

## **Race to the Top – Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation**

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) is a federal initiative that provides competitive state grants to support purposeful efforts to ensure that greater numbers of children with high needs are able to access high quality early learning and development programs, and to ensure that these programs are embedded within an integrated state system of programs and supports for young children.

In December of 2013, Michigan was awarded \$51.7 million to improve early learning programs. The Lead Agency for the grant is the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), with the MDE Office of Great Start leading the implementation, management, and cross-partner collaboration efforts of the grant.

Through this grant, the state directed substantial resources to support several early childhood policy priorities. Three of these priorities were: professional development, higher education, and family support.

In response to a study finding that the majority of children with high needs in child care are cared for in home-based environments, Michigan targeted many of its professional development initiatives specifically toward these providers. The state piloted the use of three types of consultants: health, family engagement, and social-emotional, to help providers improve quality. The state implemented a new parent/community approach to support home-based providers in certain communities. Infants and toddlers make up a large percentage of the children served by home-based providers, so the state's efforts to improve their knowledge and skills was viewed as having the potential to significantly affect the care that very young children receive.

Saginaw became involved with this initiative in fiscal year 2017 when we were awarded State grant dollars to hire an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (IECMHC). Infant and early childhood mental health consultation is a prevention-based indirect intervention that teams a mental health professional with child care providers to improve the social, emotional and behavioral health of children. Through the development of partnerships among providers and parents, consultation builds the adult's capacity to understand the influence of their relationships and interactions on young children's development. Children's well being is improved and mental health problems are prevented as a result of the Consultant's work with child care providers, child care directors and parents. This is attained through skilled observations, group and individualized strategies, and early identification of children with challenging behavior which places them at risk for expulsion. Additionally, consultants serve as a social emotional resource to community partners, providing trainings on social emotional topics and connecting families and child care providers to other services and supports. Although IECMH consultants can provide these indirect services to licensed and registered child care providers serving children 0-8, the focus of Race to the Top and the grant dollars that SCCMHA received was on home-based providers.

Renee Lewis began in the role of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant on 10/1/16. She was housed at the Intermediate School District's Transition Center to work closely with the Great Start to Quality Resource Center. She received training from the State Social Emotional Coordinator prior to providing consultation services to home-based child care providers. When working with a provider, Renee generally meets with them weekly for consultation and moves to bi-weekly as they make progress toward their goals.

By the end of 2017, the State was expressing satisfaction with the strides that had been made toward the goal of improving access to high quality learning and development programs statewide. Michigan announced that it would continue its race to the top to ensure that all of the state's youngest learners have greater access to high quality early learning and development. Renee's position was again grant funded for fiscal year 2018 and Michigan made a commitment to explore State funding to continue at least parts of this very important work into the future after the federal dollars had ended.