

The Loop

QUALITY CARE SOUTH DAKOTA NEWSLETTER



March 2026 | Issue 31

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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 child care homes, 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 - February 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 Home

• Bethany Thielsen

Level 1 - Licensed Child Care Center

• Little Tykes University
• Scarbrough Center

Level 1 - Licensed School-Age Program

• Robbinsdale Kidstop

Level 2 - Licensed School-Age Program

• Great After School Place - Hillcrest

👏 Congratulations on achieving your new QCSD level! This accomplishment reflects your dedication, hard work, and deep passion for early childhood and school-age care. Your efforts are making a meaningful and lasting impact in your communities, and that is truly worth celebrating. We are honored to support you on your quality journey and incredibly proud to have you as part of the QCSD community.

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

naeyc[®]



Preparing to Celebrate NAEYC's Week of the Young Child: April 11-17, 2026

Educators, this is your moment to shine! Week of the Young Child[®] (WOYC) is a special time to celebrate all the creativity, curiosity, and learning you foster every day. In 2026, it's even more meaningful, marking 100 days into NAEYC's 100th year, honoring a century of dedication to young children and the professionals who make a difference in their lives.

WOYC is not about doing something "extra", it's about pausing to recognize, share, and celebrate the engaging experiences you already bring to your classrooms and communities. Music, art, cooking, play, and hands-on learning happen all year long, but this week provides a chance to highlight these activities, involve families, and connect with the wider early childhood community.

Themed Days Offer Inspiration

This year's WOYC includes themed days to spark ideas and celebrate your everyday work:

- Kick-off Saturday - Plan for a week of celebrating: create a playlist for Music Monday, gather ingredients for Tasty Tuesday, prep materials for Work Together Wednesday, restock art supplies for Artsy Thursday, and draft a parent email for Family Friday.
- Music Monday – Celebrate the songs and rhythms that inspire your classroom.
- Tasty Tuesday – Explore culturally meaningful foods, share stories or recipes, introduce new ingredients, and create a community recipe book illustrated by the children.
- Work Together Wednesday – Encourage teamwork as children create, collaborate, and develop social and early literacy skills.
- Artsy Thursday – Showcase students' artwork in community spaces or online, celebrating their creativity while sharing the importance of early childhood education.
- Family Friday – Spotlight parents and families as children's first teachers and highlight ways to engage them in supporting young learners.

Resources for Educators and Parents

NAEYC offers hands-on ideas and ready-to-use activities for educators in classrooms, home-based programs, and families at home. From art projects and cooking explorations to teamwork and family celebrations, each activity reflects the learning and joy you create every day.

Take this week to celebrate yourself, the children you care for, and the value of quality early childhood education. Join the community of educators nationwide honoring the work that already makes a difference every day. Learn more and access celebration resources at [NAEYC.org/WOYC](https://naeyc.org/woyc)

Pathways Pathfinders: Abby Kramer

Each month in Pathways Pathfinders, we spotlight a member of Pathways whose commitment to professional growth highlights the strength and dedication of South Dakota's early childhood workforce.

In this edition, we feature Abby Kramer, whose work advancing curriculum, strengthening family partnerships, and achieving Level 6 in the South Dakota Pathways to Professional Development Career Ladder demonstrates the powerful impact of investing in professional development.

My name is Abby Kramer, and I serve as the director of Children's Care Corner in Howard. Children's Care Corner has been open since 2002 and is currently the only licensed state child care center within a 20-mile radius. We are licensed to serve up to 63 children and offer a full infant room, toddler room, and a combined 3- and 4-year-old preschool classroom.

We employ 22 staff members, including a full-time chef, lead teachers, assistant teachers, college students, and part-time and high school staff. I am incredibly proud of the team we have built and the consistent, quality care we provide to families in our rural community.

I began working in early childhood education in 2019 during a time when our town was facing limited child care availability. I initially opened an in-home daycare to help meet that need, and in December 2023, I stepped into the director role at Children's Care Corner. I was inspired to pursue early childhood education because our town lacked strong early learning opportunities. I wanted to create a safe, structured environment where children could truly thrive before entering elementary school.

My goal has always been to align our preschool programming with South Dakota state guidelines while keeping it engaging and developmentally appropriate. After 2.5 years at Children's Care Corner, our lead teachers and I worked together to revitalize our preschool curriculum to better support kindergarten readiness and social-emotional growth. Continuing to improve the quality of care in our town remains my greatest motivation.

What I love most about working in child care is being a resource and support system for families. I truly believe child care is more than supervision — it's a partnership. Whether families need help connecting to WIC, Child Care Assistance, or simply guidance through behavior or academic concerns, I want Children's Care Corner to be a place they can lean on. Partnering with families to build confidence, structure, and strong foundations during the early years is incredibly meaningful to me.

