

CONNECTIONS

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE QUARTERLY

FALL 2008

VOLUME III, ISSUE 1

...a new harvest...

by Lisette Levy, Connections Newsletter Editor

We are excited and proud to present the electronic version of CONNECTIONS. This online issue represents our commitment to wisely utilize our resources while providing the field with the most current information. CONNECTIONS will keep you informed about changes in policies that affect the early education community, program updates that will enhance customer services, and stories that illustrate our relationships with our partners.

Learn about present and future activities around the state that impact the early education community and participate by sending your articles for publication to [CONNECTIONS:CONTRIBUTIONS](#).

For your convenience, we are pleased to also make this [PDF version of CONNECTIONS](#) available to you for download. You may need to install the free [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) to use this printable version of the newsletter.

We want to praise the Children's Forum for being innovators in offering a quarterly e-newsletter featuring Forum information and updates; early learning coalition briefs; legislative updates; state and national news; calendar of events; and other topics that impact child care, early education, and issues related to families. In many ways, our partners and colleagues are our inspiration, inviting us all to continually improve service to our customers. Take a look at the Forum's handsome, informative e-newsletter [Florida's Child](#)



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- Child Well-Being Index-Room for Improvement

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kidcare: more than 70,000 kids and counting...

by Stacy Howard, Contributing Editor, Consumer Affairs

State agencies and community partners ramp up statewide Back to School outreach campaign to help uninsured families apply for Florida KidCare.

Jennifer, a preschool teacher in Tallahassee, noticed that Zachary had been absent from school. Zachary was an eager four-year-old, always ready to help put toys away and always excited for circle time. Zachary returned from a week's absence. When Jennifer asked Zachary's mother, Diane, if something was going on, Diane told Jennifer that Zachary had strep throat for the past week and was running high fevers. Diane also mentioned the price of the antibiotics for Zachary was \$150. "Wow, that's a lot of money," said Jennifer. "Doesn't your health insurance cover medications?"

Diane said that she did not have health insurance for her family and that private insurance rates were as high as \$700 a month, well outside of her ability to afford coverage. Diane said she would have to work a lot of overtime to pay for the cost of the medication and the doctors' visits. Jennifer told Diane about the Florida KidCare health insurance program.

Diane's story is not so unusual. After learning about Florida KidCare from her son's preschool teacher, Diane applied for coverage online in a few easy steps. Soon after, Zachary joined the 1.4 million children enrolled in Florida KidCare. Since last summer, the state- and federally-subsidized program has enrolled 70,000 more children who now have access to preventive care such as regular doctor visits, immunizations, dental check-ups, and prescriptions. Like Diane, many families pay \$20 or less per month; most pay nothing at all.

The growing number of kids that enroll in Florida KidCare is the result of a year-long outreach campaign led by Governor Charlie Crist, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Alex Sink, and the leaders of several state agencies who have dedicated resources and staff to promote the program. One out of ten is too many children without health insurance, so with the help of business and community groups, the state will target the families of the half million uninsured children in Florida and help them apply for Florida KidCare as they prepare for the new school year.

"We have a simple message: Florida KidCare is open for business and is providing quality health insurance at an affordable price," said CFO Sink, who chairs the Healthy Kids Board. "With Florida KidCare, many working families are ensuring their children have access to preventative health care."

This year, the Governor and legislature approved funding for 38,000 more uninsured children to join Florida KidCare and each state agency has pledged to increase opportunities for families to apply for the program. In addition to having a visible presence at back to school events, the agencies are using its resources to promote the program and reach eligible families. For example, the Agency for Workforce Innovation is distributing thousands of Florida KidCare applications through its statewide network of Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten providers.

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“Early health care is vitally important to educational success, and we enthusiastically support Governor Crist and the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation in their effort to enroll families in the Florida KidCare health insurance program,” said Monesia Brown, Director, Agency for Workforce Innovation.

“We are committed to ensuring children’s well-being and educational success. Healthy children attend more days of programming, are able to play and to learn, and their families more fully experience the rich benefits of their Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten or child care programs. We will continue to support and promote the Florida KidCare to all the families in our great state.”

