



Resources for Child Caring

Raising the standard of care for children

December 2009

Greetings Friends and Colleagues:

Even with the present economic turmoil, there never has been a better opportunity for our early care and education system to prepare children for kindergarten. As Resources for Child Caring's executive director, I have the privilege of sharing with you a few initiatives I think you will want to watch. Each is an example of how Minnesota's youngest children are becoming better equipped for success in school and life.

One of the most exciting of these is the new **Parent Aware Quality Rating System**, the country's first rating system that is specifically tied to getting children ready for school. We have worked with legislators, national experts and others to craft legislation empowering parents to choose a quality early childhood program for their children. In the coming year, we will be expanding this effort, building the capacity of providers in low income communities to achieve high quality ratings, and helping low income families to be able to access quality care. Last year, RCC administered \$3.5 million in scholarships and allowance funds so that 667 low income families could enroll in 3 or 4 star Parent Aware-rated programs. So far, we have helped 22 new early childhood programs in three pilot program areas achieve high ratings.

Another very promising model is the **Launching Early Learners school readiness initiative**, which has demonstrated the efficacy of aligning child care with the K-12 public school districts in order to improve school achievement. Developed in 2007 with major seed funding from the I. A. O'Shaughnessy Foundation; the Austin, Texas-based RGK Foundation; 3M, and others, LEL expanded upon a prior partnership with the St. Paul Public Schools—Project Early Kindergarten. This time, our objective was to support providers serving at-risk children in four suburban Ramsey County school districts. By providing curriculum, training and coaching assistance to providers, we were able to assist them in creating literacy-rich environments to build children's literacy skills. The improvements made were remarkable and the results of the two year pilot are showing that participating children are entering school better prepared. In the coming year, with the assistance of the Boston Scientific Foundation, we will be adding math and science to the curricula, two areas in which older American students and our workforce are critically underprepared.

Yet another is a focus that is receiving widespread attention: **early childhood health and environmental factors**. In a two-year project with the City of Minneapolis, "STEPS to a Healthier Minneapolis," we have been working to counteract obesity and poor nutrition among children in low income home child care settings. Training and technical assistance to providers improves their understanding of the problem, their ability to make a connection between

nutrition and physical activity to children's long term health, and take steps to improve their own health and well-being. With new funding from the UCARE Fund, we are beginning to expand this program to other neighborhoods in the region.

The very environment our children are in can also work against their ability to thrive, e.g., when indoor air quality is poor or if there are toxins present. I am tremendously excited by the positive response our publishing division's new *Go Green Rating Scale for Early Childhood Settings* (Phil Boise, Redleaf Press) is getting. The first of its kind, this tool allows programs to assess and remediate environmental concerns to improve children's health. We are deeply appreciative of the 28 early childhood settings that pilot tested it before we went to print: these ranged from family child care to Air Force Base child development centers and were located in 15 states, Canada and Korea!



As community members, we can invest in success now or risk costly failure later. (According to one measure, a recent study by Wilder Research, every year the cost to the K-12 system of Minnesota children not being ready is about \$113 million from lost revenue after students drop out to increased safety and special education costs.) So where do we go from here?

- We keep our eyes on quality, and access. You can count on RCC to do just that. Families should not have to compromise on quality to find affordable care. Yet today there are far too few options for Minnesotan children. The public sector's investment in early childhood leaves many gaps that we can and are filling.
- We focus on the needs of the most vulnerable: low-income families as well as those who have children with special needs and/or are members of immigrant and refugee communities
- We make prudent investments of time and community resources. The transition from early childhood to Kindergarten, and the K-to-third grade years are critical transition points that will be receiving greater attention this year.

There is no doubt that 2010 will be a challenge. But I believe we at RCC are very well positioned. The streamlined annual report enclosed with this letter is just one small example of how we have pared expenses in every area of the agency, without cutting services. I am grateful to our board, staff, volunteers and you. Your commitment to our community inspires me each and every day.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Yates".

Barbara Yates
Executive Director