

### Coalition Wins Two WEDU Awards!

The Early Learning Coalition is honored to have received two WEDU 5<sup>th</sup> Annual BE MORE Awards.



**BE MORE Informed**  
**BE MORE Knowledgeable**

These awards were for the **Look for the Stars Quality Improvement System** and the **Social Marketing Campaign for Early Literacy**, the **LEAF Talk, Listen, Read** project.

### 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Provider Conference

#### *Discover the Joy of Self Expression*

The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Provider Conference, held at Pine View School on Saturday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, had over 440 attendees, an all time high! From the evaluations, Pine View was an overwhelming success as a conference location – we hope this will be the first of many at this venue.



This year the conference had a different approach. The Coalition partnered with the Arts Council to give teachers and directors a chance to experience “the joy of self expression” for themselves, with hands-on breakouts exploring art, movement, drama, clay, yoga, music and more. The idea was for participants to try new activities, reconnect with the pleasures of play and self-expression and bring that energy and enthusiasm back to the classroom.

Next year we will return to our more traditional approach, but this time wanted to give participants the chance to experience the arts for themselves. Many seemed to welcome this opportunity. “I enjoyed the arts theme! Arts are too often overlooked,” was a frequent comment on the evaluations.

#### What Was THAT About? Conference Closing Issue

Acceptance and support of diversity in our society is a value the Coalition considers to be of utmost importance. For that reason one of the breakout sessions at the conference focused on this issue, examining the different cultural beliefs and perceptions we all carry with us.

Given the importance of this topic, the Coalition does want to address a concern that came up in the closing performance at the conference. In a skit involving voice mail messages that was intended as a comic exaggeration of worst practices (what not to do), the culminating example was “*if you don’t understand this message, move to a place where they speak a language you do understand.*”

Reactions varied. There was laughter, but also cheering and clapping, apparently in support of this sentiment. Based on the evaluations, the audience enjoyed the performance overall, which included the “Heroes” song and motivational message on the importance of play in our field. Some, on reflection, expressed dismay at what they took to be a slur against those whose primary language is not

English. Some did not pay much attention one way or another. Since there was confusion as to the meaning, this part of the skit was not effective.

**To be clear**, the Early Learning Coalition and Kate Alexander and her performers hold acceptance of diversity in our society – racial, ethnic, cultural, differing abilities – to be both a core value and a fundamental moral and legally protected right that the Coalition actively works to support.

The response to this part in the skit did bring to the surface attitudes, feelings or biases people may have that are not fully acknowledged, but which have implications for our country and in our work as early childhood educators. It also illustrated the unintended harm and pain thoughtless remarks and behaviors can have to those who may feel targeted, and the need for more awareness on all our parts.

Because of the relevance of this topic, and because her session, *The Art of Perception, A Cultural Phenomenon?*, was so well received, the Coalition had already requested that the presenter, Anne Ferrier, cultural and linguistic competency coordinator for the Sarasota Partnership for Children’s Mental Health, offer one or more follow up trainings.

We hope many will take advantage of the opportunity to attend a workshop to personally explore the issue of cultural competence.

### Family Involvement Makes the Difference!

Early childhood teachers and directors know the power of parent involvement in ensuring that children fully benefit from their experience in care. Because this is such a crucial area, one of the Look for the Stars domains specifically focuses on family involvement and engagement, with an expectation that providers foster a supportive and collaborative relationship with parents and work with parents as partners in order to provide the best early care and learning experiences for children.

There are many resources with strategies and ideas on how to get parents involved. The attached one page **Self Assessment Questionnaire** is a quick way to see if your site is on track. Are parents welcomed? Are there lines of communication? Do directors and teachers listen to parents’ concerns? Is the role of parents and families honored? Take a look and see how your site measures up. Family involvement brings big rewards!



### Because It Matters

**Because It Matters** is going strong at the sites in the pilot program this year. In the spring, the focus will be on fully involving parents in implementing Because It Matters at their centers along with a training series for parents to help them use the Keys to Civility with their own children.



## VPK News

It's hard to believe, but parent registration for this year's Summer VPK Program and next year's School Year VPK Program starts **March 25<sup>th</sup>**. Flyers with registration information in English and Spanish will be emailed to VPK providers to post for parents in the next few weeks.

