



Winter 2009

## Greetings!

Welcome to the latest edition of the Gateways to Opportunity quarterly e-newsletter! The winter of 2009 has been memorable for many reasons—the weather, the economy, and the election of President Barack Obama. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which includes substantial funding to support young children and has major implications for all of us in the fields of early childhood and school-age and youth.

The ARRA legislation provides \$2 billion in funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and an additional \$2.1 billion for Head Start. (The CCDBG federal funds do not require a state match—good news for all states but especially Illinois!) The ARRA also includes millions of dollars for the IDEA infant and toddler program, IDEA preschool program, and Title I for disadvantaged students. There is funding for school districts serving homeless children and youth and an increase in Pell Grants and college work-study. This legislation and resultant funding will have an immediate and significant impact on the fields of early care and education and school-age and youth across our nation.

If you work in the fields of early care and education or school-age and youth and have not followed the ARRA, now is the time to familiarize yourself with the provisions and implications of ARRA. An excellent Web site to visit is the **Center for Law and Social Policy** (CLASP). CLASP has launched a new Web page with multiple links to child care and early education, policy analysis, and state-by-state data.

The **Afterschool Alliance Web site** discusses implications of the ARRA funds on school-age and youth programs. They also have a wiki page that provides the latest questions and answers about the ARRA for afterschool services.

Finally, the State of Illinois has a **Web page** dedicated to the Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This site indicates which existing state programs will benefit from the recovery funds. The information is fairly general at this time, but it will be updated as details of the ARRA funds are provided.

In this issue of *Inside Gateways*, Lilian Katz shares her thoughts on the importance of asking children questions as a way to encourage children to think and respond. This is equally important for adults working in the early childhood and school-age and youth systems in Illinois: How can we position our programs to best take advantage of the ARRA funding? What changes and improvements could stimulus funding make in our early care and education and school-age or youth services? We need critical thinkers and decision makers who will help Illinois utilize this opportunity to fund programs and create opportunities.

Tim Walker and Penny Wolford are profiled leaders who integrate technology into their programs. Technology is a tool that has the capacity to make information available to everyone in an efficient and effective manner. Use technology, visit Web sites, and learn about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Ask critical questions of your program, your agency, and your legislators. Let's

formulate a plan and use this opportunity to make a focused investment in programs and services that will have a long-lasting impact on children, youth, and families.



**Joni Scritchlow** and  
Gateways to Opportunity  
Professional Development Team

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## Profiles in Leadership

**Periodically in this e-newsletter, we profile Gateways leaders to acquaint you with their work and to illustrate through their experiences the range of career options available in early care and education and school-age and youth programs.**

In this issue of *Inside Gateways*, we profile two individuals who focus on integrating technology into child care programs for children and youth. Tim Walker, director of technology at the **McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership**, develops and presents courses and workshops to center directors and family child care providers across Illinois on how to effectively integrate technology into the management operations of their programs. Penny Williams Wolford is a family child care provider in Cook County who uses technology in multiple ways to enhance her family child care business.

### Tim Walker



*By providing training and technical assistance on integrating technology into program management, Tim has helped to professionalize the field of early care and education and school-age and youth development.*

As the director of technology at the **McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership**, Tim Walker has a broad and long-range view of the role that technology has played in the administration and management of child care and youth programs in Illinois. In 2000 with funding from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership (the “Center”) initiated training programs and technical assistance to center directors on integrating technology into their program management. The training topics, formats, and locations have changed over the past nine years to reflect the needs and practices of programs and practitioners. The Directors’ Technology Surveys conducted by the Center illustrate the changes in technology use in recent years.

Responses to the **survey conducted in 2000** indicated that 47% of the 150 directors surveyed from Illinois said that they used email on a daily basis, while 30% never used email or used it monthly. One-third of the directors surveyed in 2000 said that they logged onto the Internet on a daily basis. Thirty-three percent indicated that they never logged onto the Internet or did so only on a monthly basis. One-quarter of the directors surveyed in 2000 indicated that they felt competent in their use of the Internet.

The **survey conducted four years later in 2004** included a wider range of responses—364 responses from center directors in 18 different states, including Illinois. By 2004, 85% of the center directors surveyed indicated that they used the Internet and email on a daily or weekly basis. The remaining 15% indicated that they never used email or the Internet or did so only on a monthly basis.

While directors' use of email and the Internet increased substantially over the four years covered by the surveys, the directors indicated that their skill in using software applications other than for word processing was limited and that additional training and support were needed.

