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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

[Quality Care South Dakota](#) for more information.

Congratulations - May 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 (QCSA). These teams exemplify dedication to continuous quality improvement for children and families.



Level 1 - Licensed Child Care Center

- Little Tykes University - Bison Trail

Level 1 - Licensed School-Age Program

- Boys and Girls Club Capital Area

Congratulations on achieving your new QCSD level! This accomplishment reflects your dedication, perseverance, and passion for early childhood and school-age care. Your work is creating meaningful, lasting impacts in your community and that is truly worth celebrating. We are honored to support you along your quality journeys and grateful to have you as part of the QCSD community.

♥♥ Learn more QCSD at [Quality Care South Dakota](#)

News to Support Your Program

Why Stability Matters

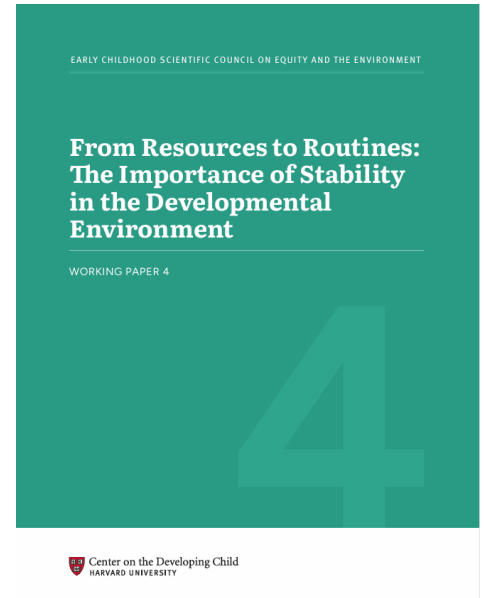
Children thrive when they can count on consistent, supportive relationships and predictable environments. Stability in a child's daily experiences—including routines, caregiving relationships, and living environments—provides a foundation for healthy development, learning, and well-being.

Research shows that frequent disruptions and uncertainty can create stress that affects children's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development. In contrast, stable environments help children feel secure, build resilience, and develop the skills they need to succeed.

To learn more about the role stability plays in child development, explore the resources below, including a working paper on the importance of stability in children's developmental environments and a webinar featuring experts who discuss how stability (or the lack of it) can affect children's well-being.

[From Resources to Routines: The Importance of Stability in the Developmental Environment \(Working Paper No. 4\)](#)

[Webinar: Why Stability Matters for Early Childhood Development](#)



SD ECE Resources



Outdoor Play & Learning

Outdoor play is more than just time outside; it's an important part of children's healthy development. Regular outdoor experiences support physical health, cognitive growth, and social-emotional learning while giving children opportunities to explore, create, and discover.

Children thrive when they have both structured and unstructured outdoor time each day. Whether they are building with natural materials, observing insects, or engaging in imaginative play, outdoor environments encourage curiosity, problem-solving, and active learning.

The good news is that outdoor learning spaces don't need to be elaborate. Natural elements such as logs, rocks, sand, water, and plants can provide rich opportunities for exploration and hands-on learning. The resources below can help you create meaningful outdoor experiences that support children's growth and development all summer long.

[Nature-Based Learning](#)

- Need some ideas for engaging outdoor activities? Check out this [Pinterest board](#)!

[Outdoor Play](#)

- Resources to help you plan for outdoor time to support children's development.

[Theme-Based Lesson Plans](#)

- Outdoor Classroom - From flowers to wind and even planting a garden, children will learn about and interact with the outdoor world around them.



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.

Pathways in Action

Pathways Pathfinders: Play is Learning Challenge

This month, rather than featuring a single Pathways member, we're celebrating the many educators who participated in the Pathways Play Is Learning Challenge!

As part of this optional Pathways engagement opportunity, members who signed up for the Play Is Learning Challenge were invited to showcase how meaningful learning happens through play in their programs and classrooms. Participants shared photos and stories demonstrating creative activities that supported children's development across a variety of learning domains while keeping play at the center of the experience.

Submissions highlighted the incredible work happening in programs and classrooms across South Dakota. Pathways member, Tara E., shared how mobile infants explored homemade sound shakers. Through this simple play experience, children discovered cause and effect, strengthened fine motor skills, and explored sounds, volume, and rhythm. The activity also encouraged curiosity, excitement, and joyful self-expression. To extend the learning beyond the classroom, each child received a shaker to take home and share with their family.



We were inspired by the creativity, dedication, and intentional interactions and teaching practices reflected in every submission. To view additional challenge entries and see how educators across the state are supporting learning through play, visit the [Pathways Facebook page](#).

Throughout the year, Pathways members have the opportunity to participate in a variety of challenges focused on topics such as literacy, wellness, teamwork, and professional goal setting. Interested in participating in future challenges? If you're not yet a Pathways member, we encourage you to [learn more about joining](#) South Dakota's professional recognition system for early childhood and school-age care educators.

Keep an eye out—the next Pathways Challenge will be announced in August! We look forward to seeing the creativity and innovation our members will share next.



Apply to be a member of Pathways

Congratulations to the 750+ 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! 🎉



Books of the Month

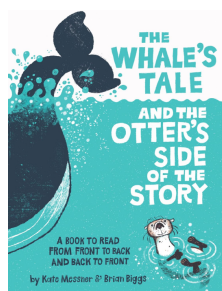
Each month, this section spotlights children's books that align with seasonal themes or offer meaningful value for child care providers. This curated selection is designed to introduce new and noteworthy titles that caregivers may not have come across before—providing fresh inspiration for story time.

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.



My First 100 Signs introduces the most useful baby sign language signs for everyday life, helping babies as young as 6 months communicate their needs, reduce frustration, and build early language skills. With bright, engaging illustrations designed for little learners, this interactive first signs book turns daily routines into meaningful moments of connection.

Reading age: 0-3 years

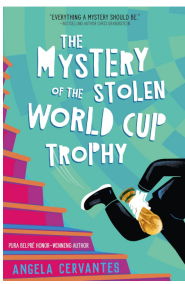


A boastful whale and a showboating otter compete in a battle of words to prove that each is the greatest animal ever to swim the seas. Read one way, the first-person text brags about whales' superiority; read the other way, it extols how much better otters are. Using true information about the two marine species to make both arguments, Kate Messner's adroit text and Brian Biggs's giggle-worthy artwork brilliantly illustrate how the same words can be used to express contradictory opinions when speakers have a one-sided view of the world.

Reading age: 4-8 years

Diez Espada—named after the jersey number of his soccer-obsessed father's favorite player, Lionel Messi—would rather be chasing clues than soccer balls. When the World Cup trophy disappears at a glitzy party in Miami, he's suddenly at the center of the most thrilling match of his life—a race to find the trophy before it's gone for good.

The clock is ticking, the suspects are slippery, and the stadium lights are ready to shine. Will Diez find the trophy in time for the World Cup championship match?



Reading age: 8-12 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

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

Sioux Falls, SD; October 8-10, 2026

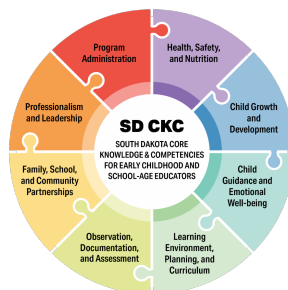
[South Dakota Early Childhood Education Conference](#)

Sioux Falls, SD; April TBD 2027



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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.

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
- Jen Johnson, SDSU Early Childhood Education Lecturer

[Quality Care South Dakota 2025 Annual Impact Report](#)

[South Dakota State University](#)

[Quality Care South Dakota](#)

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

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