

Questions for the Office of Early Childhood Commissioner Nominee

By: Sarah Tata, Legislative Analyst II
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Commissioner of Early Childhood ([CGS § 10-500](#))

The commissioner leads the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and oversees the state's system of early care and education for young children. The commissioner supervises the office, which administers the following programs, among others:

1. Early Start, which funds accredited educational programs for three-to-five-year-olds;
2. Smart Start, a competitive grant program for boards of education to establish or expand preschool programs;
3. a statewide training and professional development registry for child care and early childhood education staff;
4. Care 4 Kids, a child care subsidy program funded by the state and federal government;
5. child care services management, evaluation, and professional development;
6. child care facilities licensing and inspection;
7. youth camp oversight; and
8. family support programs, including the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.

Questions

1. What early childhood policy issues do you believe the General Assembly should prioritize this session?
2. During your time serving as Interim Commissioner, what unexpected challenges have you encountered?
3. One of OEC's duties is to develop early learning and development standards for early care and education providers to use. What is your philosophy on how these standards should be developed?
4. By law, 25% of staff members with primary responsibility for a classroom at each OEC-funded early care and education program must be designated qualified staff members at the bachelor's degree level, with the requirement gradually increasing, beginning with an increase to 50% beginning July 1, 2027 ([PA 24-78](#), as amended by [PA 25-143](#)). Considering how difficult it is to recruit and retain staff for these programs, do you see these requirements as an obstacle for the state achieving a fully staffed early childhood workforce?
5. Governor Lamont [announced](#) in November that Connecticut is adding up to 1,000 new spaces to the state's Early Start CT program in January 2026, and that the state is increasing provider payments for the program by 8% to support providers with operational costs and increased staff compensation. How many Early Start CT spaces have been added so far? Has the implementation of these new spaces and increase of provider payments been successful? Have there been any unexpected challenges?
6. Last session, the legislature passed Senate Bill 1 ([PA 25-93](#)) which established the Early Childhood Education Endowment fund to expand opportunities that make early childhood education available at no or low cost to families. The endowment was initially funded up to \$300 million for FY 25. What are these funds being used towards? Is it a usurpation of the legislature's budget authority to have this fund, seeing as it sends money to OEC without any legislature involvement?
7. Last year's annual state bond bill (House Bill 7288, [PA 25-174](#)) enables the State Bond Commission to authorize up to \$80 million in bonds (over several years) to be used to support OEC in establishing the Child Care Facilities Grant Program for Construction and Renovation. What are some projects OEC plans to support through funds from this grant program?
8. In the [2025 Early Childhood Education Endowment Annual Report](#), the advisory board reports that looking ahead to early 2026, OEC "will advance a comprehensive set of workforce and quality initiatives aimed at strengthening program quality and supporting educators." Can you discuss what these initiatives will be and any potential challenges you foresee OEC possibly facing?
9. In a recent [report](#) by the Office of the Child Advocate, the office identified significant gaps related to license-exempt youth camps. For example, entities that are exempt from licensure

are not required to conduct background checks of employees, therefore potentially leaving children at risk. Being the agency charged with youth camp oversight, does OEC believe all youth camps should be licensed? Would OEC have the capacity to oversee all youth camps?

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