The next survey of early childhood administrators' use of technology is expected in the summer of 2009. Tim expects that those survey results will confirm what he sees in his contact with center and family child care administrators around Illinois. Most, if not all, center and family child care programs have Internet access today—although not all have high-speed Internet access. Most administrators use some combination of computer software applications to decrease the time they spend on common administrative tasks such as processing payroll; preparing newsletters, flyers, and marketing presentations; forecasting enrollment; and automating data management systems. An increasing number of early childhood administrators today use the many Web 2.0 tools that are freely available—setting up a Facebook or MySpace page to promote their program, creating a Delicious or LeapTag page to share and exchange links to early care and education resources, establishing a Skype account to make free calls over the Internet, and developing a wiki with Wikispaces or Wetpaint to create a collaborative Web site.

The availability of free Web 2.0 tools is an area of enormous and rapid change in the field of technology. "There is no longer a huge fear of the unknown when it comes to technology," says Tim. "This is in part due to the increased availability of training and technical assistance on integrating technology into program management, as well as an influx of younger staff working in these programs. Hiring 'Gen Yers' who are more familiar and comfortable with using technology has motivated directors to get up to speed."

An area that remains an obstacle to integrating technology into early childhood and school-age and youth program management is funding. Finding the economic means to purchase the latest computer equipment and software remains a serious challenge for center, family child care, and school-age program administrators.

## **Penny Williams Wolford**



*Computer technology has improved Penny's communication and outreach with families, solved her fiscal management dilemmas, professionalized her business practices, augmented her Food Program cash flow, and enhanced her child care children's project work experiences.*

Penny is a licensed family child care provider in the western suburbs of Chicago. She is accredited by the **National Association for Family Child Care** and has her master's degree in education with an emphasis on early childhood leadership from **National-Louis University**. Penny has also received the **Gateways to Opportunity Infant and Toddler Credential** and the **Gateways to Opportunity ECE Credential**. Penny has been providing family child care for 13 years.

In 2008, Penny participated in the **Taking Charge of Change** leadership training offered by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership. That experience, along with completing her master's degree, provided Penny with the time and resources to explore the ways in which technology could be used to enhance her family child care business operations. "I hadn't had the time to embrace something new before I enrolled in my master's program and Taking Charge of Change. The assignments given in the classes built in the time and the challenge to 'solve a real business problem' that allowed me to research the way technology can improve my program."

The improvements that Penny has made to her program as a result of technology cover a range of areas: Penny uses software program tools to publish a monthly newsletter for parents, to track waiting lists and child immunizations in a more systematic way, to send important memos home to parents in a more timely manner, to utilize digital photography to document project work that she does with her child care children, and to submit her monthly menus to her Food Program agency, which has improved her business cash flow. Most importantly, technology solved her fiscal management challenges, as evidenced by the Business Administration Scale (BAS), an assessment tool for family child care administrators.

"In addition to providing the time and the stimulus to research various uses of technology in my family child care business, Taking Charge of Change provided funding to implement a program improvement plan." Penny says that lack of funding and lack of focused time are the two main obstacles to implementing new technologies in child care businesses. "If more training opportunities and dedicated conferences on the uses of technology in child care business were offered around the state, providers would soon learn how technology can move their programs further and improve the lives of children in their care."

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## Lilian Katz: Reflections

### Asking Children Questions

The articles in this issue of *Inside Gateways* focus on how technology can help teachers and administrators improve many aspects of their program operations. Another way to improve programs for children and youth is by encouraging teachers and administrators to ask better questions. How you ask children questions makes a difference in the kind of thinking you encourage.

I once observed a teacher with a large group of 4- and 5-year-olds as she began her daily large group routine. She pointed to one of the boys and asked him, "What color is your shirt?" to which he responded with a puzzled expression, "Teacher, don't you know your colors yet? This is blue!"

Teachers at every level of education use a variety of question-posing strategies to accomplish a range of teaching goals. Ostrosky and Lyons (2008) point out that there are many different kinds of questions that serve a variety of purposes. They offer detailed descriptions and examples of types of questions that are useful for teachers of young children.

The question "What color is your shirt?" is sometimes called a closed question. It asks the respondent to recall a fact and is very much like taking a test or exam. Most children learn fairly early that there are right answers to these kinds of questions and that the teacher is waiting for the children to give her these right answers.

I sometimes think of these questions as "interrogatory" in that the teacher wants to know what is inside the child's head. There are situations in which such questions are appropriate. For example, by about the age of 5, it is a good idea for a child to know her full name and some other basic facts like her home phone number and address. When an adult is trying to find out whether the child has mastered these useful facts, it is a good idea to start by saying something like, "I want to know if you know your address. Can you tell it to me?" When phrased in this way, the question is genuine, and its purpose is clear to the child. So perhaps we could call this kind of phrasing a "checking question" rather than an interrogatory one.

