



Smart Start Update --- March 2014

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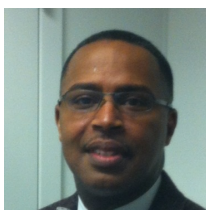
Child Care: Keeps Alabama Working Video Series

Last summer, the Alabama Partnership for Children commissioned M. Keivan Deravi, Ph.D. and Professor of Economics at Auburn University at Montgomery, to determine the economic impact of the early care and education industry on the economy of the state of Alabama. Findings from the report and the implications for the state are being detailed in a series of informational videos. Below is the second video in the series, featuring Jeremy Arthur, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama. To read the full report and learn more [click here](#).



Is Quality Child Care in the Eye of the Beholder?

**Dr. Calvin E. Moore, Jr., Division Director
Child Care Services Division
Alabama Department of Human Resources**



I think my entire twenty-three (23) year career in early care and education can be summed up as an attempt to answer that question. Absent a clear agreed upon definition of quality child care in our field, I believe I would answer yes. If I were to ask twenty-five (25) child care providers in Alabama to define quality child care I

Zero to Five Matters

*~A newsletter
focused on our most
valuable
investment~*

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Don't Forget
to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). The APC launched a social media campaign in November that targets parents, early childhood professionals, business leaders and our partners in the state. 'A Tweet a Day for Learning and Play' provides early education tips and research, including information on our initiatives and partners. Check it out today!

March FOCUS
Check out this month's Smart Start FOCUS [Packet](#) on quality early care and education matters!

Mark Your Calendars:

[Child Care Aware of America
2014 Symposium](#)
April 2-4, 2014
Washington DC

[Joining Hands
Day at the State House for
Week of the Young Child](#)
April 9, 2014



would get twenty-five (25) different answers. It is rather difficult to define the criteria for a high quality child care program. Even those of us who have been in the field for a long time have a tough time reaching consensus on this question. For me, high quality child care has three essential ingredients:

- A safe and healthy environment
- A well-trained and responsive staff
- The implementation of an appropriate curriculum producing positive child outcomes

Of course these elements can be present in a variety of settings. There are also many "right" ways to accomplish high quality programming for young children. I think intentionality is the glue that holds any high quality program together. It takes a lot of effort and planning to produce positive child outcomes. Child care workers make countless decisions throughout the day that help determine the quality of the experience for young children. Every staff member has to purposefully perform their duties every day. Working as a teacher aide in a Head Start classroom was the hardest job I have ever had. It was also the most rewarding at the end of the day.

In 2009, the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) Child Care Services Division began working on a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Stakeholders from across the state came together to develop increasing levels of quality criteria beyond the *Minimum Standards for Day Care Centers and Nighttime Centers*. The result of their work is now called Alabama Quality STARS, a comprehensive QRIS containing standards for five STAR levels of quality for center-based programs. Alabama quality STARS is currently being piloted in partnership with the University of Alabama's Department of Human Development and Family Studies with some funding provided by the Alabama Department of Children's Affairs. For the first time Alabama Quality STARS will enable parents, providers, and decision-makers in our state to identify the levels of quality in child care centers. We will also be able to ascertain quality gaps that exist in child care, target funding and support to address those gaps, and empower parents to make informed choices about their child's care. We will no longer have to guess what quality child care means in our state. Through Alabama Quality STARS we not only define what quality child care means here in Alabama, we also establish clear quality benchmarks for child care programs with a framework for improving child care for Alabama's most precious citizens.



All working parents want to know that their children are in a safe and healthy place during the day. But right now, many Alabama parents simply have no way of knowing that for sure. This is because there are important things that only a trained inspector can determine - whether wiring is up to code, whether facilities are cleaned and maintained in ways that protect health, whether staff

April 6-12, 2014
10am-12pm
Montgomery, AL

[Week of the Young Child](#)
April 6-12, 2014

[National Smart Start Conference](#)
May 5-8, 2014
Greensboro, NC

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We would like to thank:

The Daniel Foundation for their support of our Smart and Secure Children model of parent engagement and leadership through a \$7,500 grant. The APC is implementing this model in partnership with the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse College of Medicine.

