

The Loop

QUALITY CARE SOUTH DAKOTA NEWSLETTER



December 2025 | Issue 28

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Quality Care South Dakota is designed to support child care and school-age programs in meeting benchmarks of quality and identifying their strengths as well as areas for growth. The Quality Care Team is housed at the Child & Family Resource Network at South Dakota State University and works in collaboration with the South Dakota Early Childhood Enrichment System with support and direction from the South Dakota Department of Social Services.

Interested In Learning More?

Registered family day care homes and licensed child care centers and school-age programs can voluntarily participate in this opportunity. Please check out www.sdece.org/quality-care-south-dakota.

News to Support Your Program



Congratulations - November Level Designations

🎉 Shout-out to Our Quality Champions! 🎉

We are proud to recognize and celebrate the following outstanding programs that have recently achieved a new milestone in Quality Care South Dakota (QCSD). These teams exemplify dedication to continuous quality improvement for children and families.

Level 1 - Registered Family Child Care

- Tammy Herold

Level 2 - Licensed School Age Program

- Great After School Place - Dakota Prairie
- Great After School Place - Medary

👏 Congratulations on achieving your new QCSD level! Your hard work, commitment, and passion for early childhood and school-age care are making a lasting difference. We're honored to support you on your quality journey and proud to have you as part of the QCSD community.

💙💛 Learn more QCSD at <https://sdece.org/quality-care-south-dakota/>

Intentional Interactions

Strong, supportive interactions are at the heart of high-quality care and education. All versions of the Environmental Rating Scales—ECERS-3, ITERS-3, FCCERS-3, and SACERS-U—place a strong emphasis on how staff interact with children to build relationships, support social-emotional development, and guide behavior.

Each tool looks for consistent, warm, and respectful communication. Whether you're working with infants or school-age children, interactions shape how children feel, learn, and grow.

Ways to support high-quality interactions across age groups include:

- Engaging in back-and-forth conversations during routines and play.
- Supporting peer interactions by modeling and coaching social skills like turn-taking and conflict resolution.
- Offering encouragement and descriptive praise helps children build confidence and awareness of their efforts.
- Staying attuned to children's needs, providing comfort, helping with transitions, and acknowledging feelings.
- Creating a calm, welcoming environment that invites connection and cooperation.



Across all four ERS tools, the Interaction indicators highlight how educators help children feel safe, respected, and valued. These daily moments of connection are essential to creating a nurturing environment and are a key part of quality in every classroom or care setting.

Pathways Literacy Challenge Completion Celebration!

We are thrilled to announce the successful completion of the Pathways Literacy Challenge. All Pathways members were invited to participate in this challenge, designed to celebrate the joy of reading while supporting the children and families they serve every day.

Participants caring for children from birth to age 5 were challenged to read 100 books between October and November, while participants caring for school-age children were challenged to read a total of 8 hours to the children in their care. Educators embraced the challenge by bringing literacy to life in engaging and meaningful ways. One participant of the challenge said, "Thank you so much for giving us this amazing opportunity to earn free books for my daycare. Not only have you helped introduce new vocabulary to all of my young readers, but this has also helped develop a love of reading in some of the kiddos in my care. They are very excited to see what new books they will be getting in our reading area."

The challenge also provided an opportunity for professional recognition through the Pathways program. Educators who completed the challenge received a certificate and were celebrated with a bundle of books geared toward the age of the children they care for.

We extend a heartfelt thank-you to all Pathways educators who participated. Your dedication and enthusiasm continue to make South Dakota's early childhood and school-age care programs stronger and more inspiring for children and families.

Stay tuned! Pathways will continue to offer engaging challenges to support early childhood and school-age care educators across the state. If you are an educator working in a registered or licensed child care or school-age program and are interested in joining Pathways, you will find more information at <https://sdece.org/pathways/>.



SD ECE Resources



Your Program, Your Toolkit

Have you checked out the [SD Resources](#) section of [South Dakota ECE Resources](#) recently? If not, you might have missed our newest addition, the Leadership Toolkit.



The Leadership Toolkit is designed for busy family home child care providers, program directors, and administrators in early childhood education. It brings a wide range of resources together in one convenient place, including:

- Budgeting tools and editable spreadsheets
- Tuition and enrollment resources
- Family child care focused tools
- Tax information for providers

Whether you lead a family childcare program or a large center, the toolkit provides resources to support you. Strong leadership strengthens programs, and stronger programs create better experiences for children and families.

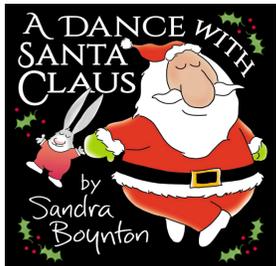
Access the [Leadership Toolkit](#) today on the South Dakota ECE Resources website and make the most of these tools for your program

If you are an educator working in a registered or licensed program, please [register here](#) for a South Dakota ECE Resources membership at no cost to you.