I am currently at Level 6 in Pathways. I have earned my Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, hold a Preschool certificate, completed over 120 hours of training and coursework through support from the SD Early Childhood Enrichment CDA program, and maintain CPR and First Aid certifications. I believe you can never have too much knowledge in a career you are passionate about, and I plan to continue advancing in Pathways as I grow in my role.

Being part of Pathways has strengthened my commitment to continuous growth. As a leader and early educator, I strive to be the very best I can be — not only for myself, but for my staff and the children we serve.

Working in early childhood education, especially in a small town, means showing up every day to make a difference in children's lives. Being recognized at a higher level across the state is incredibly meaningful and gives me a deep sense of pride. I am proud to be recognized by Pathways to Professional Development, Children's Care Corner, and I am proud to partner with Quality Care South Dakota and Child & Family Resource Network, and we are honored to represent our community throughout South Dakota.

At the heart of my work is a quote I carry with me: *"We're not just providing child care — we're building the foundation for who children become."*

Thank you, Abby, for letting us shine a spotlight on the important work you do each day at Children's Care Corner. Your passion for children, dedication to families, and commitment to growing as an educator truly stand out, and they help strengthen not only your program but the entire Pathways community.

If you are an early childhood or school-age care educator and would like to become a member of Pathways, please connect with [Nichole Lanning](mailto:Nichole.Lanning@sdece.org). You can find more information at <https://sdece.org/pathways/>



Apply to be a member of Pathways

Congratulations to the 700+ educators participating on the South Dakota 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 celebrate and get a welcome kit to you soon!

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



SD ECE Resources



Introducing the Director Toolkit: Quick Access to the Resources You Need Most



Directors wear many hats each day, from supporting staff to engaging families and managing program operations. When you need guidance, having a quick starting point can make all the difference.

The new [Director Toolkit](#) was created to help busy leaders quickly connect with the resources they use most often. Instead of searching across multiple sections, the toolkit provides direct access to key topics.

Resources are organized into sections: Policies & Procedures, Staff Management & Development, Child & Family Engagement, Program & Curriculum, Health, Safety & Sanitation, Finance & Operations, Technology & Communication, and Professional Development & References.

Start exploring the [Director Toolkit](#) today and streamline your access to essential director resources.

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.

Sharing books and stories with the children in your care supports early literacy by building language skills, strengthening comprehension, and encouraging curiosity. Making reading part of your daily routine helps foster a lifelong love of learning.



An Interactive, sensory lift-the-flap book with felt flaps and a mirror for infants and toddlers.

Illustrator Ingela P. Arrhenius's artwork pops in this new addition to the best-selling felt flaps series. Five stylishly illustrated spreads depict friendly safari animals, including a cheetah, a hippo, an ostrich, and an elephant hidden beneath bright felt flaps. With a mirror on the final page, this is the perfect book to share with very little ones.

Reading age: 0-2 years

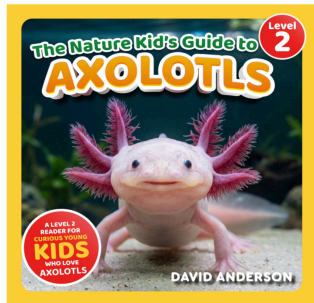


If one day buds bloom and birds chirp, and the next day a late snow falls from the sky, is it spring? Will it ever be spring? An evergreen, child-friendly picture book that explores themes of patience, hope, the seasons, and nature by the *New York Times* bestseller and Caldecott Medalist Kevin Henkes.

A flower in the garden down the street. Birds in the sky. Buds on the branches in the park. It must be spring.

But wait! What is this icy gust of wind? Why are snowflakes falling from heavy gray clouds? Will it ever be spring? Yes, says the sun. Just be patient.

Reading age: 4-8 years



The Nature Kid's Guide to Axolotls is written for curious kids who want to learn about one of nature's strangest creatures. Why do axolotls stay in water their whole lives? How do they eat without chewing? What makes their feathery gills so special? Your child will discover the answers and be eager to share every wild fact.

Written in short, easy-to-read sentences perfect for Level 2 readers, this book builds confidence and reading skills while sparking curiosity. The engaging format keeps kids interested from cover to cover, with fun facts and "Did You Know?" sections sprinkled throughout.

Reading age: 6-10 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

*Pathways members make time to stop by the Quality Care SD/Pathways booth for a professional headshot.

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

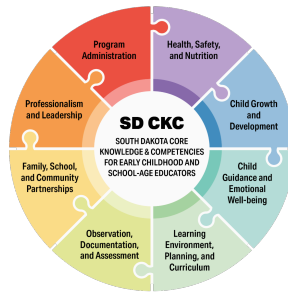
Keystone, SD; April 9-11, 2026

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

Sioux Falls, SD; October 8-10, 2026



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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 their child care and school-age programs.

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

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