

Improving early childhood education and care in Maine

July 2, 2019

Governor Janet Mills recently [reconvened the Children's Cabinet](#), which brings together the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Public Safety, Corrections, and Labor to make statewide improvements in the lives of Maine's children and their families. The Cabinet is focused on two goals: creating a comprehensive early care and education system in Maine and supporting vulnerable youth and their families.

Accessible and available high-quality child care is considered one of the most effective protective factors in preventing child abuse and neglect and strengthening families. The benefits include:

- Encouraging healthy development and provides ready access to early intervention services when needs are identified
- Fostering improvement in the relationship between the parent and child
- Supporting parental resiliency
- Encouraging social connections and interactions among peers, and constructive and supportive social connections for parents
- Connecting children and their families to supportive adults
- Creating economic opportunities by allowing parents to achieve educational or employment goals

By promoting protective factors, we can also reduce the prevalence and mitigate the effect of adverse childhood experiences, which have lifelong negative consequences related to physical and mental health.

As the Children's Cabinet seeks to build a comprehensive early care and education system, OCFS continues to partner with the Cutler Institute to grow and improve the [Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network \(MRTQ PDN\)](#). OCFS encourages child care and early childhood education professionals to utilize this network to assist in their professional growth. The network promotes and supports professionalism and quality in early care and education through several programs:

- *Maine Roads to Quality Registry*, which also allows professionals and their employers to track and maintain a record of ongoing training and educational accomplishments.
- *Technical Assistance*, which consists of a statewide system for providers to improve the quality of the services they deliver. This includes free on-site technical assistance and peer-to-peer networks, known as communities of practice.
- *Trainings* provided in-person and online that address a wide range of topics applicable throughout the early childhood education system. MRTQ PDN-sponsored trainings are free and available statewide.
- *Development* and promotion of additional training opportunities available from providers other than MRTQ PDN, including opportunities to increase the number of skilled trainers throughout the state and an online calendar of statewide training opportunities for early child care and education professionals.

Maine also maintains a [Quality Rating and Improvement System \(QRIS\), known as Quality for ME](#), which assigns a step level to each participating child care provider based on indicators of quality. This program recognizes child care programs that provide quality care, encourages providers to increase their quality by completing additional trainings and attaining national accreditation, and provides parents with easily identifiable standards of quality. Maine seeks to encourage quality by providing incentives for those that participate in the QRIS, including double child care tax credits for families receiving services provided by a top-level provider and allowing providers to access the Child Care Investment Tax Credit for expenses made to improve program quality. You can search for child care providers participating in the QRIS here: search.childcarechoices.me/.

OCFS also administers the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP), which provides financial support for child care to eligible families with children under 13 years of age, so parents can work or attend school or training. Currently, CCSP supports over 3,000 families and nearly 5,000 children with a subsidy. The Department has also increased reimbursement rates for providers participating in CCSP in order to encourage participation. Providers participating in CCSP receive higher reimbursement rates as they move up in the QRIS. This is intended to encourage high-quality care within the CCSP program. Unlike many states, there is currently no waiting list for Child Care Subsidy.

OCFS is partnering with other Departments and stakeholders to continue to seek new and innovative means to improve the early childhood education system, including availability, accessibility, and quality. The Children's Cabinet presents an excellent opportunity for collaboration. We look forward to working across departments to make improvements that reflect evidence-based solutions shown to increase protective factors and decrease or mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences.