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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 sdece.org/quality-care-south-dakota/ for more information.

Congratulations - June Level Designation

Shout-out to Our Quality Champion! 🎉

We are proud to recognize and celebrate the following outstanding program that has recently achieved a new milestone in Quality Care South Dakota (QCSD). This team exemplifies dedication to continuous quality improvement for children and families.



Level 1 - Licensed Child Care Center

• Christ Lutheran Church Daycare

Congratulations on achieving your new QCSD level! This accomplishment reflects your dedication, perseverance, and passion for early childhood/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 sdece.org/quality-care-south-dakota/

News to Support Your Program

Talking Mental Health with Young Children

How do we talk to young children about mental health in ways they can understand? In a YouTube series from Devereux Center for Resilient Children: Talking Mental Health with Young Children, Dr. Nefertiti Poyner offers practical tips, simple language, and developmentally appropriate strategies for both early childhood professionals and parents/caregivers. Each short episode focuses on helping adults start meaningful conversations with young children about mental health and emotional well-being.

Throughout the series, you'll learn:

- An easy way to explain the term "mental health" to young children.
- How to talk about anxiety and hope in age-appropriate ways.
- How to discuss depression and resilience with young children.
- How to address stigma and encourage children to feel comfortable asking for help.

By giving children the words to express their feelings and helping them understand that mental health is an important part of overall health, we can build a strong foundation for lifelong emotional well-being.

Families, early childhood and school-age care educators, and anyone who supports young children's social and emotional development are encouraged to explore this valuable resource and share it with others.

Watch the Talking Mental Health with Young Children YouTube limited series: [Talking Mental Health with Young Children](#)



SD ECE Resources



Start the Year Strong

We all know the feeling, once the Fourth of July is behind us and school supplies start filling the store shelves, the start of back-to-school season doesn't seem so far away. Before long, programs begin settling into new routines, classrooms become busier, and many children experience changes in schedules, classrooms, or daily expectations.

Even if many of the children in your care have been with you throughout the summer, the transition into fall often brings new opportunities and new challenges. It's a great time to refresh classroom routines, strengthen relationships, reconnect with families, and create a welcoming environment that supports children's learning and well-being.



The start of a new season is also the perfect opportunity to reflect on your practices and plan intentionally for the months ahead. Focusing on predictable routines, strong relationships, and social learning and emotional learning can help children feel safe, confident, and ready to thrive.

South Dakota ECE Resources offers a variety of tools to support you as you prepare for the fall season. Explore resources that can help you:

- [Strengthen relationships with children and families.](#)
- [Refresh classroom routines and support smooth transitions.](#)
- [Foster children's social development and emotional development.](#)
- [Create and maintain safe and healthy environments.](#)
- [Support your ongoing professional growth with practical resources and strategies that can be applied in your daily work](#)

Explore South Dakota ECE Resources today to find resources that align with your goals and support the children and families in your program throughout the year.

If you are an educator working in a registered or licensed program, please register for a South Dakota ECE Resources membership at no cost to you: sdeceresources.org

Pathways in Action

Pathways Pathfinders: Anna Heck

This month, we're highlighting Anna Heck, a Pathways member whose commitment to lifelong learning has shaped her journey in early childhood and school-age care. From earning her bachelor's degree in Human Development & Family Studies to pursuing a master's degree in Social Work, she continues to build on her passion for supporting children and families. Read on to learn more about her Pathways journey and what inspires her work.

My journey in early childhood education started in 2022. I have a passion for early childhood development and ensuring that our youth have a safe space to come and learn, grow, and be cared for.

I previously worked at the Boys & Girls Club ECE as a Youth Development Professional for three years during my undergraduate studies. I graduated from SDSU with my bachelor's degree in Human Development & Family Studies and a minor in Early Childhood Education. I am currently pursuing my master's degree in Social Work, and this summer I am working in a school-age care summer program in Sioux Falls as a Student Success Specialist, providing behavior support for school-age children.



One of the things I love most about working with children is building relationships with them and watching them grow. It's rewarding to know that even the small moments, whether it's helping a child learn a new skill, work through a challenge, or simply feel safe and supported, can make a lasting difference in their lives.

I began at Pathways Level 6, and as I've continued my education, I've advanced to Pathways Level 8. I earned these levels through my education, including my bachelor's degree in Human Development & Family Studies with a minor in Early Childhood Education, along with my professional development.

Being part of Pathways has encouraged me to continue learning and growing as an educator. It has reinforced the importance of ongoing professional development and inspired me to keep building my knowledge so I can better support children, families, and the professionals I work alongside.

I would encourage other educators to become a Pathways member. Pathways is a great way to grow professionally and be recognized for the time and effort you put into your education and career. Having my hard work recognized through Pathways has been rewarding. Reaching Level 8 reminded me how much I've learned through my education and experience, and it motivated me to continue growing professionally as I work toward becoming a social worker who supports children and families.

Congratulations on reaching Pathways Level 8, Anna! Thank you for sharing your journey and for your dedication to continued learning and supporting children and families. We look forward to seeing where your Pathways journey takes you next.

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@sdstate.edu](mailto:Nichole.Lanning@sdstate.edu). You can find more information at sdece.org/pathways/



Apply to be a member of Pathways

Congratulations to the 800+ 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.



Tuffy Hello, Garden!

Take little ones on a garden adventure! Celebrate juicy strawberries, garden colors, and playful discoveries with this sweet story.

Reading age: 0-1 year



Kindergarten Gets Ready

Join kindergarten teacher Mr. Bee as he gets ready for the new school year. Watch as he transforms a cluttered classroom into an inviting, orderly space where everything has its place. Everything goes where it will be easy for the children to reach, and easy to put away when they are done.

This satisfying journey shows children with what to expect when they start school, building excitement in the most comforting way—until, at last, here come the new students, ready to explore a room prepared just for them. *Kindergarten Gets Ready* organizes the messy unknown into an orderly, irresistible place for children getting ready for kindergarten.

Reading age: 4-6 years



Katie the Catsitter: Villain Con

Middle school is a roller coaster and lately Katie doesn't know which way is up or down, who's a hero...and who's a villain. Even the people she cares about most keep surprising her. Are Katie's best friends leaving her behind?! Katie just wants things to stay the same--but is she holding her friends...and herself back? Maybe it's time for a change. Afterall, Madeline is running for mayor to try to change things in the city. Maybe Katie's changing too. And maybe some of the things she thought she knew about villains--and about heroes--were wrong. Is Katie ready to move forward...even if means moving away from her friends?

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

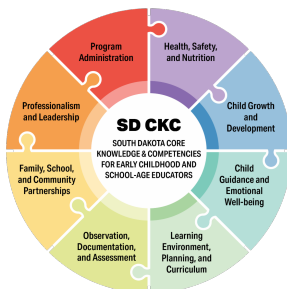
[South Dakota Early Childhood Education Conference](#)

April 1-2, 2027, Denny Sanford Premier Center, Sioux Falls



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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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