



NEWS RELEASE

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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County Honors Child Care Providers Today

Participants Thank County for Providing Opportunity to Better Serve Families

Success stories will be plentiful among the 100 plus child care providers gathered for a special breakfast reception at the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration today to celebrate their participation in a program that has improved the delivery of child care services to children and families in the County of Los Angeles.

Supervisor Don Knabe and the Los Angeles County Policy Roundtable for Child Care will honor child development centers and family child care providers who have made a commitment to improve the quality of their services by participating in the Steps to Excellence Project (STEP), a child care quality rating and support system underway in 10 communities within the County.

The breakfast reception is part of several activities taking place in Los Angeles County in celebration of the Week of the Young Child sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and its 300 local, state and regional affiliates. This week serves as a time to recognize the importance of early care and education, and to celebrate the teachers and policies that bring early childhood education to young children.

Sandy Banks, columnist with the Los Angeles Times, will address the child care providers and recognize the important services they provide to children and their families.

Following the reception, the STEP honorees will attend the Board of Supervisors meeting, where the Board will declare April 19 – 25 as Week of the Young Child in Los Angeles County.

Supervisor Knabe, representing the Fourth Supervisorial District, is a champion of STEP. “The STEP program is an innovative rating system that works directly with individuals who provide essential early childhood services to families in Los Angeles,” Knabe said. “High quality early childhood programs bring lasting benefits to Los Angeles and the state of California, and the STEP program is one key element in making sure we’re heading in the right direction.”

Participants in STEP voluntarily open their programs to an intense observation and administrative review process and have access to training and support if needed to improve their operations. Since

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the program began in July 2007, 1,156 individuals have participated in 78 training sessions, which includes more than 150 quality improvement grants awarded to STEP participants, making it possible for programs to meet STEP standards.

STEP is designed to accomplish three goals:

- Create incentives and supports for child development programs who offer high quality services;
- Provide parents with clear, concise information on the quality of child care settings;
- Provide benchmarks to determine if the quality of care is improving over time.

Maxine Higa from the Salvation Army Child Development Center in South Los Angeles, said she is thankful for the funding she received to “enhance our inside and outside environments and provide staff with professional development support which has improved our service delivery to the children and families in our community.”

The goal of the program is to educate parents and improve the quality and services of the centers. Participant Shatoune Shepard from Shepard Family Child Care in Inglewood said it fulfilled its goal. “STEP helped me improve the quality of my family child care by providing me with training and tools to support the emotional, social and cognitive development of the children I serve.” Echoing those sentiments is Victoria Coronel from the Coronel Family Child Care Palmdale, who said that “because of STEP, I now have more ideas and experience, and I have learned a great deal about the care and support of children from 0 to 3 years of age.”

Training topics have focused on the six areas rated by STEP shown by research to impact the quality of services provided, including safety, program quality, teacher qualifications and whether the center can accommodate children with special needs. The rating system also helps parents make informed choices when seeking quality child care for their children.

Sharon Sar, from the Sar Family Child Care in Long Beach, described what the program meant to her. “I am very thankful for being a part of STEP, a program that has embraced me and strengthened my child development skills and relationship building skills with my clients,” she said. “I now have more pride in what I am able to offer our community.”

Seventeen states have implemented child care quality rating and support systems. Los Angeles County’s STEP has acted as a local pioneer in this area, focusing on child development centers and family child care homes serving children from birth through five years. Based on legislation adopted in September 2008, an advisory committee has been formed to advise the Legislature on how California might approach implementing a statewide child care quality rating and support system.

“Caring for young children is hard work, yet working with young children affords early educators the opportunity to assist children in building the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior and mental and physical health,” Kathy Malaske-Samu from the Office of Child Care said. “Far from babysitting, high-quality early learning experiences will prepare children for school and for life.”

The process of rating programs began in February 2009. The program rating results will be available on the Office of Child Care website (www.childcare.lacounty.gov) beginning in June.