Books of the Month

Each month, this section spotlights children's books that align with seasonal themes or offer meaningful value for child care providers. This curated selection is designed to introduce new and noteworthy titles that caregivers may not have come across before—providing fresh inspiration for story time.

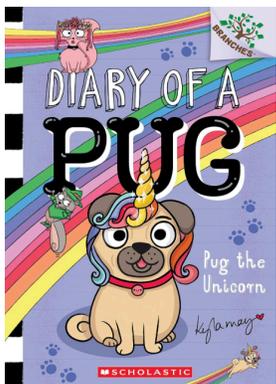
As December brings chilly days and the festive spirit of the season, it's the perfect time to share the joy of books with the children in your care. Reading together not only strengthens language skills and builds focus, but also sparks imagination, making story time a warm and meaningful part of your daily routine this month.



The only thing this sweet bunny child wants for Christmas is to dance the Rock-and-Roll Swing with Santa on Christmas Eve. Will it happen? (Spoiler: Of course!) Sandra Boynton's jaunty lyrics and captivating, expressive illustrations come together in this cozy gift book for the festive season.

Based on the magical song (gloriously sung by Zooey Deschanel) on Boynton's Christmas album, *Cows and Holly*, this lovely picture book is the perfect read-aloud to celebrate Christmas with any little bunny in your life, year after year.

Reading age: 1- 3 years



Bella and Bub and friends Jack and Luna are off to Ye Olde Faire, a festival where people dress up like it's olden times. During a day filled with fairies, knights, and a joust, the friends learn about a magical legend: A real unicorn lives in the woods nearby!

Is the story true, or is it a tall tale? Bella and Bub are determined to find out. With Jack and Luna's help, they're off on a magical adventure this pug will never forget!

Reading age: 5-7 years

Caleb and Ronan are best friends. It doesn't matter that Ronan is a dog and Caleb is a middle-schooler. They've been together their entire lives and traveled the world together with Caleb's family.

But now, with Ronan too old for such adventures, Caleb has chosen to stay in Seattle, settling down with his grandfather in a quirky retirement community. Things should be calm here, maybe even boring. But then



tragedy strikes, and Poppy is rushed to the hospital. Suddenly, Caleb's world erupts in chaos and he and Ronan are separated.

Desperate to find each other, the two friends set out on an impossible journey. But a deadly storm is brewing and predators lurk, and they have no idea where the other is. Can they find their way back together—and to Poppy—before it's too late?

Reading age: 9-12 years

**Please note, all book descriptions and suggested reading ages are provided by Amazon. While suggested reading levels can provide guidance, they should be seen as flexible recommendations rather than strict rules. By using suggested reading levels as guidelines, you can choose books that not only match children's developmental stages but also ignite their curiosity and enthusiasm for reading. This personalized approach fosters a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience.

Mark Your Calendar

Upcoming Statewide Conference Dates

[South Dakota Early Childhood Education Conference](#)

Rapid City, SD; April 9-10, 2026

[SD School-Age Care Alliance Out of School Time Leadership Retreat](#)

Keystone, SD; April 9-11, 2026

[SD School-Age Care Alliance \(SoDakSACA\) Conference](#)

Sioux Falls, SD; October 8-10, 2026





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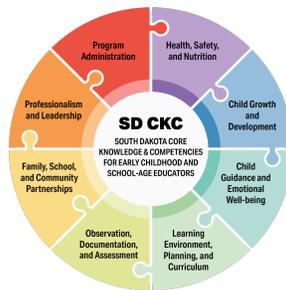


PATHWAYS SOUTH DAKOTA

Congratulations to the 550+ professionals participating on the Pathways to Professional Development Career Ladder. If you're an educator in a registered or licensed early childhood or school-age care program, we'd love to welcome you and get a welcome kit to you soon!

[Apply to be a member of Pathways](#)

Visit our new Pathways Facebook page and join us in celebrating the early childhood and school-age care educators who make up our Pathways community!



The South Dakota Core Knowledge and Competencies (CKCs) guide self-reflection and professional growth by describing what early childhood and school-age care educators need to **know**, **understand**, and **be able to do** at all levels of professional practice in eight areas of knowledge.

Directors are using the SD CKCs to support important conversations about professional development and growing leaders in your child care and school-age program. Click the button below to learn more, to view the document, and to order free copies of the SD CKCs for yourself or your team.

[View SD Core Knowledge & Competencies](#)

Quality Care South Dakota Team

- Rachel Busmann, Outreach Coordinator and QCSD Lead
- Amelia Gullickson, Early Childhood Quality Assistant
- Nichole Lanning, Early Childhood Quality Assistant
- Maria Picek, Lead Coach and Observer
- Cheyanne Kamps, Early Childhood and School Age Program Observer
- Deb Owens, Early Childhood and School Age Quality Coach
- Cassie Stoltenburg, Early Childhood and School Age Quality Coach
- Clover Herdman, Early Childhood and School Age Quality Coach
- Tessa Stoltenberg, Education Program Support Assistant

[South Dakota State University](#)

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[South Dakota Quality Recognition and Information System | Website](#)

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