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Teaching the Teacher

By Amanda VanCura

THERE ARE MORE THAN 35 MILLION children from birth to age eight in this country. In Collin County alone, children between the ages of birth to age five compose more than 51,000 of the population (U.S. Census, 2005). With children being such a large part of our citizenry, it only makes sense that we have an organization dedicated to the education and care of our young people. The Collin County Association for the Education of Young Children (CCAIEYC) is a devoted group working to build better futures for our youth. In fact, this past April, the organization celebrated those involved with Collin County children during the Week of the Young Child national event.

WHAT IS THE CCAIEYC?

The CCAIEYC is an affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which has nearly 100,000 members and a national network of over 300 local,

state and regional affiliates. It is the largest organization of early childhood educators and others dedicated to improving the quality of early childhood programs for young children. The Collin County affiliate has approximately 140 early childhood professionals working together to maintain this goal.

"We all worry about the care our children receive when we are in the workplace," shares Julia Easley, director of Advocacy, Children's Medical Center of Dallas. "CCAIEYC is a major community asset."

CCAIEYC supports its daycare and preschool facility members by providing professional development opportunities, helping to build public support for high-quality programs and ensuring that the NAEYC standards are being followed.

"The purpose of CCAIEYC is to serve and act on behalf of the needs and rights of all young children, with our primary focus on providing educational services and resources," explains Kathy Pounds,

treasurer of the CCAIEYC and preschool director at Teddy Bear Junction. "The early years are a crucial time for their growth and development and a time when we help children prepare to succeed in school and life."

CCAIEYC AND COLLIN COUNTY

One of the benefits of membership in the CCAIEYC is the education, support and resources offered to teachers and caregivers. Training and support for staff, teachers and administrators that work with children birth to age eight is offered year round.

"The CCAIEYC works with all of Collin County to identify licensed program centers and to notify them of early childhood opportunities offered by CCAIEYC," comments Linda Gulick, president of CCAIEYC. "We also have a newsletter that lists many training opportunities available to all of Collin County."

Trainings are often available for

members and non-members and offer cutting-edge information for educators. At least six monthly training opportunities have been offered this year for those working with young children. In addition, the organization is working with the Methodist Nursery Kindergarten Association (MNKA) to bring Dan Hodgins, PH.D for an exceptional training event in October. Dr. Hodgins, last year's keynote speaker and Advocate of the Year at the Week of the Young Child banquet, is a teacher and renowned presenter with more than 30 years experience in the field of early education and care.

"Dan was the speaker for our October 2006 Fall Training in combination with MKNA," says Ms. Gulick. "We are planning training that's open to any early childhood educator. We usually have people attend from all over Texas."

In addition to offering training and education, the CCAEYC is here as the support system for preschool centers and daycare providers in the area.

"We are here to answer or find answers to questions and provide assistance to all programs in Collin County," explains Ms. Gulick.

For facilities wishing to become a member of the CCAEYC, the organization is offering membership to four Collin County participants who have attended CCAEYC trainings.

WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD

The CCAEYC members do their part to become the best educators and caregivers in Collin County. This is why, each year, the NAEYC and its affiliates celebrate the efforts of the caregivers, parents, teachers and other adults who play important roles in the lives of young children. The "Week of the Young Child" is recognized across the country by hundreds of local organizations working to improve opportunities for all children.

"This is a time to recognize and thank the adults involved in the education and care of our young children," says Ms. Gulick. "The theme of this year's event was 'Build a Better Future for All Children.'"

This year's Week of the Young Child was April 22-28. Teachers, trainers, directors, advocates and caregivers in Collin County were recognized for their

outstanding achievement and success in the growth and development of young children.

"Every year, the CCAEYC takes nominations from parents, staff and administrators for persons of the year," says Ms. Gulick.

Parents should ask about the training for their teachers, the child-to-teacher ratios and how their activities promote development.

The CCAEYC was also awarded a special honor at this year's banquet by Phyllis Cole, County Commissioner, Precinct I for Collin County. This was a proclamation that proclaimed the week of April 23, 2007 as CAEYC Week of the Young Child in Collin County.

"This was a very special honor for the CCAEYC," said Ms. Gulick.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Each state has different childcare laws. It is for this reason that the NAEYC has established standards of excellence for all childcare programs for children from birth through third grade. As a result, some form of consistency can begin to be established among accredited facilities.

"Texas childcare standards allow more children per adult than most states, making it difficult for providers to give children the one-on-one attention they need to be safe and to thrive," comments Ms. Easley. "Texas law allows one worker to care for 11 toddlers. That's not a good situation for the children or the caregiver."

As the arm for this area, CCAEYC ensures that caregivers are meeting the NAEYC standards. A major part of NAEYC's efforts to improve childcare is through accreditation for programs that are committed to quality. A national, voluntary accreditation system has been set to offer professional standards for early childhood education programs and

to help families identify these high-quality programs.

"Parents should ask child care programs about the training for their teachers, the child-to-teacher ratios and how their activities promote cognitive, social, emotional and physical development," says Ms. Easley. In addition, parents can visit www.naeyc.org to learn more about the standards for accreditation and to check if a facility is accredited.

CCAIEYC members also attend regional and national trainings offered by the NAEYC. President Linda Gulick recently attended a conference with the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children on strategic planning. Plans were made to strengthen and grow membership and participation in Texas. The NAEYC uses various grants and donations from different organizations to conduct research and offer training for educators nationwide.

Parents should also view the NAEYC as a strong advocate for their children. Karen Marks serves as the Public Policy Chairman and often travels to Austin to follow issues in the legislature that concern young children.

"Child care is at an all-time-high issue in the legislature this year," says Ms. Gulick. Ms. Easley agrees, adding that well-informed adults are needed to advocate for the well being of all the children in the community. She recently won the Advocate of the Year award at the Week of the Young Child event.

"I am blessed to serve as Director of Advocacy at Children's Medical Center," she says. "Speaking up for children is a key piece of our mission 'to make life better for children.'"

GROWING OUR CHILDREN

Improving and maintaining high-quality care for our children isn't the job of one organization or community. With the growing number of young children in our community, state and nation, it is important for all adults to get involved. The CCAEYC and its national arm depend on its members and citizens for leadership and support. It is through this joint effort that the quality of early childhood education will progress.

Amanda VanCura is a freelance writer living in Plano.



Linda Gulick with Kathy Pounds (top);
and guest speaker (bottom)
photos provided by Kathy Pounds

What to look for in a childcare facility.

Suggestions from the NAEYC

- Is the facility NAEYC accredited?
- Are children interacting with other children and adults in an effort to build healthy relationships?
- Does the curriculum include a variety of activities appropriate for all ages and needs?
- Do teacher and caregivers understand principles of child development and learning?
- Is the program licensed by the state, age-appropriate and well maintained; indoor and out?
- What is the child-to-teacher ratio?
- What degrees and training do the teachers have?
- Are the groups small enough to provide the individual attention very young children need? (For babies, look for groups of no more than six to eight children with at least two adults; for toddlers, groups should not exceed eight to 12 children with at least two adults.)
- Are there plenty of toys and learning materials that offer interesting and challenging activities to children that are also safe and achievable?

Congratulations to These Educators!

Family Day Home of the Year – Manju Sharma, owner of Kids Kare

Teacher of the Year – Nanette Hudgens, Kid Care at Cottonwood Creek

Trainer of the Year – Sharon Lindholm, M.S., LPC, LMFTA

Director of the Year – Kathy Pounds, Teddy Bear Junction

Advocator of the Year – Julia Easley, Children's Medical Center Advocacy Manager



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