

January 5, 2022

Dear Governor Carney:

Thank you for meeting with us to discuss education priorities, with a focus on early childhood education. We appreciate your commitment to preserve the child care industry and keep child care open to support Delaware's workforce and families. Continued and increased support is needed to preserve this essential industry.

We will continue to advocate for our key priority: Increasing the state's investment in early learning (ages zero to five). We heard your commitment to children in the City of Wilmington, third grade reading, and fiscal responsibility—and we believe investments in child care are critical to these priorities for the following reasons.

- **Wilmington schools:** the success of Wilmington schools depends on the preparation and support given to families with birth through pre-kindergarten children.
- **3rd grade reading:** decades of research demonstrate that children entering kindergarten with high-quality early learning experiences are much more likely to show success at this critical benchmark.
- **Our economy:** Delaware employers are raising this issue as a crisis for hiring and getting people to work.

In terms of focusing the funding on early learning (rather than funding Purchase of Care across all ages), we have discussed with DOE and Jon Sheehan a proposed solution: add to the ARP funding already committed by DOE and DHSS to start a “contracting for slots” pilot, targeting ages zero to three (because other proposals are working to expand three- and four-year-old pre-k).

The child care world, including in Build Back Better and in other states, is moving toward this model, which, like ECAP and K-12 education, ensures that the “slot” is paid for, for the year. This not only helps stabilize revenue for child care, while creating a contract with terms of transparency and quality, but also ensures that eligible families can find child care.

We strongly encourage you to consider investing additional state budget resources into the DOE's ARP contracted slots model this year. This approach would address your concerns of fiscal responsibility and ensure every dollar goes to high-quality child care—as well as create greater leverage, accountability, and transparency with child care providers—be they nonprofit, small business, Head Start, or district programs. Let us know if we can be of assistance expanding this model.

We also want to elevate the teacher staffing crisis, which needs immediate attention and executive level leadership. Schools have reached a point that is not sustainable and

immediate action is needed. There are a number of strong proposals that need action and urgency to impact our essential employees as soon as possible—these include several strategies employed in the health care industry and others during the pandemic:

- Funding to:
 - Support full-time positions, with benefits—these staff will serve as long-term substitutes that can be on hand in schools
 - Create incentives for substitutes, including increased pay for committing to longer timeframes
- Policy change—including potential emergency regulations:
 - Allow student teachers to serve as teachers of record on an emergency certification, similar to ARTC candidates
 - Provide waivers/flexibility around Praxis II certification passage scores that give alternative options and/or longer timeframes for candidates to meet the standards
 - Accept other states' specialist certifications using reciprocity like we have for teachers
 - Shorten the “substantial break in service” for retirees (currently six months) statute to allow more to return to the classroom—at least on a temporary basis

We will continue to advocate for increased investments in child care to support the workforce of today and the workforce of tomorrow—and solutions to addressing teacher shortages, with you and your Administration as well as the Joint Finance Committee of the General Assembly.

Please let us know how we can be helpful in advancing these critical issues in our state. Thank you for your leadership and support.

Sincerely,

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Kristin Dwyer, DSEA
Kirsten Olson, Children & Families First
Logan Herring, REACH Riverside
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