For more information or to apply for benefits, visit the [Florida KidCare website](#). Families can also call 1-888-540-5437 to receive an application by mail.



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room for improvement in child well-being index

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by Riana Lewis, Contributing Editor, Research and Analysis

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According to the 2008 Foundation for Child Development, U.S. children's quality of life has been growing slowly over an eight-year period (1994 to 2002). The Child and Youth Well-Being Index (CWI) Report covers the economic well-being of families, the health and safety of children, and children's school attendance and performance. The foundation's study projects a higher score for the 2007 U.S. CWI in comparison with CWI scores from the mid-1990s, and believes that there is room for improvement. The foundation also argues that the housing finance crisis, rising inflation, and job loss problems of 2007 and 2008 will likely have a negative impact on the numerous well-being areas affecting the overall CWI score

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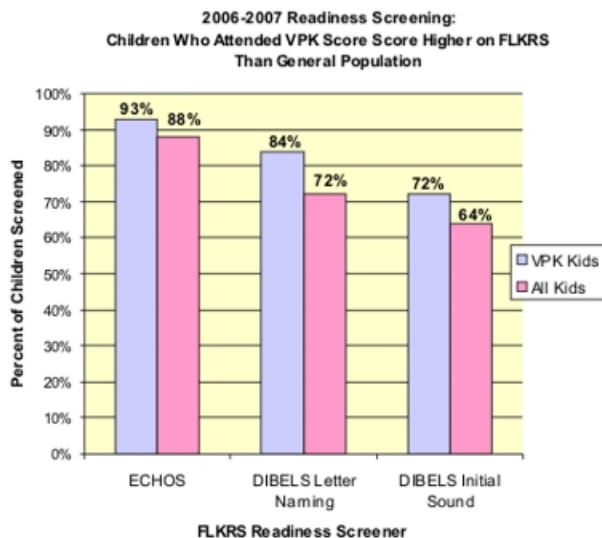
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The Agency for Workforce Innovation understands the negative impact that economical and social problems have on families and their children. The mission of the Agency is to advance the economic well-being and self-sufficiency of all Floridians through premier early learning and workforce services. As studies report, children in early learning programs are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to commit crimes as adolescents and adults, and are likely to break the cycle of poverty by achieving employment and higher incomes than children that did not participate in an early learning program.

The Agency is directly involved in improving the well-being of Florida's children by providing workforce services to parents, and early learning services for their children. For example, Florida's VPK programs contribute to the overall well-being of the state's children in the areas of health, safety, educational attainment, and school participation.

As the Florida Department of Education reported, VPK children who participated in the 2006-2007 program, tested as being more ready for kindergarten than other children attending kindergarten for the first time (Florida Department of Education. Overview of the 2006-2007 Preliminary VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rates).

A more detailed discussion of these scores was presented at the [2008 One Goal Conference](#). You will need the [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) to view it.





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statewide workgroup develops monitoring tool...

by Ginger Tate, Contributing Editor, Eligibility Support and Fraud Prevention.

A workgroup made up of representatives from early learning coalitions, contractors and early learning staff met over the last three months to review specific requirements for eligibility for each of the programs as well as methodologies to meet those requirements. The workgroup also convened during the Agency's statewide workshop on August 7 and 8 on School Readiness (SR) and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) eligibility. A representative from the Child Care Bureau also attended the August 7 workshop to provide input about what other states around the country have developed.

The workshop was a great success and an example of the continuing partnership between the Agency and the coalitions. The results of the workgroup and workshop will be used as a basis for the standard statewide eligibility monitoring tools and guidance, as well as the basis for Florida to use in the upcoming USDHHS Improper Payment Authorization Review. The development of standard statewide tools will enable coalitions to replicate the monitoring process used by the Agency's Eligibility and Support Fraud Prevention (ESFP) unit.

In the first year of implementation, the coalitions will have the option to utilize the standard tool for their subrecipients. If the coalitions choose this option, ESFP will not only provide technical training and support, but will also validate the coalition review rather than conduct a full annual review. Coalitions may opt to have ESFP complete the full review in this implementation year. Some coalitions contract out all or a portion of their VPK and SR eligibility services, as well as their VPK provider qualifications process. The coalitions will monitor their subrecipients using the standard statewide tools. The coalitions that have retained services in house will still receive an onsite monitoring by ESFP for the services offered in house.

