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PRESON’S MESSAGE

Recently I attended the NAEYC Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C., where we were told that approximately 13 million children in the United States are in regulated early childhood education and care programs. If one assumes an average ratio of 1:10, teacher to child, then there are approximately 1.3 million early childhood education professionals providing direct services to children daily in our nation.

These statistics led me to think about the number of early childhood professionals working in the 14 southern states that SECA serves. Assuming the four regions of the nation are fairly evenly represented, that means there are about 350,000 early childhood teachers in the Southern states.

On January 1, 2002, I became President of the Southern Early Childhood Association, which is the professional association for the. South. We presently have about 16,000 members. Why aren’t more of the 350,000 people who are teaching preschoolers in the 14 Southern states members of their professional association? The 16,000 members we have represent about 4.6% of the individuals working in our region.

I hope you are asking yourself why such a small percentage of individuals are members of SECA. And I hope this article will motivate those of us who belong to SECA to make more of an effort to encourage our colleagues to join this association.

The primary reason to be a part of a professional association is the ability to advocate for children, their families and early childhood staff with a collective voice. An advocacy organization in Tennessee has as its motto “Many Voices Speak as One.” Perhaps SECA should adopt as a similar perspective as we work to improve compensation and benefits for employees and the quality of care in programs for children.

As I travel to states representing SECA, one of the most common responses I get when introduced as the SECA President, is how much teachers enjoy working with SECA. How user-friendly the articles are, and how teachers can take the information and go directly to their classroom and put it to practice. There are many other reasons to join SECA. We have a wonderful conference held in a different Southern state each year. Our Resource Catalog gives members easy access to current and relevant position statements as well as many professional publications.

One of my top priorities is to spread the word about the necessity of professional association. I hope to convince a sufficient number of those 95.4% non-SECA members to join with us so we in the South can truly speak with one voice for children, early childhood programs, and their staff.

Authors


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SECA RECALLS 2001 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Because of the extraordinary events of the last few months and the uncertainties of mail delivery throughout the United States, the SECA Board of Directors has taken the unusual step of recalling an election and issuing a new ballot for President-Elect. This step has been necessary because of the uncertainty of delivery of ballots to all SECA members and the desire on part of the Board of Directors to ensure an equitable and fair election for the next SECA President.

A second ballot was mailed at the end of December in the SECA Reporter. All previous ballots will be discarded and will not be counted. YOU CAN VOTE AGAIN. MAKE SURE YOUR VOTE COUNTS BY SENDING IN THE SECOND BALLOT.

Moving???
If you are moving or have a change of address, please notify the SECA office immediately. We want to make sure you receive your Dimensions and SECA conference and membership information on time!

Southern Early Childhood Association
P.O. Box 59930
Little Rock, AR 72215-5930
(501) 221-1648
Toll Free: 800-305-7322

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Cover design by Leslie Jones, a student at Louisiana Tech., Ruston, LA.
Recently I received an invitation from Congressman Harold Ford to attend a meeting at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss legislation he wanted to introduce in Congress. The Pre-Kindergarten Oriented Professional Support (P-KOPS) Act is the name of the legislation. Its purpose is to increase access to high-quality, pre-kindergarten education by competitively funding early educator positions. The meeting was canceled when Congressman Ford was called back to Washington, D.C.

If this meeting had been held, I was prepared to ask Ford to modify his legislation to include funding for scholarships so early childhood educators could obtain their Associate or Bachelor’s degrees. This Act was focused on teachers working with 3- and 4-year-old children. I was going to suggest that we also need help with professionals teaching children younger than age 3. I agree with Congressman Ford about the need to attract and retain qualified early childhood teachers. We are all aware of the high turnover rate of the preschool workforce and the negative effect this has on children.

I met an early childhood teacher at a Georgia conference who had just moved from Pennsylvania. She had the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children send me a video they produced about their Worthy Wage Program and some information about a statewide compensation initiative called Quality Early Education Through Salaries and Training (QUEST). This initiative is very much like the WAGE, and T.E.A.C.H. programs that started in North Carolina and have now been adopted by a number of states. The component of QUEST that I am most impressed with is the provision for forgiveness of up to $10,000 in student loans for degree teachers who go to work in licensed early childhood education centers.

I think Head Start is right on target by investing resources in requiring lead teachers to have an Associate Degree. I would love to see a local education association in one of our Southern states set up a goal of having every early childhood educator in the community have at least a CDA. The group could team up with Head Start and get their city and county governments to buy into the idea as well as the Chamber of Commerce, the public schools, and United Way.

With 100% of their workforce holding some type of credential, the Preschool Legal Legislation

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Have You Renewed Your 2003 Membership?
If you have not yet received your membership renewal form, please let us know so that you can get the latest information on what’s happening at the state and national levels. Your SECA affiliate can provide this for you. If you live outside the SECA region, please contact the SECA office at P.O. Box 59530, Little Rock, AR, 72215-5930
Phone: (501) 221-1648 or 800-305-7322

We’re very excited about counting you as a member!

Annual SECA Business Meeting Scheduled

The annual Business Meeting of the Southern Early Childhood Association will be held on Saturday, March 15, 2003 from 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

A revision in the SECA By-Laws will be considered. The text of the proposed By-Laws change is found on page 20 of this issue of Dimensions of Early Childhood.

Southern Early Childhood Association
8500 W. Markham St., Suite 105
Little Rock, AR 72215-5930
(501) 221-1648 • fax (501) 227-5267
e-mail: info@southernearlychildhood.org
Web: www.southernearlychildhood.org

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