Another kind of question to use as occasions arise is a "probing question." This kind of question is used when the adult wants to learn more about the child's thinking about a particular topic or her anticipation of

a particular event. For example, a preschooler who was participating in a car construction project told the teacher what he was thinking about adding to the front of the big box that was the body of the car. The teacher expressed real interest in his plans, and as he shared them, she casually said, “If you do add that part, then what?” Or sometimes a child makes a statement about what she plans to do, and the teacher can say something like “So that what?” to probe the child’s thinking about her plans or intentions.

In a similar way, when children are formulating the questions for their project, the teacher can write the question offered by a child and then ask the group, “What do you think the answer might be?” For example, during an investigation of bicycles, a child might ask, “How do you fix flat tires?” The children in the group will offer a variety of possible answers. When a reasonable answer to the question is offered, the teacher could say, in a positive and serious way, “What makes you think so?” In this way, the teacher supports the disposition to examine the basis for one’s views and opinions.

Most important of all is that the questions should be posed to the children matter-of-factly, seriously, and in a positive tone, conveying respect for children’s responses as well as confidence in their abilities. They may not have the “right” answers to teachers’ questions, but taking their responses seriously can encourage them to go on thinking about the issues raised and the bases for their ideas.

## Reference

Ostrosky, Michaelene M., & Lyons, Barbara Phillips. (2008). The art of asking questions: Guidelines for early childhood teachers. *Focus on Pre-K & K*, 20(4), 1-6.

The Illinois Early Learning Project has tip sheets on a range of topics including **The Project Approach: Helping Children Ask Questions**.

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## Current Early Care and Education (ECE) and School-Age and Youth (SAY) Initiatives

Periodically in this e-newsletter, we provide updates on key professional development initiatives taking place in Illinois. Additional information and updates about each initiative are made available on the Gateways Web site.

### I-TEACHe (Illinois’ Tool for Early Childhood Excellence and Educators)

Teachers of young children depend on good observational skills and tools to help them assess children’s abilities and interests, and to help them plan programs that meet the developmental needs of all the children in their care. That can be a challenge when a teacher is planning programs for 15, 20, or 25 children. A number of assessment systems have been developed to assist early childhood professionals (e.g., Work Sampling-Illinois, High/Scope COR, and the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum). Teachers find these assessment systems useful, but they also need a way to store their observations and documentation so their assessments can be used more easily and efficiently.

In 2001-2002 at the request of teachers and with the help of a focus group of teachers, the **Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)** developed **I-TEACHe** (Illinois’ Tool for Early Childhood Excellence and Educators) for teachers in their state-funded PreK programs. I-TEACHe is an online observation and documentation system that utilizes a computer and a handheld personal digital assistant (PDA), such as a Palm Pilot, that allows teachers to record classroom observations and transfer them into a computer that organizes observations according to the **Illinois Early Learning Standards and Benchmarks**.

Teachers who use I-TEACHe report that the system helps them track the progress of individual children more easily and helps them report children's progress to parents more systematically. Because I-TEACHe organizes observations by the eight learning areas in the Illinois Early Learning Standards, it also helps teachers look at children in a holistic way and reflect on their teaching practices in a comprehensive manner. For example, a teacher's I-TEACHe observation records might indicate that a child is spending a majority of her class time in the science and math areas of the room, prompting the teacher to consider her classroom environment and instruction. Do the science and math areas of the room dominate the other learning areas? Are the learning materials in the math and science area more appealing or accessible than in the other areas of the room? Does the teacher engage children more fully in those areas because of her own strengths and interests in math and science? I-TEACHe helps teachers assess individual children's needs as well as their own teaching practices in an ongoing and systematic way. Because it minimizes the use of paper to record and report assessments, I-TEACHe is also energy-smart and green friendly.

Although teachers in state-funded PreK and Preschool for All (PFA) programs are given priority in I-TEACHe workshops—and approximately 600 teachers representing 250 school districts use the I-TEACHe tool—any early childhood teacher can attend an I-TEACHe workshop provided he or she has completed an assessment system workshop and one of the state's Early Learning Standards workshops.

Meg Stafford is one of the PreK teachers who uses I-TEACHe. Meg teaches forty 3- to 5-year-olds in two half-day classrooms at Trico Elementary School in Campbell Hill. Trico serves the three counties of Jackson, Perry, and Randolph in southwestern Illinois. Meg's program is funded by ISBE with a grant from Southern Illinois University (SIU) and is coordinated through the Southern Region Early Childhood Programs at SIU.

Meg first learned about the I-TEACHe assessment tool from her aunt, who had been using I-TEACHe in her PreK classroom in central Illinois for five years. Meg's mother, Jean Stafford, who also teaches PreK through Southern Region Early Childhood Programs, convinced her advisors at SIU that having I-TEACHe in the PreK classrooms of Southern Region would be beneficial. According to Meg, "We use portfolio assessments with our students at Trico, and I-TEACHe helps with that process a lot." She says that the I-TEACHe tool allows her and her teaching assistant to easily record what children are doing in the classroom and combine their narrative notes and anecdotes with photos and artifacts—objects that illustrate a child's growth and development. "I-TEACHe uploads various assessment pieces to the computer, where they can be connected to the Illinois Early Learning Standards." The portfolio materials can be quickly and easily assembled for staff discussions and classroom planning as well as for parent meetings and home visits.

