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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 - August 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 - Licensed Child Care Center

• School of Early Education - Sioux Falls

Level 3 - Licensed Child Care Center

• HopeCare

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 communities, 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

Finding Literacy in Everyday Moments

September is National Early Literacy Month, a perfect time to look at the many ways child care providers support children's language and literacy development every day.

Supporting early literacy doesn't have to mean adding another activity to an already busy day. Sometimes, it simply means being intentional about the opportunities that are already there.

A conversation during lunch can introduce new vocabulary. A song during cleanup can build children's awareness of sounds and patterns. A grocery list in the dramatic play area can give children a reason to experiment with writing. A child's question about a bug found outside can turn into a conversation, a story, a drawing, or a search for information.

These everyday moments matter and oral language is the foundation of future literacy.

At Quality Care South Dakota, we use the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) as one of the tools to help educators reflect on their environments and continuously build quality in their programs. The ITERS-3, ECERS-3, and SACERS-U look at many aspects of children's experiences, including materials, activities, interactions, and opportunities for learning.

When we look at these areas through an early literacy lens, we can see that many of the things providers are already doing each day can create meaningful opportunities for children to develop language, communication, and literacy skills.

Look Around Your Classroom: Early Literacy Through the ERS Lens

Take a moment to look around your classroom or program and ask yourself:

- **Books:** Can all children independently access a variety of books?
- **Conversations:** Am I creating opportunities for meaningful, back-and-forth conversations?
- **Songs & Rhymes:** Do children regularly experience songs, rhymes, fingerplays, and other playful language experiences?
- **Print:** Do children see meaningful print connected to their everyday experiences?
- **Play:** Does dramatic play give children reasons to talk, tell stories, read, write, or pretend?
- **Listening:** Do I slow down and give children time to express their thoughts and ideas?
- **Environment:** Does my environment invite children to explore language and literacy naturally throughout the day?

As we celebrate National Early Literacy Month, take a moment to notice the many ways you are already building language and literacy into children's days. Then, consider one way you might expand language and literacy opportunities.



[source](#)

Because early literacy isn't just an activity on the schedule, it grows through the relationships, conversations, play, and experiences that happen throughout the day.

SD ECE Resources



SOUTH DAKOTA ECE RESOURCES

Building Strong Teacher-to-Child Interactions

Positive, responsive interactions are at the heart of quality early childhood experiences. The way teachers talk with, listen to, and respond to children helps create a learning environment where children feel safe, valued, and ready to learn.

The Quality Care South Dakota Framework highlights this practice in the Learning Environment category for Level 1: "Staff interactions with children and families are warm, respectful, and positive." Everyday moments such as greeting a child by name, getting down to their level, acknowledging their feelings, asking thoughtful questions, or celebrating their efforts can make a meaningful difference.

Explore resources on [South Dakota ECE Resources](#) for practical ideas and strategies to strengthen relationships and support positive interactions with children.

- [Parenting & Meaningful Interactions](#)
 - Tips for Families: Talk, Sing & Read Together Everyday
 - Indoor Activity Toolkit for Families
 - Daily Safety Checklist - Family Childcare Home Indoor
 - Indoor Activity Toolkit Adaptations (for families/children of all abilities)
 - Themed Activity Bundles
 - Nine Elements that Promote Positive Parenting
 - Positive Parenting Approaches
 - Positive Parenting and the Seven Essential Life Skills for Children
- [Teacher-to-Child Interactions](#)
 - Banking Time: Strengthening Your Relationship with Individual Children
 - Build Confidence Through Interactions
 - Building Positive Relationships with Young Children
 - Communication is Key
 - Creating a Caring Community
 - Emotional Piggy Bank
 - Hot Button Activity
 - Positive Feedback and Encouragement
 - Rebuilding the Pyramid: Reconnecting After a Break
 - Recommendation and Considerations for Positive Descriptive Feedback
 - Reconnecting and Building Relationships with Infants
 - Starters for Giving Positive Feedback and Encouragement
 - Things That Will Help Me Stay Calm - Infants
 - Things That Will Help Me Stay Calm - Toddlers
 - Using the 14 Talking Tips to Support Emotional Development



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: Crystal Doppler

For Crystal Doppler, early childhood education (ECE) is more than a career, it is a journey of learning, connection, and purpose.

Crystal has spent 18 years in the education field, a journey that began when she volunteered in her daughter's Head Start classroom while pursuing her elementary education degree. It was there that she discovered how much she enjoyed working with young children and witnessing their natural curiosity.

"I started out volunteering in my daughter's Head Start classroom. At that time, I was going to school for my elementary education degree. Through working in the Head Start classroom, I found that I really enjoyed the younger ages and their natural curiosity."