### VPK Readiness Rates Released

- ◆ The preliminary **VPK Readiness Rates for 2008-2009 were released on February 5<sup>th</sup>**. To view your readiness rates for last year's VPK program use your login and password, as you did to verify your VPK attendance information.
- ◆ The VPK Readiness Rate website is [www.vpk.fl DOE.org](http://www.vpk.fl DOE.org).
- ◆ **NOTE: This year the maximum readiness rate is 200, not 300 as in past years.** This change is a result of replacing the DIBELS portion of the *Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKERS)* with the *Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR)* – more information below.
- ◆ The minimum readiness rate is expected to be 138 out of a maximum of 200. However, the final decision of the Department of Education has not yet been made.
- ◆ Providers will have until **February 19<sup>th</sup> (14 days) to dispute the accuracy of their rates.**
- ◆ Once the final readiness rates are posted and the minimum rate is set by the Board of Education the readiness rates will be made public.

### Kindergarten Assessment Information

The *Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR)*, which has replaced the DIBELS portion of FLKERS,



measures **Letter Naming and Phonemic Awareness**, both included in the VPK Education Standards, and used to calculate a student's Probability of Success in Reading score.

A flyer describing the FAIR is attached, with links to lots of valuable resources for VPK teachers, including sample lesson plans and appropriate strategies for developing emergent literacy, language and vocabulary.

## Just for Family Providers

The Florida Family Child Care Home Association (FFCCHA) Conference will be held June 22-27 in Clearwater Beach. The theme this year is **"Enhancing Our Minds in 2010."** The Coalition will once again sponsor family providers who would like to attend this event, targeted just for them.



Visit our website! Minutes of meetings and scholarship applications are posted. A calendar of meetings is also available, as well as the community training calendar. Look us up and give us your feedback! If any director or teacher would like to receive a copy of this newsletter via email, contact the Coalition at the general email address below.

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Sponsorship by Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County, Agency for Workforce Innovation, Office of Early Learning, State of Florida, Sarasota County Government

## A Growing Trend: **PRESCHOOLS GO GREEN**

There is a growing movement in the early childhood field to establish eco-friendly environments to help safe-guard children and protect natural resources. A checklist from the Oregon Environmental Council is attached, which gives information on several areas to consider when creating a more eco-friendly environment:

- Pesticides & Pest Prevention
- Air Quality
- Household Chemicals
- Lead
- Mercury
- Furniture & Carpets
- Art Supplies
- Plastics & Toys
- Playground Equipment
- Recycling & Garbage

Locally, **Amy Meese**, a parent in our community and a Center for Disease Control Environmental Health Leadership Fellow as well as General Manager, Natural Resources, Sarasota County Government, is developing a project called ***Pesticides, Disinfectants and Our Kids, OH My!*** with the goal of protecting children by reducing exposure through increased use of more sustainable practices. An article from her with a **description of the concept is attached.** The Coalition will soon convene an informational meeting with Amy for those providers interested in becoming involved.



**Look for the Stars  
RETENTION BONUSES**

In the next few weeks teachers at participating Look for the Stars sites who have been employed for 3 years or more at that site will receive a **retention bonus check** from the Early Learning Coalition, on behalf of the Quality Child Care Council.

The purpose of the retention bonus is to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of early childhood teachers to their profession and to the sites where the work.

A center is only as good as its teachers, and centers reap big benefits when teachers make a long term commitment of time and energy to their sites.

Bonuses will be structured as indicated below. The Coalition thanks the dedicated teachers in our community!

<b>3 – 5 Years:</b>	<b>\$200</b>	<b>109 Teachers</b>
<b>5 – 10 Years:</b>	<b>\$300</b>	<b>103 Teachers</b>
<b>Over 10 Years:</b>	<b>\$400</b>	<b>74 Teachers</b>



## Remember...the Coalition Newsletter is On-Line Only!

If you do not get Coalition emails you are missing news, updates, and training information. Contact us at [mail@earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org](mailto:mail@earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org) to be added to our distribution list.

**The Coalition wants to reach all directors and teachers in Sarasota County!**

Early Learning Coalition's Child Care Connection  
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