

Harford County Directors Association

2018 November Report MSCCA

The Harford County Directors Association started our year with a kickoff meeting in September that was well attended. We've welcomed some new members and new directors attending from centers that have been long standing members. We had a discussion about our goals and priorities and began to plan our year.

In October we shared information from the MSCCA Leadership Symposium and had a COK training at our HCDA meeting presented by Harford Community College on leadership and management skills and team building.

In November we invited representatives from Harford County Public Schools to visit our meeting to talk about the transition for our preschool students into Kindergarten in the county. Kathy Griffith, coordinator for preschool and kindergarten in HCPS shared the transition process. Parents receive a transition form from the school as a part of the Kindergarten registration packet that they give to the preschool or childcare center to complete for each child. These forms are added to the child's cumulative records and kindergarten teachers review the forms at the start of the school year. As directors it has been our experience that only about half of our children bring in a form to be completed. Some directors who are also parents reported not receiving the form in their packets and we recognize that some parents may not provide the form to the school. Kathy is following up with schools to make sure that the transition form is included in the kindergarten registration packets. Kathy also shared the most recent update of the form to our directors' group electronically. We are advising that providers have parents sign the form in the spring indicating the school where the child will be attending and have teachers complete a form for all students to send in. Schools plan their own transition activities for incoming kindergarten students, and providers are encouraged to contact their feeder schools directly to arrange for transition activities in the spring. In our group, there were programs that invite Kindergarten teachers in to meet with the preschool 4-year-old children before the end of the school year, and programs that arrange a field trip to a local school for the 4-year-old class to visit a Kindergarten classroom, see the cafeteria, etc. We will survey the membership to gather other ideas for transition activities to share with the group.

We also discussed the transition for our students with identified special needs and for those without IEPs who still may need extra attention and support for a successful transition. The current process for transitioning students with an IEP includes scheduling a meeting with the preschool teacher (if the teacher is from the public school), the kindergarten teacher, and the parent. The meeting is an IEP team meeting and is regulated by the IEP protocol. As a group we expressed concern that for children in private programs, the preschool teacher is seldom if ever invited to be a part of this process. We feel that this is an oversight and that including these educators can make a difference in the transition of the child. Because this is an IEP process, parents are free to invite anyone they choose to the meeting, but in the past there hasn't been a protocol for informing parents that they can invite the child's preschool teachers or child care providers. Missy Romano, coordinator for special education in HCPS, attended our meeting and recognized this disconnect. Although the child care provider is not part of the list that is invited automatically, HCPS has promised to make an effort to ask parents if they would like to invite

the child care provider or preschool teacher and to contact these teachers directly to be a part of the process. HCPS is also looking into the legal guidelines to investigate whether any other documentation may be requested from providers in lieu of attendance at that meeting.

We also recognize that there are many children who do not have identified disabilities that may need extra support in order to make a successful transition into kindergarten. We recognize the increasing awareness of the importance of trauma-informed care, and that providers have often been working with these children over extended periods of time for many hours each week. The school system has encouraged providers to make sure they fill out the transition forms (have the parents sign first!) with pertinent information about these children so that kindergarten teachers will have a starting point for assisting these children in the fall. Although providers cannot share specific information about the background situations, they can and should share information about children's behavior and executive functioning skills. If the program has used successful interventions for the child, that information can and should be shared as well. Providers can attach relevant documentation to the transition form but programs are encouraged to keep this brief as kindergarten teachers are likely to become overwhelmed if too much documentation accompanies the child.

Harford County has organized a work group to examine the services and supports available for children and families in our county from birth to age 5. This work group was represented at our meeting by several HCPS employees and they have committed to making the transition to kindergarten a priority in their work group in the coming months. It is our goal to create a working partnership between the school system and the provider community so that our students are supported through this transition to set them up for success as they move forward in school. As a provider community, we are encouraged by the partnership we are currently building with the school system to support our students. In past years, HCPS has visited our meeting to share basic information about what the children should know and be able to do by the time they begin kindergarten, and the HCPS model for preschool has been shared as the ideal for our community programs to strive toward. It is our feeling that the children in our programs are well served by the schedules and curriculum that we provide and that parents are well served by the choices that they have for preschool and childcare from the various providers in our county. We are excited by the opportunity to have our providers treated with the professionalism that they deserve, and to create a meaningful dialogue with the county school system, and we are hopeful that this partnership will create a better transition for our students into the public school system when they leave our programs.