



Delaware partners with TFA to train early educators

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[Teach for America](#) has partnered with the [Delaware Early Care and Education Office](#) to train infant and toddler teachers, using [Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge](#) funds and state funding streams. The state launched the initiative in 2013, and so far, 11 early educators have gone through the training.

TFA's early childhood teacher training program began in 2006 and has since trained more than 1,100 preschool educators in 22 of its 46 regions where TFA operates.

"TFA pre-K teachers work typically through partnerships with community based ECE centers and organizations, including [Head Start](#) centers and child care -- like our partnerships in Delaware," said Laura Dallas McSorley, managing director of the [Early Childhood Education Initiative](#). "While some districts might be using Title I dollars, there is diversity -- many districts are operating Head Start classrooms, have local dollars, or using state pre-K slots."

Focus on infant and toddler educators

While other TFA early-childhood partnerships have been with a variety of centers and pre-K programs, some of which are part of large traditional schools districts, Delaware is an example of an effort broadly supported by state and local elected officials, the education community, and the philanthropic community, aimed at producing long-term infant and toddler early educators. McSorley lauded Delaware Gov. Jack Markell and the state legislature for committing \$22 million for early childhood initiatives in FY 2013. She said the state has also done "a great job of drawing down federal Race to the Top-Early Learning and Preschool Development grants."

Delaware does not have universal preschool, and universal kindergarten is a recent development, so fostering early education is important, said Laurisa Schutt, executive director of TFA Delaware. She said garnering respect for early education requires a shift in thinking from providing day care to infants and toddlers to laying the foundation for K-12 learning regardless of where the children have their preschool experience.

TFA early educators are in three centers in Delaware. Melissa Browne is leading the Latin American Community Center to extend its learning model from 0-5 year olds through K-12. Browne "believed that expeditionary learning [which uses in-depth, hands-on projects] was the way to work and needed a cohort [of early educators]," Schutt said.

The model helps prepare young children for the Common Core English/language arts, but since the [Common Core State Standards](#) are not for infants and preschoolers, Browne "took it upon herself [to link those standards to early education] and the culture and rigor has changed in less than a year," Schutt said.

Embedded PD

Training and certification that emphasizes early learning is foundational and although the program's initial training is six weeks, there is on-going training through instructional coaches who help early educators implement practices in the classroom.

Professional development on oral language, Schutt said, helps teachers "think about what's important for a child and setting a goal. What's the vocabulary that is going to make them an advocate to say 'no, I don't want to play with that toy'" and how to facilitate "great read-alouds with discussions about 'I wonder how that character felt.'"

The Delaware Office of Early Learning is a partner in providing PD for all providers and has also focused on literacy and the differences for infants versus toddlers.

Shakira Perez teaches two-year olds at the Latin American Center and came to the program as a college graduate who wanted to serve a community with similar background as her: she speaks Spanish and came from a low-income background.

She lauded the professional development model for distinguishing "what's appropriate for infants and what's appropriate for toddlers" and fostering her understanding of how to create engaging lesson plans for young learners.

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