

UD to create center for childhood education

State awards university with \$2.4 million grant

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The Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood will provide professional development opportunities to early childhood educators. Through workshops, seminars and courses, the institute aims to serve a range of practitioners such as early interventionists and those who work with children with disabilities, said Kathy Wilson, a state education associate.

"Research confirms that professional development of staff is a critical component for improving the quality of early care and education programs," she said.

In Delaware, 93 percent of infant and toddler teachers and 58 percent of teachers of children ages 3 to 5 only have a high school education; some lack literacy skills beyond a sixth grade level, said Audrey Noble, director of UD's Delaware Education Research and Development Center.

Wilson said the institute, which will open Nov. 1, plans to offer courses that will give college credit to educators seeking bachelor or master's degrees.

The majority of the \$2.4 million will come from the federal Child Care Development Fund and be distributed over the next three years. The institute will be housed in the university's Center for Disabilities Study, and UD is in the process of hiring a director and other staff members.

Beth Mineo, director of the Center for Disabilities Study, said the institute plans to collaborate with other organizations that offer professional development in early childhood and act as a clearinghouse to make these services accessible to all sectors of the early childhood field.

"The institute is really an umbrella structure. This will be a one-stop shop for people to come here and find out what opportunities are available for them," Mineo said.

In addition to providing professional development, the institute plans to research best practices for early childhood education and evaluate the impact professional development has on child care centers.

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