



Early Education and Care Exceptional Educator and Instructional Leader Awards

The exceptional instructional leaders and exceptional educators are, by region:

Western Massachusetts:

Laurie Smith is an exceptional educator who works in a family childcare program. She has been a Family Child Care Educator since 1997. Currently, Ms. Smith is enrolled at UMass/ Amherst and will receive her BA degree in the spring of 2013. Ms. Smith is interested in advocacy and leadership and through this interest she enrolled in a course at Wheelock College called "Leadership in Early Education and Care". Ms. Smith also created the Family Child Care Association which provides supports for fellow family child care educators.

Shad Hanrahan is an exceptional instructional leader who supports center-based and out of school time programs. Mr. Hanrahan provides leadership to his staff and promotes guidance around best practices and promotion of quality services for children and families. Mr. Hanrahan is an effective communicator and he provides opportunities for his staff to engage in professional development. Mr. Hanrahan works with community organizations and is currently collaborating with Chicopee community schools providing a weekend recreational program for many of the homeless children being served by the Chicopee School system.

Central Massachusetts:

Denny Acero is an exceptional educator who works in a family child care program. She has received her CDA. Ms. Acero is dedicated to supporting children and families and continues to increase her knowledge and skills by regularly participating in professional development opportunities. Ms. Acero is an active member of the National Association for Family Child Care.

Northeast Massachusetts:

Lisa Jones-Melo is an exceptional instructional leader who works in a center-based program. She provides support to her teachers and views herself as a coach, taking opportunities to point out teachable moments. Ms. Jones-Melo shares resources with her staff to keep them up to date on the most current research in the early childhood field. She also continues to improve her skills by participating in training opportunities to strengthen her coaching techniques. Ms. Jones-Melo is currently a Literacy Coach and Mentor within multiple preschool classrooms.

Denise O'Neil is an exceptional educator who also works at a center-based program. Ms. O'Neil is a dedicated educator and has been described as self sufficient and willing to look for opportunities to increase her learning. She takes the initiative to learn new techniques and uses multiple styles of teaching to support children. Ms. O'Neil works well with families and provides opportunities for them to learn and participate in classroom activities to support continuity between home and school. Recently she worked with Loews store and received materials to support activities where she included parents in the experience.

Sheila Costa is an exceptional educator who works at a family child care program. Ms. Costa has applied for and received grants to support her childcare and she regularly seeks to increase her skills and knowledge through professional development opportunities to support high quality services for children and families. Ms. Costa received her Associate's Degree with Honors in Early Education and Care from North Shore Community College in May 2012. In the fall she will matriculate at Gordon College and has been honored with one of their highest merit-based awards, the Presidential Scholarship. Ms. Costa will pursue a Bachelor's degree and intends to double major in Early Childhood Education and Arts. Ms. Costa was awarded a QRIS grant to support quality in her program. An interest of Ms. Costa's is literature and one of her goals of furthering her education is to write and illustrate via pictures and books.

Deniece Rodriguez is an exceptional instructional leader who works at an afterschool program. She is supportive to her staff and generously shares her knowledge on topics that will support staff around good practices for children. Ms. Rodriguez enrolled in a degree program at Springfield College and has completed classes in early childhood; she continues to take classes to increase her knowledge in the early childhood field. Ms. Rodriguez has encouraged a staff member to volunteer his time as a cheerleading coach. She sees this as an important role for staff to form working partnerships between school, families and various local organizations to increase their understanding of supporting children within the context of a larger community. Ms. Rodriguez stated that her program was the first to pilot the "Creative Minds" curriculum which is a curriculum that supports art and is effective in reaching young people at risk of failure by providing tools to explore and interpret their experiences.

Southeast Massachusetts, Cape Cod and Islands:

Suzanne Brzezinski is an exceptional educator who works at a center-based program. She has been employed at her program for over 10 years. Ms. Brzezinski works closely with her administration to align her experiences gained from professional development opportunities to provide consistent and quality services for children. She works with a wide range of age levels from preschool, kindergarten and elementary programs and is also certified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Ms. Brzezinski holds a Master's degree which she obtained while working at her current program. She is completing a post graduate program from UMass/Boston to obtain her special education certification. Ms. Brzezinski is certified in "Open Circle", "The Skillful Teacher", and "Wilson Reading", to enhance her teaching skills. Through her connection with P.A.C.E. organization she runs the "Family Fun Day", at a vocational school.

Patricia Plummer-Wilson is an exceptional instructional leader who works at a center-based program. She provides training opportunities for staff to increase and expand educator development. Ms. Plummer-Wilson has established planning time for educators across age levels to come together as teams to learn from each other and improve existing programs for children. She regularly seeks out professional development opportunities to stay current with the latest research to ensure her staff continues to provide quality opportunities for children. Ms. Plummer-Wilson supports collaboration with community partners such as early intervention, Department of Children and Families, public schools and Community Care Services and others to provide a wealth of resources for children and families. Her agency also hosted classes from Massasoit Community College and Fisher College on site. In addition, her agency has also

piloted a worksite practicum. Her agency is also participating in “Raising a Reader Program”, which includes a lending library for families and a series of parent trainings.

Julie Vareika is an exceptional instructional leader who works at a center-based program. She continues to attend professional development opportunities to provide support to her staff and share the latest research to support high quality services for children. Ms. Vareika works closely with her educators to move them along a path to build their skills and competencies through completing professional development plans. Ms. Vareika’s agency has partnered with two colleges (University of Massachusetts and Providence College) who have supported staff to attend college courses in education at reduced cost.

Metro Boston

Tracey Nardone is an exceptional instructional leader who for 20 years has been the director at a center-based program. Ms. Nardone promotes team building and describes herself as a hands-on director. She believes in keeping current with the latest research to better support learning for children. Ms. Nardone also challenges her staff to continue to build their own knowledge by introducing current events related to children to spark conversations and engage educators to improve their own practices. Ms. Nardone supports her staff by allowing them opportunities to participate in site visits with a different early childhood programs to see other practices.

Andrea Urbano is an exceptional instructional leader who also works at a center-based program. She has been employed at her program for 3 years and has cultivated a cohesive environment by aligning three centers with the program’s mission and vision, focusing on children’s individual social, emotional and educational development as the important values required to support children’s needs. Ms. Urbano encourages her staff to problem solve situations to further develop their own thinking and abilities to support the needs of children in their classrooms. She keeps current with the latest research and professional development opportunities to support her staff and encourages them to build and enhance their own learning. Ms. Urbano participated in the Center for Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) training which supports children’s social-emotional development and she implemented this approach into every classroom.

Doris Spoor is an exceptional educator who works at a family child care program. She earned her CDA from Urban College and then went on to receive her Associates Degree in 2010 by attending school at night. Ms. Spoor continues to expand her knowledge and growth in the early childhood field by pursuing professional development opportunities. She works closely with families, providing take-home activities for them to reinforce the continuity between school and home. Ms. Spoor is a member of many networks in her community which she feels supports her learning and ability to provide resources to families. Ms. Spoor has been trained and certified in the Ages and Stages Questionnaire Screening, which is a tool to support professionals around supporting families and children’s in their developmental and social-emotional needs.