As of August 19, all fraud referrals made by a coalition for our early learning programs should be sent to the ESFP Unit via fax at (850) 487-2441, or posted to the coalition's Coalition Zone on Sharepoint. Once the coalition posts the referral on Sharepoint, the coalition should email Pat Weyer at pat.weyer@flaawi.com or Rodney MacKinnon at Rodney.mackinnon@flaawi.com from the eligibility and fraud unit to notify ESFP of the submission.

August and September eligibility reviews included the Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee (IRMO), St. Lucie, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa-Walton, Big Bend, and Duval coalitions. In October, we will review the Escambia, Sarasota, and Manatee coalitions. We look forward to working with all of the coalitions as we strive to continue our quest for world class eligibility accuracy.

Anyone who has questions about the ESFP Unit or our process may contact Pat Weyer, Eligibility Monitoring Supervisor at (850) 921-3462 or pat.weyer@flaawi.com.

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restructuring oel harvests efficiencies...

by Stacy Howard, Contributing Editor, Consumer Affairs.

The Office of Early Learning (OEL) is benefiting from a recent decision to restructure how we do business. To improve efficiency and effectiveness, Director Brittany Birken mapped out a new way to organize the teams that make up OEL. This plan streamlines business to improve communication. The restructuring created new teams and shifted others to create efficiencies.

OEL is located in two buildings on the south and east of the Capitol complex in downtown Tallahassee. [The Director's Office](#); [Consumer Affairs](#); and [Program, Research, and Policy](#) are located in the Caldwell Building at 107 E. Madison Street. [Financial Administration and Budget Services](#), [Accountability](#), and [Project Management](#) are located across the street in the Holland Building at 600 South Calhoun Street.

We've highlighted each team and provided team contact information so our customers can contact appropriate OEL staff for any questions or concerns. If you are unsure of whom to contact, please call our main line at 850-921-3180. A call center specialist will be happy to direct your question to the appropriate team.

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT

[Brittany Birken, Ph.D., Director](#) 850-921-3198

[Matt Guse, Assistant Director](#) 850-921-3165

PROGRAM, RESEARCH, AND POLICY

[John Hughes, Ph.D., Manager](#) 850-921-3471

- Assists implementation of the School Readiness (SR), Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) programs
- Promulgates rules and policies for program implementation and oversees the coalition program plans
- Provides data and research to inform policy and programmatic decisions.

ACCOUNTABILITY

[Stephanie Gehres, C.P.A., Manager](#) 850-921-3177

- Promotes SR, VPK, and CCR&R program compliance and effectiveness.
- Ensures compliance with federal and state guidelines, assess program outcomes, and identifies opportunities for improved services to Florida's families and children through reviews of each coalition.
- Conducts reviews of coalition performance. eligibility

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determination and fraud prevention, and quality assurance. Analyzes and checks all reported facts for accuracy and relevancy.

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

[Stacy Howard, M.S., CFLE, Manager](#) 850-921-3468

- One-stop location for information. Operates as the communication hub for OEL.
- Coordinates statewide training, guides product development, coordinates the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) meetings. Includes eight Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinators.
- Provides provide training and technical assistance to coalition and service provider staff through TA Coordinator.
- Ensures up-to-date and accurate information delivery to internal and external stakeholders. Works closely with partners including Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Education (DOE), Department of Health (DOH), Florida State University (FSU) Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, early learning coalitions, and families.

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION AND BUDGET SERVICES

[Thomas Imholt, M.S., Financial Administration Manager](#)
850-921-3174

[Bill Ammons, Budget Services Manager](#) 850-921-3131

- Provides oversight to coalitions about the OEL budget and procurements.
- Oversees coalition financial status.
- Processes payments for services provided and monitors expenditures.
- Provides management of statewide contracts.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

[Khalil Zeinieh, MBA, Manager](#) 850-294-2709

- Administers key OEL projects including Early Learning Information System (ELIS), Child Care Executive Partnership (CCEP), Even Start, and Single Point of Entry/Unified Wait List using sound project management principles, processes, and standards.
- Facilitates and coordinates OEL and coalition Business Process and Quality Improvement recommendations and related projects.
- Develops and implements statewide early learning performance measures.



