



PDO PATHWAYS

Quarterly News and Views to Advance Professional Development in Early Childhood Education across Pennsylvania

eceptdo.org

QUARTER 1 - 2021

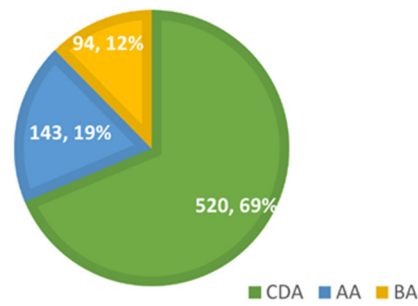
ECE PDO Leadership Update

2021: All Eyes Forward and Focused

WE WORK BEST WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER.

That mantra is central to the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization (ECEPDO)@PASSHE’s mission to increase pathways for professional development among those who care for the youngest among us. We are a formidable force for positive change that is forging new career pathways for many who may otherwise have found self-advancement beyond their financial reach.

As disrupters of a longtime pattern that has historically made it difficult for an early childcare professional to advance their education and earning potential, the PDO’s no-cost/low-cost access to college credit-bearing education and a reservoir of supports have swelled the ranks of PDO-sponsored student-workers. By the end of 2021, there were 757 students enrolled in PASSHE PDO-sponsored coursework, most of whom are pursuing Child



Development Associate certificates (69%); 19% are pursuing associate’s degrees; and 12% are pursuing bachelor’s degrees. There are currently nearly 2,000 student records in the ECEPDO database, suggesting the level of interest goes well beyond those currently enrolled in coursework. Our team of liaisons, coaches, and education partners continue to encourage and facilitate enrollment.

PDO-sponsored students are required to work a yearly average of at least 25 hours/week in a licensed early childcare center. This means they are often pulled in many directions as they balance work, academic demands, and home life. Recognizing the challenges this can present, the PDO offers a bench-strength of supports, including free 24/7 online tutoring, coaching/mentoring, bilingual content, books/materials, technology tools, opportunities for apprenticeship, and beyond. We will continue to assess the demand for and success of supports and will adjust accordingly. Pledged to meet our mission, the ECEPDO continues to strategize and put into place the ways and

means to provide equitable access to education by recruiting students working in centers to increase their STAR levels. While we celebrate the achievements accomplished so far, we are not resting in our collective efforts to expand educational access to those working in communities where quality early education is needed most.



Given the percentage of enrolled students in CDA coursework, we have our sights set on helping CDA graduates articulate their earned credits to associate’s degrees. This makes-sense approach enables students to achieve incremental, manageable academic advancement with portable college credits.

While the COVID pandemic forced online learning, as opposed to traditional face-to-face classroom learning, we are confident the virtual format actually sparked many to begin or advance their professional development journeys. For many, not having to attend a face-to-face class to which they would otherwise have to travel made it comfortable and more readily accessible – particularly with PDO-sponsored technology supports where they have been needed. *(Continued on back page.)*



Talk to Us!

We welcome your ideas about how we can continue to offer supports that advance early childhood education pathways by breaking down barriers to professional development. Connect with us on social or at eceptdo.org.



ECEPDO@PASSHE

Director Jennifer L. Pyles, Ph.D. (at right)
Assistant Director Elizabeth (Liz) Knouse, MA (at left)

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Meet PDO Bachelor's Degree Student Kelsie Hallahan

A Second Chance to Advance Her Heart's Desire

KELSIE HALLAHAN recognizes the value of a good education and following her heart's desire to foster the development of young children. Kelsie has been accepted into the ECEPDO and is pursuing a second bachelor's degree from Shippensburg University – this time in Teacher Education with Certification, as she wants to teach young children.

A 2017 Shippensburg graduate with a degree in Communications-Journalism, Kelsie found that while she enjoyed working in that field, she continued to feel a heart-tug toward the Children's Center in Camp Hill, PA, where her mother has been a director for over 30 years. Kelsie worked at the center after high school graduation and in her words "fell in love with it and the children."

"Working with young children is so rewarding," she says, adding, "Without PDO funding, I could not afford to pursue this dream. It would be out of reach for me financially," indicating that most of the general education classes she took while studying for the communications degree will transfer toward the education degree. As a result, Kelsie will complete her second degree in about two years.

