

From the Guest Editors

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As longtime advocates for early childhood education, it's an enormous honor to serve as guest editors for this issue of Delaware Journal for Public Health.

Delaware has come a long way since we began working on these issues more than 10 years ago. And, in many ways, our renewed focus on early care and education kickstarted in the 1990s, when medical technology and research confirmed the connection between early brain development and lifelong health and success.

Today, a broader coalition is behind what providers and developmental science tell us: the first few years of a child's life are filled with critically important milestones that, if missed, can put that child behind the pace of their peers early. If a child does not arrive in kindergarten with essential skills (or does arrive with a developmental delay that hasn't been caught by educators), they can quickly fall behind in areas like reading. If they are not reading on grade level by third grade, research tells us it's incredibly hard to get back on track – and more expensive long-term.

Yet, we know early opportunities and long-term outcomes are inequitable and inadequate for the future we want for Delaware and for our own children and grandchildren.

Which is why we're grateful to the DJPH and the Delaware Academy of Medicine/Delaware Public Health Association for identifying early childhood as a priority for all Delawareans.

We would like to thank the many national and local experts who share their expertise in this edition. This issue features pediatricians, brain researchers, cardiology experts, hospital administrators, community and business leaders, all sharing perspectives on early childhood as a key period in life for public health focus and public investment.

Delaware has made a lot of progress: increasing our investments in doulas, home visiting, high-quality early care and education—including pre-k, developmental screenings, and early intervention.

And our collective “tent” of advocates continues to grow. Thanks to the organizations and individuals active in the First State Pre-K coalition—organizations focused on health, researchers, business groups, early care and education programs, faith groups, parents and more—our message of increased state support for families, children, and providers is also amplified.

We have much more to do to ensure that the future of Delaware—our youngest citizens—get the healthy start we know makes a difference. We hope readers learn from this edition and share it with their family, friends and colleagues. Advancing public health requires collective action, and we can all be a part of advancing the issue by speaking up and speaking out.

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