**New Leadership in Infant and Toddler Learning Post-Baccalaureate Certificate Addresses a Critical Need for Professional Development in North Carolina**

Research has shown that the infant-toddler period is particularly significant in terms of a child’s brain development and learning, and that high-quality caregiving experiences are essential to supporting optimal developmental outcomes (Center for the Developing Child, 2016). Unfortunately, although North Carolina has made great strides in improving the quality of care available to children prior to kindergarten entry, services for infants and toddlers lag far behind the opportunities for preschool-age children. For instance:

* Significantly fewer infants and toddlers are enrolled in four- or five-star (the higher levels of quality) centers than preschoolers;
* Infant-toddler teachers have lower education (far fewer infant-toddler teachers have an Associates degree or higher (45%) than preschool teachers (69%); and
* Infant-toddler teachers have, on average, one and one-half years less experience working with children than preschool teachers (Child Care Services Association (CCSA), 2017).

The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE), CCSA and The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) partnered together to address the tremendous need for professional development specifically targeted to improve the quality of infant and toddler care. The result is a new graduate-level Leadership in Infant and Toddler Learning (LITL) Certificate program that will be piloted at UNCG. Starting in Fall 2018, professionals working with or on behalf of infants and toddlers and their families can receive advanced training and earn a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate. The first cohort of LITL Certificate students includes professionals from a variety of roles such as Infant-Toddler Specialist, family child care provider, Early Head Start curriculum specialist, and infant-toddler teacher. These first students will begin taking classes in August 2018. The on-line LITL Certificate program includes six courses that can be completed in as little as three semesters. The courses include advanced study in infant-toddler development, best practices for working with infants and toddlers and their families, assessment of infants and toddlers, leadership, and coaching/mentoring.

Upon receiving approval from DCDEE, CCSA took the necessary steps to create and add a new T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship opportunity to correspond with UNCG’s LITL Post Baccalaureate Certificate program. The LITL Scholarship Program offers two unique scholarship options for participation, each tied to the applicant’s role and employment setting. The first option provides scholarship support to early educators, including teachers, home based professionals and directors who teach infants and toddlers or administer an infant or toddler program within a licensed facility. The second scholarship option is reserved exclusively for field-based early education system specialists who work on behalf of early childhood educators and the children in their care.

Once formal admission has been granted by UNCG, each student is encouraged to apply for the T.E.A.C.H. LITL scholarship. If approved, the scholarship recipient will receive a package of supports tied to the option selected for participation. T.E.A.C.H. will cover 80% of tuition and book costs on a per course basis for early educators or offer a $1000 educational stipend on a per course basis for field-based specialists. In addition to receiving counseling support, both scholarship options provide a compensation benefit for successful course completion and mandate a retention commitment period.

**Applications for the next cohort of students (which will start in August 2019) should be submitted to UNCG by January 15, 2019**. Students seeking scholarship support and assistance from the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program are asked to submit the Intent To Apply for T.E.A.C.H. LITL Scholarship form directly to CCSA soon after submitting their initial application to UNCG.

For further information about the Leadership in Infant and Toddler Learning Certificate offered through the UNCG, please see <https://hhs.uncg.edu/wordpress/hdf/graduate/programs/litl/> or contact Catherine Scott-Little at mcscottL@uncg.edu. Inquiries related to the T.E.A.C.H. LITL scholarship should be sent to Kimberly Bynum at kimberlyb@childcareservices.org.

References

Center on the Developing Child. (2016). *From best practices to breakthrough impacts: A science-based approach to building a more promising future for young children and families.* Harvard University: Author. Available at <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/From_Best_Practices_to_Breakthrough_Impacts-4.pdf>

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