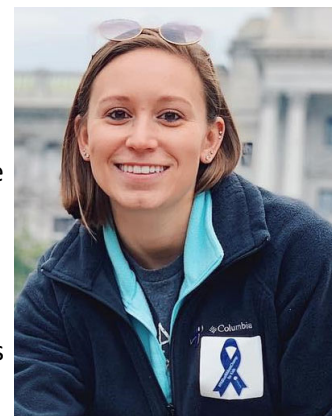
Kelsie has especially enjoyed the course she has taken in Positive Behavior Development. "I learned so much about age-appropriate behaviors for young children and ways to

calm them," she adds. She has also taken courses in Cognitive Development, as well as Becoming an Early Childhood Professional.

Currently working with children aged 3-5 years, Kelsie has a first-hand opportunity to witness the developmentally different ways children learn – even across those two short years of growth.

Recalling one of the most impactful experiences of her own early years, Kelsie says that as a first grader, she exchanged letters with a "celebrity" as a prayer partner. As it turns out, that celebrity was the late Penn State football coach, Joe Paterno.

"Joe Pa and I exchanged many letters that I treasure," she recalls, adding, "My first grade teacher, Sister MaryAnn, made this possible and it created many wonderful keepsakes and memories for me. I want to be someone who makes happy memories for other children." Good luck, Kelsie!



Meet ECEPDO Apprenticeship Coordinator Dawn Manetta

Early Childhood Apprenticeships Work!

APPRENTICESHIP COORDINATOR DAWN MANETTA'S energy and enthusiasm make her a magnetic force in early childhood education! Dawn's career has been largely dedicated to the care, development, and instruction of young children, as well as teaching adults at the college level. From early career days as a childcare center worker to opening her own center with a deliberate outreach to disadvantaged families, Dawn Manetta has an unwavering dedication to young children, students, and the early childhood workforce.

"The opportunity for early childhood workers to become apprentices is a much-needed culture shift in the way we think about and reward the value of those who care for the youngest among us," she says. Focused on teaching on-the-job learning coursework and other classes to help students advance their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, Dawn believes the early childcare apprenticeship, sponsored by the ECEPDO, is a true game-changer for both employers and their employees.

"Apprenticeships are designed to address systemic issues associated with staff turnover. We look at reasons why early care workers leave their jobs. It is not typically because they don't like their work but rather, because they are not earning a living wage. In short, they cannot afford to stay on the job without an opportunity to advance their educational credentials and increase their earning capacity," she adds.

Apprenticeships address barriers to career advancement. Beyond simply targeting wage or one aspect of turnover, apprenticeships change the culture of the work environment and in turn, "the benefits to children are exponential," Dawn says, adding, "Employers benefit from more qualified workers who experience greater on-the-job satisfaction that comes with feeling valued and being paid appropriately. The result is that they stay on the job and children benefit from stability."

Through earned college credit articulation from the apprenticeship to an associate's degree program, the portability of credits earned takes professional development to whole new level. "It is nothing short of an amazing opportunity that all early childcare employers and employees should consider," Dawn encourages. Check out Dawn Manetta's ongoing Zoom sessions at the Events page at ecepdo.org to learn more, or reach her at DMManetta@ship.edu.



Caring for ourselves as we care for others

Mindfulness Matters: An Essential Tool for Self-Care

THE SNOOZE BUZZER ON THE ALARM was a sharp reminder of a restless night and set the tone for the first hours of what would be a stressful morning. Breakfast burned, your own children missed the bus, and your car keys went missing. Traffic was miserable and your umbrella turned inside out, soaking you in the downpour from your car to the entrance of the childcare center where you work.

You are now running late, and the minute you take off your rain-drenched coat, children are already clamoring for your attention with 20 questions. You can feel your anxiety level soar to match your blood pressure. You realize you need to **STOP** and **BREATHE**. It's a perfect time to exercise mindfulness to reduce stress and refocus on the delight and duties associated with the care of young children.

As early childhood education providers, our days are undoubtedly filled with both fun and at times, a good dose of frustration. How can we “get centered,” so our perspective is healthy, our disposition reflects our true compassion for children, and our words and actions are peaceful, while still being instructive?

By practicing mindfulness – or the awareness that arises from purposefully and non-judgmentally paying attention to the present moment – we can train our brains to focus on the here and now, and are not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us. It’s not as elusive as it may seem.

MINDFUL BREATHING

Breathing is at the core of mindfulness-based stress reduction. We can practice mindful breathing while waiting for our lunch to warm in the microwave, when we’re standing in line at the grocery store, or just as we drift off to sleep. Whether we have 30 seconds or 30 minutes, mindful breathing can lower our stress levels. It’s portable and free!

