

Column: Colchester makes early childhood care a priority

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Colchester, Conn. — April 11-17 has been dedicated as the Week of the Young Child by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Its theme, so appropriately named, is “Early Years Are Learning Years.” Research from Harvard University has shown that in the first few years of life, a child’s brain creates 700 new connections every second. This is why the quality of both a child’s environment and relationships in the early years is so important.

Long-term studies have shown that for every dollar invested in early care and education, there is a return to both individual and society of somewhere between \$4 and \$15. Research has also shown that children who receive high quality early care and education tend to complete more years of education, can have higher achievement in reading and math, and improved language development.

This is why every single week of the year is the “Week of the Young Child” in Colchester. The town, with the help of its many volunteers and partners, works in many ways to ensure that every child enters kindergarten ready for success.

With the use of federal and state grant funding, Colchester offers every 3- and 4-year-old an opportunity for a developmental screening through our Colchester Early Childhood Program. This screening helps to identify children who need extra support to ensure a successful education.

For four years, Colchester has received a School Readiness grant from the Connecticut State Departments of Education and Social Services. This grant’s purpose is to increase the accessibility and affordability of quality preschool for our children, provide professional development for our local early care providers, and provide education opportunities to our parents and caregivers of children.

Received grants

Colchester also received grant funding from the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund to develop The Collaborative for Colchester’s Children.

This Collaborative is a partner-based community-wide initiative responsible for creating an early childhood blueprint for our children and their families.

The Collaborative is beginning to address the needs of children and families in the areas of early care and education, family supports and health and wellness. Our free family kickoff event, Celebrating Families, takes place May 1 at Colchester Elementary School. It will provide learning opportunities for parents, fun activities for children and a free community lunch.

Recently, Colchester schools partnered with TVCCA to bring additional opportunities through Early Head Start and Head Start. These proven programs will offer parent/caregiver support and education for families with infants and toddlers while giving Colchester another high quality preschool program.

Colchester’s efforts to improve the lives of our children are immeasurable. Our collective efforts are fueled by the incredible passion and energy of our extensive group of volunteers and partners who work tirelessly and will not rest until all of Colchester’s youngest citizens are happy, healthy and successful children.

Shelly Flynn is early childhood coordinator for Colchester Public Schools.

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