

Scholars for Excellence in Child Care Program – Background Information

The Scholars for Excellence in Child Care program was designed for child care professionals to have the opportunity to go to college to work toward a CDA credential, Certificate of Mastery and or associate degree.

In 1999, the Reaching for Stars program received national attention for its potential to significantly improve the quality of child care in Oklahoma. One of the few disappointments however was the slow participation rates of child care providers in moving up the stars levels. Child care providers identified higher educational levels as major barrier. Providers admitted reluctance, fear and low literacy levels kept them from taking college courses. A program was needed to improve the quality of care in licensed child care facilities, reduce staff turnover in the field of child care, improve child care educational opportunities and increase teacher compensation.

The director of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services convened a task force to address this issue. The task force was comprised of State Regents' staff, two and four-year child development/early childhood faculty, and early childhood professional development entities and the OKDHS division of child care services staff members.

It was determined that the majority of child care providers would not go to college "on their own". Through discussions it was discovered that child care professionals have many preconceived ideas about attending college. They have a fear of failure – they don't think they can be successful in college because they have a limited educational background (some may have a GED or have only completed high school, which for many has been quite a number of years ago, and they have never given college a second thought, or if they did, they did not have the resources to attend. Additionally, managing personal lives and going to college seems overwhelming, there might not be a quiet place to study, many are single parents and have no support system in place, and many have low self-esteem.

The task force discussed the need for each two-year college campus to have someone that would go to the child care providers rather than expect the child care providers to come to the colleges. It was determined that each campus should have a scholar coordinator to not only act as support for the providers as they begin and continue their college coursework but to help the providers navigate the college system and help them with determining their educational goals – acting as their advisor, helping to complete the financial aid paperwork, college admission and enrollment forms, as well as the scholarship application.

In June 2000, the State Regents entered into a contract with OKDHS to fund the scholar coordinator position (along with operational costs) at each community college in the state.

Since July 2004, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services has contracted with the State Regents to administer the scholarship portion of the Scholars for Excellence in Child Care (Scholars) program. Prior to July 2004, Oklahoma was a "TEACH" (Teaching, Education, and Compensation Helps) state. TEACH is a licensed scholarship program through North Carolina and was administered through the University of Oklahoma's Center for Early Childhood Professional Development. It was determined by DHS that it would be more cost effective to administer the scholarship as part of the Scholars program.

Oklahoma City Community College Scholars Program Results

Since program inception thru fall 08 there have been approximately:

7 CDA credentials awarded to scholars

94 Certificates of Mastery earned

13 Associate Degrees earned, and

9 Director's Certificates of Completion awarded through the Scholars Program office

Note - there may have been more CDAs than reported - the credential is awarded through the Council for Professional Recognition and scholars usually receive the credential a semester or two after they complete coursework and may not always let the coordinator know it was received.

Source: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education/Kiki McWilliams, April 6, 2009