Allow your mind to deliberately focus on your breath. Notice where it is most obvious in the body – the nostrils, the chest, maybe the belly. Try to breathe in deeply and slowly through the nose, and feel the air fill your chest cavity. Exhale slowly and experience the feeling. Let go; feel and hear yourself breathe (You may need to take a three-minute bathroom break to do this!)

Continued on the next page

MINDFULNESS TIPS (How To Ease Your Stress On The Spot)



Interrupt your thoughts with the prompt “stop!” and pause whatever you are doing in that moment.



Notice your breathing for a second. Breathe in slowly through the nose, expand your belly, and exhale slowly through your nose.



Notice your thoughts, feelings and even bodily responses. What thoughts do you notice? What emotions arose? How does your body feel? Try to sit with whatever you find without judgement for a few moments.



Thoughtfully consider how you’d like to respond. What’s one thing you can focus on right now? What’s your number-one priority at this moment? Narrow down your focus and take it one small step at a time.



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ECEPDO Leadership Update

The ecepdo.org website – launched in January 2021 – continues to expand in content and to connect visitors with information, inspiration, and support. Very soon, we will be incorporating podcasts on the ecepdo.org website as another way to reach visitors through an audio-focused medium. Stay tuned!

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Mindfulness Matters

Breathing into the belly is a powerful way to activate the body’s relaxation response. By using our breath to anchor us, we avoid minds that wander into problem-solving and worry. When we harness this natural, built-in way to be “present in the moment,” it’s easier to be compassionate to ourselves and to those around us.

FIND ANOTHER ANCHOR

If mindful breathing isn’t your thing, consider another type of anchor, such as the feeling of your hands touching one another or the feeling of your feet on the ground, and use it as your “anchor” when your mind insists on wandering.

BENEFITS



We might think multi-tasking is essential to avoid forgetting about something important, but research has shown that we actually minimize our productivity when our minds are scattered. By allowing ourselves even a few mindful moments each day, we may feel

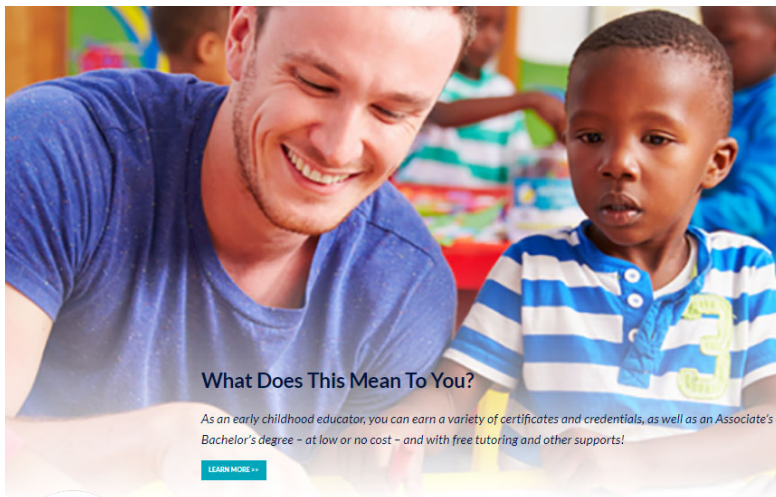
more refreshed and can increase mental sharpness. We may lose focus a dozen times in 10 minutes, and that’s OK! Like many worthwhile things, mindfulness takes practice.

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

Mindfulness is to the mind what regular physical activity is to the body; the more you do it, the better you get at it and the better you feel. If you can practice daily, even for a few minutes, it can help to reduce stress.

We would not expect to get up and run a marathon if we have never run a half-mile. Give yourself some time and grace; you’ll get there.

Thanks to Marnie Aylesworth, D. Ed, for contributing to this article. Other sources include mindfulnessercises.com, mindful.org, and freemindfulness.org, all of which offer many online tips, tools, and resources to advance your mindfulness journey.



What Does This Mean To You?

As an early childhood educator, you can earn a variety of certificates and credentials, as well as an Associate's or Bachelor's degree – at low or no cost – and with free tutoring and other supports!

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



Further, with the advent of PDO-sponsored apprenticeships (earn-while-you-learn) and concurrent enrollment at the high school level (where juniors and seniors can earn college credits for early childhood education coursework), we continue to adapt best practices to expand a growing menu of professional development opportunities.

Join us as we keep all eyes focused on the future.



This project is supported by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) of Pennsylvania’s Department of Human Services (DHS) and Pennsylvania’s Department of Education (PDE). For more information, visit dhs.pa.gov and education.pa.gov.