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updating the oel events calendar...

by Deborah Rogers, Contributing Editor, Consumer Affairs

The Agency for Workforce Innovation Office of Early Learning (OEL) website features a new calendar of [Early Learning Partners and Stakeholder Training Events](#). This calendar is available to agencies, coalitions, and trainers in the child care and early learning field to share information about early learning conferences and training available throughout the state.

OEL will post calendar items if you are coordinating an event that is open for general registration. This calendar won't feature closed meetings or events, as the goal of the calendar is to share information within the child care industry in Florida. If you would like to submit an item for the calendar, please send the following information to [Deborah Rogers, Consumer Relations Analyst](#).

- Title of Event:
- Date:
- Time:
- Event Contact:
- Location:
- Brief description, including website or phone number for more information:

Some events of interest for the next quarter:

Child Development Education Alliance 15th Annual Conference
Friday, Oct 10 - 11, 2008, at Wyndham Jacksonville Riverwalk, Jacksonville Florida

3rd Annual Tracks to Success Conference
Saturday, Oct 18, 2008, 8am - 3pm, at Santa Fe College, Gainesville

Northwest Florida AEYC Conference, Pensacola
Saturday, Oct 25, 2008, at Pensacola, Florida

National Association for the Education of Young Children
Wednesday, Nov 5 - 8, 2008, at Dallas, Texas

National Zero to Three
Thursday, Dec 4 - 7, 2008, at Los Angeles, California

Pinellas Early Childhood Association Conference
Saturday, Jan 24, 2009, at St. Petersburg, FL

Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County
8th Annual Provider Conference
Saturday, Jan 31, 2009, 8am - 3pm, at Pine Shores, Florida

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giving excellent customer service...

by Audia Bradwell, Contributing Editor, CCR&R Specialist

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) is fundamentally about customer service. Providing quality customer service should be the primary purpose driving CCR&R staff. When a customer receives services through CCR&R, it is important that the customer walks away feeling that the services offered to them were exceptional, even if a customer is not told exactly what he or she wants to hear. For instance, a customer may learn there is a waiting list for a program that they would like to take advantage of immediately. An excellent customer service experience softens a disappointment that could prevent the customer from returning when the program is available.

What is quality customer service? The SLS helps guide our thoughts and actions when assisting customers and ultimately helps us by defining quality customer service. The SLS coaches us in providing a consistent and high level of service throughout Florida. The following are some key components the SLS provides to ensure quality service is implemented:

- **CCR is the “Front Door.”** CCR&R is the front door to family services and must be offered to all customers assisted by the coalition or contractor. CCR&R early learning referrals, consumer/education information, and/or community resources must be offered to all customers with children of all ages that request information and/or referrals via telephone, in person, e-mail, mail, or internet. All interviews must be conducted in a manner that will ensure the confidentiality of each customer.
- **Basic Consumer Information.** Most customers contacting CCR&R do not know the difference between a family child care home and a child care center, a licensed and a non-licensed facility, or the difference between School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten programs. It’s critical we explain all early learning and school-aged program options to the customer, and help them identify quality programs that meet their needs.
- **Multi Language Services.** When a staff person is not available who speaks the customer’s preferred language, a translation service or free translation web site must be utilized. Families should be able to receive materials in their preferred language when possible.
- **Disabilities.** Families of children with disabilities or special health care needs must receive full CCR&R services including referrals to early learning programs, consumer education information, and community resources providing appropriate support.
- **Consumer Outreach and Education.** The CCR&R specialist’s role is to provide information about the various child care programs and all community resources that may help the parent. This may include but is not limited to: the United Way Directory, the FLAIRS report, and any local resource guides. All CCR&R specialists, including blended

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resource guides. All CCR&R specialists, including blended staff, must have the ability to make an immediate referral to the designated community service help line.