"I-TEACHe also helps us focus on children's strengths and weaknesses. We have a little girl in our class who is doing a fair amount of writing during the day. As a result, we have a lot of information recorded in the language arts learning area for this student. She may not, however, have as much recorded or experienced in math or science. I-TEACHe helps us to see what other developmental areas we need to observe for more information about this student."

Meg finds the PDA handheld device that is part of I-TEACHe helpful for "quick entries" when working with multiple students at one time as well as when they are outside the classroom—outdoors on a field trip or in the gymnasium, for example.

The I-TEACHe team is working with some of the **Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies** to pilot I-TEACHe to assess its usability in other early childhood programs, such as family child care. Other improvements in the works for the I-TEACHe system include a Spanish translation of the system and Web links to activities and lessons to help implement the Illinois Early Learning Standard Benchmarks.

**For more information about I-TEACHe, contact:**

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## **Program Administration Scale (PAS) and Business Administration Scale (BAS)**

In the fall 2007 issue of *Inside Gateways*, we reported on the implementation of the new Quality Counts: Quality Rating System (QRS)—a voluntary rating system offered through the Illinois Department of Human Services to assist child care providers with program quality improvement.

To measure leadership and management practices in center and family child care settings, the QRS relies on the Program Administration Scale (PAS) for center programs and the Business Administration Scale (BAS) for family child care programs. These two tools were developed by **Teri N. Talan** and **Paula Jorde-Bloom** of the **McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership**, an organization that has supported administrative leaders in early care and education for over 20 years.

The PAS and BAS are constructed to help program directors and family child care providers make continuous quality improvements in their program's administration. Each measures quality on a 7-point scale, enabling programs and providers to set realistic goals and make incremental program improvements to achieve these goals.

The PAS and BAS are unique among assessment tools. They provide a comprehensive but focused look at administrative practices in early childhood programs; other reliable and valid assessment tools typically assess global program quality. The **PAS** assesses the full range of center-based administrative practices—human resources development, personnel cost and allocation, center operations, child assessment, fiscal management, program planning and evaluation, family partnerships, marketing and public relations, technology, and staff qualifications. The **BAS** for family child care programs is more streamlined, but it is equally comprehensive and assesses 10 items—qualifications and professional development, income and benefits, work environment, fiscal management, record keeping, risk management, provider-parent communication, community resources, marketing and public relations, and providers as employers.

The PAS was initially developed for use in a Chicago-specific project in 2001. Soon after, the PAS was recognized by other groups within and outside Illinois as a useful tool for measuring the quality of programs' administrative practices. In 2004, the PAS was published by **Teachers College Press**, which increased its use nationwide. Some states—Tennessee, Ohio, and California—have embedded the PAS in their quality improvement initiatives, specifically, the Tennessee Administrator Credential, Ohio's Step Up to Quality (QRS), and the California Director Mentor Program. **Research** conducted by others outside the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership affirms the effectiveness of PAS in predicting early childhood program quality.

The publication of the BAS—a newer assessment tool than the PAS—is anticipated by many who work with family child care providers nationwide. The BAS will be published by Teachers College Press in May of this year.

The BAS and PAS have been in use throughout Illinois for a little over a year, coinciding with the state rollout of the Quality Counts: Quality Rating System (QRS). Training on using the instruments is provided through the **state's Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies**. The benefit of the BAS and PAS tools will be realized as programs and providers assess the improvements made in their administrative and business practices when they apply for higher star levels on the QRS in the coming years.

**For more information about the PAS and BAS, contact:**

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## **New Gateways Resources**

The following resources and resource links have been added to the Web site since the last issue of *Inside Gateways*.

### **Research Centers**

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs  
<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/illinois/>

### **Research Reports**

Dual Language Learners in the Early Years: Getting Ready to Succeed in School  
<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/ecell/earlyyears.pdf>

The Changing Face of the United States: The Influence of Culture on Early Child Development  
[http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/Culture\\_book.pdf?docID=6921](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/Culture_book.pdf?docID=6921)

Who's Caring for the Kids? The Status of the Early Childhood Workforce in Illinois—2008  
[http://cecl.nl.edu/research/reports/whos\\_caring\\_report\\_2008.pdf](http://cecl.nl.edu/research/reports/whos_caring_report_2008.pdf)

### **State Government**

Say It Out Loud  
<http://www.mentalhealthillinois.org>