

**Progress Update to the Early Childhood Education Cabinet and a Recommendation  
Related to Quality Improvement “Minimum Standards” for SFY 08 School Readiness Slot Expansion**

**January 11, 2008**

Under Public Act. 07-03, the Early Childhood Education Cabinet was authorized to establish minimum standards for the allocation of new School Readiness Program funds for SFY 08. At its July 30, 2007 meeting, the Cabinet approved four of the five recommendations of the Goal One ECE Systems Working Group defining minimum standards for assuring and improving center-based care for preschool children. One of the recommendations adopted by the Cabinet required that any program accepting SFY 08 funds for new slots or for the expansion of existing slots using the new funds would be required to participate in an ECERS review:

*“... as soon as feasible, preferably before opening, but no later than 6 months after being funded. If the average score is less than 5, [the program] will develop an action plan and qualify for the quality improvement funds from the Early Childhood Cabinet*

The current plan is that programs certified under the new NAEYC standards would be exempt from this requirement. The new system has more rigorous quality standards.

Representative Beth Bye called a meeting for January 8<sup>th</sup> with SDE and the Office of the Cabinet because of some confusion between SDE and the Cabinet about implementation of the ECERS quality component. Charter Oak also attended as they will implement the policy. After discussion about the shared goal of assuring program quality and about the plan for ECERS implementation, the team agreed to recommend to the cabinet that the ECERS requirement be waived for any NAEYC accredited programs that added 5 or fewer slots to their school readiness programs in SFY '08. (This includes currently accredited programs that were certified prior to September 16, 2006 under the previous criteria).

Attending the meeting were: Representative Beth Bye, Dr. Janice Gruendel (Cabinet Co-Chair), Joyce Staples (Office of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet), Merle Harris, Shirley Adams and Kristin Adomeit (Charter Oak State College), and Harriet Feldlaufer, Deborah Adams and Gerri Rowell (SDE Bureau of Early Childhood Education).

The group came to consensus on the following recommendation to the Cabinet:

- Any accredited/approved program (National Association for the Education of Young Children, Head Start, NEASC, and American Montessori System) that receives 5 or fewer new slots is not required to have an ECERS for SFY 08. However, these programs may apply under the voluntary category to participate in the ECERS if they so choose.

The change proposed above impacts about 14 programs funded in SFY 08. A specific listing of these programs is being developed and will be made available by the Bureau of Early Childhood, State Department of Education. The group also reconfirmed the following:

- Any School Readiness Program contract/grantee accredited under the new NAEYC criteria is not required to have an ECERS. Such programs may apply under the voluntary category to participate in the ECERS process.

At its July meeting, the Cabinet also approved funds for both the ECERS and for Quality Improvement to School Readiness Programs *based on results of the ECERS review*. A total of \$900,000 was allocated for these purposes in SFY 08, and a Memorandum of Agreement with Charter Oak State College (COSC) has been approved to implement and manage this initiative on behalf of the Cabinet. A Project Manager has been hired and COSC is now engaged with state-approved ECERS raters and trainers. COSC will begin implementation of the project this month, based upon SDE-provided information on the programs that are required to receive ECERS.

Priority for awarding these SFY 08 Quality Improvement Grants will be as follows:

- First to all programs, required to have an ECERS, that receive a score of less than 5 (out of total of 7) in order to address issues identified through the ECERS process.
- Second to those programs that volunteer to participate and receive an ECERS score of less than 5 in order to address their identified issues.
- Third priority to those programs that receive a ECERS score of 5 or more who wish to apply for the grant in order to enhance their programs.

There is no change in these priority categories from that adopted by the Cabinet in July 2007.