- **Provider Start Up.** When a potential provider contacts your office, educate them about the resources available to them that would help them start up a program. This may include, but is not limited to: the DCF Child Care Training Information Center, their local licensing office, DCF web site, information on how to enhance the quality of services the provider provides, and other provider startup information.
- **Emergency Situations.** In the event of an emergency or natural disaster, the customer relies on the CCR&R specialist's knowledge about the various community resources and emergency management procedures. Try to learn more about emergency guidelines and reports such as Keeping Children Safe . NACCRRRA offers this and other aids that may help assist the customer in the event of an emergency or natural disaster.
- **Online Referral.** CCR&R service centers must develop a method for customers to request CCR&R referrals and/or information online by January 1, 2009. The web page may be added to the coalition or the contractor web site, and must capture the customer request information for the mandatory monthly report at the same time the customer makes the online request.

While we've covered some key components of quality service, you should carefully read the entire SLS to review everything required of you as a CCR&R specialist. Familiarity with the CCR&R Reference Guide can increase the quality of customer service you provide. This guide contains a wealth of information about child care for families and current or potential providers. Read through it and familiarize yourself with chapter contents and the location of covered topics. In addition, read through and familiarize yourself with the early learning materials that AWI-OEL produces and that your own coalition or contractor produces.

Remember, providing CCR&R services should always involve establishing a rapport with the customer, listening attentively to the customer, and being empathetic with the customer's personal challenges. Even if you find yourself disagreeing with what the customer is saying, remaining calm and professional will bring the best resolution to the customer's child care needs. Always remain unbiased in the different child care options you represent to the customer.

Remember that we appreciate your hard work and are grateful to you for choosing CCR&R as your career and for being an integral part of a state and national network of CCR&R agencies. We recognize your hard work and would like to take this time to say thank you for everything you do for CCR&R. Always keep in mind that we are here to serve you. Never hesitate to contact the AWI-Office of Early Learning toll free at 1-866-357-3239 should you have any questions or need assistance.





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facing the challenge...

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TRAINING WITH DEVEREUX EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE'S DVDS ON CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

by Toby Hunter, Child Development and Inclusion Coordinator, Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, Inc.

I was recently approached by the Agency for Workforce Innovation's Office of Early Learning to conduct trainings on "Facing the Challenge." In the past year, I have been approached by the staff and director several times concerning extreme behavioral issues at this site. Several of these cases have led to formal assessment and eventual placement in exceptional educational programs. Other cases have been resolved through a series of interventions, but with the recognition that additional staff training would be beneficial. To bring in this training, I partnered with O2B Kids, Midtown campus, a corporate child care center that serves a diverse population of children. The audience consisted of all of the lead teachers, along with their director.

The training was divided into two parts, What is Challenging Behavior? and Why Do Kids Misbehave? I presented the printed activities and handouts from the accompanying Trainer's Guide and proceeded through the introductions. The most interactive component was participant response to the Facing the Challenge video clips. These short vignettes were perfect for initiating conversations, allowing the staff to explore their teaching styles, especially as related to their own experiences.

As a trainer, I liked the ability to flow between lecture-style presentation, discussions, and video clips. The expert commentators on the DVD increase the authority of the material, and serve to reinforce the concepts being taught. Teachers enjoy seeing authentic clips of children in the classroom, because they can relate to the scenarios and understand that they are not alone in dealing with similar situations. Finally, the Trainer Guide handouts can be used in a variety of creative ways, such as ice-breakers, follow-up activities, pre/post assessment of knowledge, and reflection/discussion points. In this way, the trainings can be customized to each audience and circumstance.

The center director later told me she was proud of how much her staff had grown as a result of the training, and that she was sure that the principles they learned would translate into successful interventions in the classrooms. To build on this success, we hope to present another series of trainings in the near future, and expand the audience to include child care providers from other centers throughout our county.

The "Facing the Challenge" training materials are available [online](#), or through the Devereux Foundation sales team at (866) Train-US (872-4687).

