantle them in Pennsylvania’s schools.

“Providing equitable early learning environments is crucial for ensuring every child has a fair start in life. These environments lay the foundation for lifelong learning, development, and success,” said **Deputy Secretary of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Shante’ Brown**. “The Office of Child Development

and Early Learning is proud to acknowledge the 2024 awardees in their work in providing equitable early learning environments that not only benefit individuals, but also strengthen their communities.”

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is honored to recognize the work of the early childhood education programs and professionals on behalf of Pennsylvania children and their families. Recipients of the award have shown to be equity champions through their work embracing diversity and full inclusion as strengths, upholding fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and working to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities.

The following submissions were selected as GOLD level awards for the 2024 Pennsylvania’s Equity in Early Childhood Education Champion Awards:

- Bennett Family Center, University Park
- Carnegie Science Center, Pittsburgh
- Chelton Child Development Center, Dresher
- Community YMCA of Eastern Delaware County, Lansdowne
- French Creek Valley Christian Childcare, Saegertown
- Innovation & Exploration STEM Early Center, Huntingdon Valley
- J.A.M. Christian Daycare, Kennett Square
- KR Early Learning Center, Allentown
- Lehigh Valley Children’s Centers at Coaldale, Allentown
- LGA-Lil Geniuses Academy, Philadelphia
- Lyn Mitchell, Director of Early Childhood Education, Capital Area Head Start, Harrisburg
- Pre-K Kids Learning Center, New Castle
- Reading Area Community College, Reading
- Reading Daycare, Reading
- Steeple Kids, Langhorne
- The Children's School at Saint John's, Bala Cynwyd
- The Goddard School, West Chester
- The Robert and Maureen Dunham Children's Learning Center at Penn College, Williamsport
- Tri County Community Action, Harrisburg
- Tumble Totts LLC, Philadelphia
- United Neighborhood Centers of NEPA, Scranton
- Ya-Ya's Place Family Daycare, LLC, Philadelphia

The following submissions were selected as SILVER level awards for the 2024 Pennsylvania’s Equity in Early Childhood Education Champion Awards:

- AIU/Steel Valley Family Center, Homestead
- Brightside Academy, Allegheny Avenue, Pittsburgh
- Dare 2 Dream Daycare & Learning Center LLC, Wyoming
- GEARS Kids Center, Elizabethtown

- Jack Safer, President & CEO, Brightside Academy, Pittsburgh
- Jessica Jenkins (York County EIS and SPEC), York
- Michelle Stevens Group Day Care, Chester

The following submissions were selected as BRONZE level awards for the 2024 Pennsylvania's Equity in Early Childhood Education Champion Awards:

- Dr. Shawna Starling, Vice President of Intervention and Development Services, Brightside Academy, Pittsburgh
- Extraordinary Dreamers Early Learning Academy, Philadelphia
- Family & Friends Child Care Center, Lansdale
- Kiddie City Early Learning Center, Whitehall
- Little Eden Daycare, Philadelphia
- Loving Life Lehighton Preschool, Lehighton
- Shady Lane School, Pittsburgh
- TLC Too (NEGD), Philadelphia

For more information about the Equity in ECE Champion Award, visit the Pennsylvania Key website [here](#).

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