

Capital District Child Care Council: *Strengthening its work with the DECA Program*



**Capital District
Child Care Council**

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The Capital District Child Care Council (CDCCC), located in Albany NY, serves six counties in the Capital region and Mohawk Valley. The Social Emotional Development Services team works directly with the DCRC staff and resources to provide quality social and emotional support to communities across counties. The team primarily works with Albany County and Saratoga County Head Start programs as mental health consultants. Through this work the Child Care Council staff helps Head Start programs to implement the DECA Program to fidelity using the reflective checklists, DECA I/T, DECA P2, e-DECA, and by providing support training for staff centered around childhood resilience and the DECA resources.

The DCRC materials have enhanced the mental health consultation services that we provide to at-risk populations. The materials are comprehensive and clear, yet simple enough that they are easily used by all staff members. I personally enjoy having a strong framework with research to back it up that aligns with my own personal/professional philosophies on approaching challenging behaviors and childhood resilience. The strong focus that I have on attachment and relationships aligns well with the DECA tool and all of the trainings and other materials offered through DCRC. I have also taken the *Building Your Bounce* journal and developed training for providers in which we discuss the resilience model, how our resilience relates to the work we do with children, and work through a few strategies from the book together to support staff resilience. Participants learn where they can access more information about *Building Your Bounce* so that they can continue to foster their resilience after the training. Our team has recently started working with the *Your Journey Together* materials to build parent workshops using that curriculum. I find that the material is easy to use and easy to train. Teachers and parents respond well to the breakdown of protective factors and how those factors translate in the classroom and in the home. These same ideas hold true for the DESSA as well; we use the DESSA tool with our school-age programs to help staff understand and support social and emotional wellbeing across the populations they serve.

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This past year I looked back through the e-DECA reports to pull together trends from the Albany County and Saratoga County Head Start programs with the hope of better informing our practice for the upcoming year. We discovered that 42% of all children reported on in Albany County had at least one area of need on their fall DECA reports. We noticed that there was a significant need to focus on attachment/relationships in Albany so I worked with staff to understand the importance of building strong relationships and the effect that can have on challenging behaviors. Often, once the children and their teachers had a strong working relationship, the behaviors decreased. Through global planning and individualized planning, the teachers, administrators and support staff were able to build children's resilience in the Head Start program and we saw significant increases in the Strengths reported on the DECA. The CDCCC saw similar results in Saratoga County. Below are some highlights:

- 50% of children moved from an "area of need" to the "typical" or "strengths" range in the Self-Regulation category
- 64% moved from "area of need" to the "typical" or "strengths" range in the Initiative category
- 79% of children moved from an "area of need" to the "typical" or "strengths" range in the Attachment/Relationships category

Our Mental Health Consultant in Saratoga County Kathryn Nixon Davis, LMSW, worked with teaching teams to build stronger relationships with children and used coaching practices to help teams plan for global and individualized strategies. Kathryn also trains Head Start teachers and other child care providers on the proactive strategies to prevent challenging behaviors such as building friendship skills, as well as responsive strategies to challenging behavior in early childhood and school-age programs. Trainings from the CDCCC work to pull in philosophies and practices of DCRC to best support child care providers in building strong social and emotional development across the children and families they serve.

I have really enjoyed finding a framework and tools that align with my own beliefs and philosophies on early childhood development, challenging behaviors and resilience. The greatest lesson I've learned since starting work with DECA materials and DCRC is to always look deeper to really understand behaviors. Sometimes it is easy to forget how a stressful home life can impact a child and when we overlook what is going on at home, we miss key triggers or understandings of a child. I have also been able to strengthen the work that I do with relationship building by using the DECA materials. I think it is important for those working in early childhood to understand how children develop in relation to their experiences in and out of the classroom and to help foster strong social skills and emotional intelligence within their students to promote healthy social/emotional development across their lifetime. I also have learned the importance of building adult resilience, which is not something I had considered working with prior to coming into contact with DCRC and DECA materials. I really enjoy working with the adults who have strong impacts on children to boost their own resilience. I feel that this work is as important for the adults as it is for the children in their care.

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