

This year in Harford and Cecil counties we welcomed some new faces into our Director's organization, and are expanding our network to keep providers informed and to work together to build a great community. In October we had a training on Outdoor Learning Opportunities at Forest Hill Nature Preschool through Project Act. In November, Kathy Griffin visited us from Harford County Public Schools. We discussed our common goal of aligning curriculum for our preschoolers with kindergarten entry expectations, and our desire to know more about the curriculum in kindergarten and beyond so that our students will be better prepared. Through the year we have been working with HCPS to create a partnership, and in the spring, HCPS invited providers from the child care community to attend trainings for public school educators in preschool and kindergarten. We are excited to have this opportunity to partner with the school system to provide training, and we hope to expand that partnership by creating a more connected transition for our students from preschool to kindergarten, and from public schools to private after-school care.

We had a great holiday luncheon with a gift exchange, and in January we were visited by MaryBeth Johnson and Rosemary Lober from MSDE EXCELS who provided support for the directors as we talked about the Accreditation process. We discussed concerns over discrepancies between different validators in interpreting the Accreditation checklists. We talked about the process of uploading documentation and about planning for the self-study and validation visit. As an organization, the Harford County Director's Association hopes to support our providers in seeking and accomplishing their goals for quality milestones, including Accreditation.

In February, we had a training with Project Act to address extreme and challenging behaviors in students. We talked about children's natural motivation to do well, and how it is helpful for perspective if we as educators take an approach to try to figure out what is getting in the way of the child's success. We talked about the challenges of explosive and oppositional behaviors in preschoolers and how many of these behaviors can be traced to difficulties with language processing, emotional regulation, sensory hyper or hypo-sensitivity, social information processing, cognitive flexibility, and/or executive function. Triggers are important to identify for explosive behaviors. When a child's defiant behavior is triggered, it is much more difficult to address the behavior. Collaborative problem solving to develop a plan for addressing behavior with the child in advance is the best strategy. The Collaborative Problem Solving approach starts with empathy—verbalize the child's feeling. Then define the problem from both the adult's and the child's point of view, generate solutions together with the child, and make a plan. There are lots of great strategies that we as educators already use including visual schedules, child-generated classroom rules, social stories, and sensory aids like wobble seats, weighted vests and mats, and fidgets. Offer some of these strategies in the plan developed with input from the child. We had a great discussion about classroom modifications and how to provide modifications in a way that is accepted by the other students. "Fairness in the classroom isn't about everybody getting the same, but about everybody getting what they need."

In March the Office of Child Care staff visited our meeting to share updates with Licensing. We talked about issues that are sometimes seen during visits from the Licensing specialists, and how to make sure that your program is following the regulations. We talked about creating calendars for tracking substitutes in each classroom so that each day's staffing is documented, even if staff are switched or changed from their original schedules. We talked about credentialing and EXCELS goals in programs, and Rosemary Lobel visited to talk about the process of moving up in EXCELS and of supporting staff in their credentialing level goals. In March we also enjoyed a great multi-cultural field trip event for HCDA

members when Rock Creek Steel Band visited from Ocean City to share some of their amazing music and to share some of the history of the steel drum.

In April, We talked at our meeting about the importance of staff meetings and shared ideas for team building. We discussed challenges in scheduling staff meetings. Most schools that were at our meeting hold monthly staff meetings, but some find it difficult to schedule at a time when everyone can attend. Several schools have found that an evening schedule once a month works well for their staff. Teachers are given a schedule of all meeting dates in advance so that they can make plans to attend. Most schools make staff meetings mandatory. Some schools schedule the meetings during the day and hold additional smaller meetings for staff covering the students during the time of the scheduled meeting. Although it can be difficult to plan for a time that works for everyone, regular staff meetings are an important piece in helping your staff stay on the same page and work together toward the same goals.

We discussed some morale boosting and team building ideas. At Goddard in Forest Hill, the teachers receive a questionnaire at the beginning of the year with choices for team building activities and they rate the activities by their preferences, planning for several during the year. They have had success with planned staff dinners out, happy hour events with appetizers and some drinks paid for by the school, and paint nights. Several schools have set up closed Facebook pages for their staff where teachers can share information, reminders, etc. Staff holiday dinners and other planned social get-togethers are also a common way of building a productive community among the staff.

We talked about techniques for supporting staff through the monthly staff meetings. Some of the meetings can be used for training. Celebree in Laurel Bush brought a yoga instructor to their staff meeting to teach the staff about mindfulness techniques. At Forest Hill Nature Preschool, the staff participates in an ongoing "Kudo Cards" system. The teachers use printed compliment cards to write praises or compliments about other staff throughout the month which are posted on a staff bulletin board. At the monthly staff meeting all of the cards are read out loud and then put into a bag and shuffled. One card is chosen each month and the teacher receives a small trophy (which is rotated each month) and a \$25 gift card. Forest Hill Nature Preschool, has also found that the teachers enjoy the staff meeting content more if it is the form of a game. At the beginning of the year, the staff orientation was planned using a Jeopardy game that was downloaded and revised to review procedures important for the year. New materials are often brought to staff meetings for the teachers to play with, initiating conversation among the staff of how to best plan for and use the materials. Some of the schools also set up "Teacher of the Month" or "Teacher of the Quarter" recognitions to honor the great work that their teachers are doing. Celebree in Laurel Bush also creates a great organizational structure in which teachers can choose which events during the year they want to work on and sign up for committees to plan these events. Time is allotted at staff meetings at the beginning of the year to work within committees to plan for these events.

We also talked briefly about security, and recent break-ins at centers in Harford County. The police believe that because the break-ins at multiple sites occurred on the same day in a short time frame, the culprits were likely part of a group called the Felony Lane Gang who moves from location to location in a smash and grab pattern. A car pulls into the lot and some smashes the car window, grabs a purse or wallet and immediately leaves. Cameras in the parking lot were not a deterrent for this crime, which was committed in less than a minute at each location. We have had similar incidents in past years as well, although different schools have been targeted. As a group we discussed setting up a text group for

directors to use for sending information about emergency situations. If a break-in occurred at one center, the director could send a message to other centers in the county to be on the alert and schools may be able to prevent and occurrence by posting a staff member in the parking lot during drop-off or pick-up at that time. For this pattern of crimes, once the schools have been hit, the break-ins do not continue, but we have concerns about others in the area who might see this as an opportunity to prey upon our parents, some of whom do leave cars running, valuables in the car, and unfortunately even children in the car while they go inside the school to pick up or drop off. On a lighter note, we also discussed the importance of staying in touch with each other as a group of directors. In the next few weeks, we will be setting up a closed Facebook group for HCDA and inviting program directors to join. We think this could be a great resource and support for our director's organization.

This year we are supporting MSCCA financially with donations of Lottery Trees to the Leadership Symposium and the Conference By the Sea. We are also making a donation to the Jen Nizer grant to support programs in Maryland and the great work they are doing. We are planning to use some of our budget to host an Early Childhood Expo for Harford County early childhood community stakeholders. Our vision is to create an event for parents and potential childcare employees where visitors can visit tables to learn more about different schools in our county. We would also open the event to vendors of early childhood supplies and materials, and to HCPS to answer questions about starting Kindergarten. We are forming a subcommittee to research possible venues and look into planning for this event for the spring of 2019.

This has been a great year for HCDA and we are proud to be a part of MSCCA working hard in our local community!

Lavonne Taylor

President, Harford County Director's Association