The Alabama Partnership for Children would also like to thank **Alabama Power** for renewing their investment in young children and families with a \$15,000 grant to the Alabama Partnership for Children.



Special thanks to **Parents and Children Together in Decatur, Huntsville Early Intervention and Central Week School of Decatur** for hosting a Books, Balls and Blocks event on February 26, 2014.



qualifications are adequate, etc. But unlike other states in the region and the country, many Alabama child care facilities are not visited by inspectors trained to check child care facilities. They may be failing to meet minimum standards, and parents (and caregivers themselves) wouldn't know. Even a well-meaning provider doesn't bring the same expert eye as a trained inspector.

Families wouldn't want to eat at a restaurant that isn't inspected. Hair salons and nursing homes are required to be licensed and inspected regularly. It's simple common sense that the places where so many of our young children spend hours each day should - at the very least - meet basic health and safety standards.

If you are using child care . . . *Do You know?*

- If your child care facility is regularly inspected?
- If it is inspected, whether it meets state minimum standards for health and safety (including wiring and other codes)?
- If staff criminal background checks are on file?
- If staff have suitable training in First Aid and CPR?
- If staff have adequate training in early childhood development?
- Whether the caregiver-child ratio is appropriate for your child's age?
- If they have an emergency/weather plan?

If you are considering child care . . . *Use Your Senses*

Sight . . .

look for cleanliness; warm, nurturing care; children busily engaged in activities or babies in cribs with bottles propped in mouths, are caregivers interacting with children?

Sound . . .

do you hear music; caregivers laughing and playing with children; or do you hear crying, yelling, or harsh teacher direction?

Smell . . .

take a deep breath - is it fresh and clean; smoke-free?

Intuition . . .

when you're there does it feel inviting and warm; would you want to spend the day here?

For all Alabama Families . . . *Know the facts*

- Over half of the child care programs in Alabama are uninspected. Alabama is one of only 14 states that allows some child care programs to operate without inspection or regulation.
- A trained inspector can check important things a parent may not be able to.
- Other states require minimum standards and regular inspections of all child care facilities - just as we do for restaurants, hair salons, nursing facilities, etc.
- Inspections can offer additional reassurance to all parents - as well as all

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child care providers who want to run safe, healthy facilities.

- When some facilities don't have to be licensed and inspected, all facilities face pressure to cut corners.

For more information, visit www.alabamachildcarefacts.org.

Celebrate Week of the Young Child

April 6th - 12th

Week of the Young Child is being celebrated this year April 6th through 12th. This celebration provides opportunities to recognize the needs of young children and to recognize the caregivers and other adults involved in building better futures for all children.

Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by [The National Association for the Education of Young Children](http://www.naeyc.org) (NAEYC), the world's largest organization of early childhood educators and others dedicated to improving the quality of early education programs for children birth through age eight.

This year the Alabama Partnership for Children, along with other state advocates, will celebrate Week of the Young Child, and we hope that you will too!

The following are easy ways to celebrate Week of the Young Child:

- Host a day at the mall, with activities for children and information for parents from family service organizations.
- Have a children's parade through town.
- Provide lunch for the individuals that care for the special children in your life.
- Have a proclamation signed by a city government official.
- Post art done by children in local restaurants and businesses.
- Host a breakfast at your child's child care center to honor the providers.
- Decorate community store windows to promote the celebration.
- Have an art project set up at a child care center for parents and children to do together.
- Support programs that provide quality early childhood education by volunteering at a local school, community center, Head Start or child care program.
- Have local newspapers cover activities during the week.
- Host literacy trainings for parents.
- Have an award where parents can nominate someone they think is an exceptional friend of young children.
- Educate yourself and others about the importance of quality early childhood education in preparing young children for school.

For more information on how to celebrate Week of the Young Child, please [click here](#) or contact Michele Smith Piggott toll-free at (866) 711-4025 or by emailing mpiggott@SmartStartAlabama.org.

local system of resources and support that enables parents, families, and others who care for young children to ensure that they are healthy, protected, nurtured, and offered every opportunity to succeed in life.

Phone: 866-711-4025 | social@smartstartalabama.org

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