What started as simply enjoying working with a particular age group has grown into a much deeper calling. "When I first started in the field, it was simply the enjoyment of the age group. Over the years, my goal and 'why' for working in early childhood has shifted. My goal now is to guide children, families, and other early childhood educators to reach their full potential."

Today, Crystal serves as the Assistant Director of Administration and Compliance at Ark Academy in Sioux Falls, while also teaching in the Preschool program. "At Ark Academy, we are dedicated to providing a nurturing and loving environment for children. Our Christian-based approach ensures that every child feels valued and supported as they grow and learn."



One of the things Crystal values most about early childhood education is the opportunity to build relationships with the children, families, and other professionals to help guide them to reach their full potential. She feels the ECE field is truly a village and when we are all working together and supporting each other, we can all reach our full potential.

Crystal earned Level 7 on the Pathways Career Ladder by completing her associate degree in early childhood education. She will soon continue her education by pursuing her bachelor's degree in early childhood education, with the goal of reaching Level 8. "I have always enjoyed learning and being part of Pathways has pushed me to continue learning through fun challenges. Pathways has also helped me grow my village of supportive ECE professionals, as we cannot do this alone."

For Crystal, professional growth is closely connected to the work educators do every day with children and families and believes that educators must continue learning. "As an early childhood educator, you must love learning. If you do not love learning, how can you instill the love of learning in the children you guide and care for?"

Being recognized through Pathways was especially meaningful to Crystal, "Being recognized on Pathways was validation that all the hard work and passion ECE professionals put into what we do is important and impacts everyone."

Crystal's passion for learning doesn't stop when she leaves work. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her own children, being outdoors, hiking, attending races and tractor pulls, enjoying music and concerts, writing, and going on random adventures. That spirit of curiosity and discovery seems to follow Crystal wherever she goes, and it is a fitting reflection of the way she approaches both life and her work in early childhood education.

One of Crystal's favorite quotes captures her philosophy beautifully:

"Tell me and I will forget. Teach me and I will remember. Involve me and I will learn."- Ben Franklin

Crystal's Pathways journey is a wonderful example of what can happen when a passion for children grows into a commitment to lifelong learning. Through her work, relationships and continued professional development, she is helping build the village that supports children, families and educators, and is encouraging others to keep learning along the way.

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!



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.



Happy Halloween, Baby!

Discover all the joys of Halloween with Baby Cat in the Hat, Baby Grinch, Baby Lorax, and more of the Dr. Seuss Babies! This adorable book features chunky easy-to-lift flaps, perfect for little hands!

Nurture a love of reading and of Dr. Seuss!

Babies and toddlers will love to learn about Halloween traditions with their favorite Dr. Seuss Babies characters! Lift the flaps to reveal funny Halloween costumes, a pumpkin turning into a jack-o'-lantern, and other delightful tricks and treats in this interactive board book featuring simple rhyme.

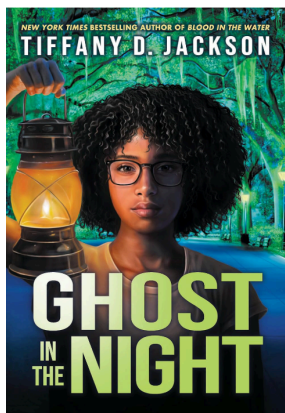
Reading age: 0-3 years



An Untold Story of the Halloween Fairy

Being the Halloween Fairy is hard, especially when you don't like spooky things and have to compete with cool costumes. But this year, she is determined to bring joy to kids...with candy! Or rather, trading Halloween candy for magical, wonder-filled dreams, all while saving children from having candy cramps and upset stomachs.

Reading age: 4-7 years



Ghost in the Night

There's not enough time in the day. How often have Mickey, Skye, Levi, Cyrus, and Thea thought that?

Well, now they have plenty of extra time... because they no longer need to sleep. None of them knows why this is happening to them. All they know is that they have to keep it a secret from their families and their friends. And while they keep it a secret, they can use their extra hours to become better than everyone else.

Each of them thinks they're alone in their sleeplessness. But once they find each other, they know it can't be just an accident. Suddenly they're forced to ask: What's keeping them awake at night?

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

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

Sioux Falls, SD; October 8-10, 2026

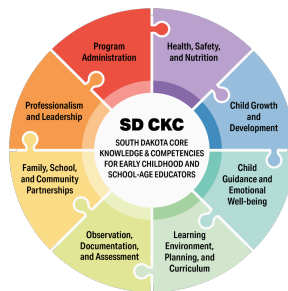
[South Dakota Early Childhood Education Conference](#)

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.

[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

- Jen Johnson, SDSU Early Childhood Education Lecturer

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

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