

*Leaders in Literacy* is a pilot project of the Barksdale Reading Institute in partnership with The Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University and the W.K.Kellogg Foundation. The pilot project is located in West Point and Greenville with the main objective centering on the language development of preschool children. Childcare centers that work with children who will attend Barksdale Schools in the two communities are voluntarily participating in the initiative which features extensive on-site staff development for childcare staff and utilization of age appropriate literacy materials. The eighteen month project targets children birth up to age four years

ChevronTexaco, along with many of Mississippi's leading experts such as MSU's Early Childhood Institute and the Barksdale Reading Institute, is developing a certification process whereby communities can be recognized for their efforts to benefit their youngest citizens. The voluntary program, due to be formally announced later this year, will rely on public and private partnerships and existing state resources. Mississippi has many early childhood programs that have been identified as "best practices." The community certification process will draw from these success stories and use them as a guide to develop standards for communities to address preK education, childcare, healthcare, and parent training. The certification process will be tailored to fit different types of communities, and there will be ways to reward communities that meet the standard. In the end, children will be healthier and better prepared to begin school.

The Mississippi Early Childhood Association provides a complimentary copy of the Rob Reiner produced video "I'm Your Child" to parents. Funding is provided via the Phil Harden Foundation.

Several initiatives being funded via DHS grants:

- ETV's "Right from Birth Series" is targeted at parents and caregivers of young children, and presents information to help them prepare the foundation for their children's future learning and success in school. The series currently airs on 118 PBS stations.
- The Nurturing Homes Initiative is a collaborative effort of the Department of Human Services, the Mississippi State University Extension Service and the Alcorn State University Cooperative Extension Program. The initiative provides educational information, training and technical assistance to non-licensed family home providers that offer full day, full year child care services to children of families falling below the 200% poverty level.
- Mississippi State's Early Childhood Institute's *Partnerships for Quality Child Care Project* assesses nearly 174 childcare centers that receive quality enhancement funding from DHS and who serve low income children for the purpose of improving the quality of care provided at the centers. The Institute uses quality rating scales that are used across the country to guide the technical assistance provided by the project staff.
- The Department of Human Services' Office of Children and Youth provides memberships in the Mississippi Early Childhood Association for over 450 childcare directors of centers who participate in the child care certificate program.

- The Office of Children and Youth also enables these same directors and one staff member to attend a continuing education class on early childhood development.
- The Office of Children and Youth's Child Care Director's credentialing program provides a 130-hour curriculum on best practices in child care management for child care directors and staff. The child care workers' scholarship program provides scholarships to child care workers to obtain their two-year associate degree or a four-year bachelor's degree.

Mississippi Valley State University and the Department of Education have collaborated to recently submit a grant proposal to the Department of Labor to create a career ladder certification process for child care workers.

Housed in the Department of Education's Office of Reading, Early Childhood and Language Arts, the Mississippi Head Start Collaboration Office is a state-level office established for the purpose of building a collaborative partnership between federally-funded Head Start programs and state-funded early childhood programs to improve the quality of services to low-income children and their families in Mississippi.

The Division of Medicaid, the State Department of Health, the Department of Finance and Administration, the Department of Human Services, Kidney Care Incorporated Foundation of Mississippi and other entities have collaborated to submit a health initiative support grant application to the Southern Institute on Children and Families, in conjunction with the Robert Wood Foundation, to implement a state coordinated integrated health care delivery system for children.

First Steps Early Intervention is a Department of Health program providing services to children 0-3 who have developmental delays. First Steps makes educational/developmental resources available to help families of infants from birth to age three recognize possible problems so that help can be obtained as early as possible.

The Mississippi Forum on Children and Families serves as Mississippi's affiliate to the Parents as Teachers program, which covers child development from birth to age 5 and suggests parent activities that encourage language and intellectual growth, curiosity and social skills. The Forum also operates a state-wide child care resource and referral service for businesses that assist employees in finding needed child care.