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what is school readiness?...

by Courtnie Wheelless, Contributing Editor, School Readiness Coordinator

"I can't work if I don't have child care. I can't afford child care when I do work." Too many of Florida's families face this problem every day. Low-income working families all over Florida struggle to make ends meet and provide quality child care for their children. Many of these families do not qualify for most types of assistance because they are employed. When these families work, they often do not earn enough to cover the cost of living, let alone the high price of child care. These families qualify for child care assistance, but are placed on long waiting lists because of the funding shortage for these programs.

The SR program helps families become self-sufficient. By assisting families with the cost of child care, families can afford to work. The SR program promotes physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of children; involves parents as their children's first teachers; prepares children to become ready for school; and provides parents with information on child development.

The SR program provides child care assistance to families who have children at-risk of school failure, children who have disabilities or special health care needs, children whose parents are migrant farmworkers, and children of low-income working families. To qualify for this program, a family's income must gross less than 150% of the federal poverty level; for example, a single mother with two children cannot make above \$26,400 a year to get assistance.

These families make a co-payment based on the total gross income and their family size. A fee schedule determines the parent fee based on whether their child(ren) need full-time or part-time care and how many children are in care. The child care provider collects the fee, which does not cover registration fees or other fees that a provider may charge. This assistance may be the difference in the ability to pay the light bill for many families.

Unfortunately, in many communities there are no available funds to enroll a child in the SR program. When funds are not available, a child's family joins others on the wait list. On the wait list, families must verify their contact information, employment, and family size every six (6) months. Once funding becomes available, families are enrolled from the wait list on a first come, first served basis. Many wait lists can be up to one year long.

Although the wait may seem hopeless, the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) hotline offers some relief to families on the wait list. CCR&R maintains a database of child care providers, some of whom offer reduced rates, sibling discounts, scholarships, or may be willing to negotiate a fee. CCR&R Specialists also help families by referring them to social service agencies that offer temporary assistance for utilities, rent, and other expenses, which may free up money in their budget to help pay for child care.

The SR Program has not been spared from the budget reductions enacted by the Legislature because of the economic downturn; however, through the informational efforts of the Agency for Workforce Innovation and the tireless lobbying efforts of advocacy groups and citizens, the cuts to the SR Program have been small compared to other programs. The Agency is committed to doing

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all that we can see that any future funding reductions have as little impact as possible on the early learning services provided to Florida's children and families.



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from the field...

by Stacy Howard, Contributing Editor, Consumer Affairs

The Office of Early Learning's field staff are at the center of attention in the recent reorganization. Most noticeably, we've changed the name coalition analysts to Regional Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinators. While continuing to attend board and other meetings, coordinators have shifted their focus to providing technical assistance and training to the early learning coalition staff.

The TA coordinators are a diverse and talented group of individuals with a vast amount of knowledge that ranges from operational expertise to program experience. This new role concentrates the coordinators' efforts on sharing this expertise more readily with coalition staff. The TA coordinators are excited and look forward to continuing to work closely with coalition staff in their expanded roles.

In spite of the new title, one thing has not changed. The TA coordinators are committed to being part of the continued progress and success of the coalitions and to support their needs and goals. Please feel free to contact your regional TA coordinator and let him or her know of training or technical assistance needed by your team or training you would like to see offered.

For more information about the TA coordinators, please call or email [Stacy Howard, Consumer Affairs Manager](#), at the Office of Early Learning, Telephone: 850-921-3468.

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resources and useful links...

The [Office of Early Learning \(OEL\)](#) website includes departmental updates and organizes information in a more user-friendly fashion. The website contains a wealth of information and valuable resources for parents, providers, and early learning coalitions. OEL released a manual to provide guidance on how to navigate the new website:

[Manual for OEL Website Navigation \(Powerpoint\)](#)

[Manual for OEL Website Navigation \(PDF\)](#)

Here are a few of the many helpful resources that are located on the website:

[Calendar of Events](#)

[OEL Publications and Presentations](#)

[AWI-FG-064 Sub recipient and Vendor Determinations](#)

[Coalition Burn Rate](#)



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contact *connections...*

We're always interested in what you have to say. For questions/comments about any articles you read in our newsletter, or if you have suggestions for future articles, please feel free to write us by clicking on any of the names below. Alternatively, you can contact us by writing or calling our Senior Editor, [Lisette Levy](#), telephone number 850-921-3164.

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