



ECHO:

Transforming Education Through Innovation and Collaboration

Q&A with Katie Caples, Director of ECHO

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Every Child Has Opportunities (ECHO), was launched in 2024 in direct response to the crisis in early childhood education we face as a community, a Commonwealth, and a Nation. With over **\$3M** committed annually, **ECHO** provides a blueprint for addressing the issues that limit opportunities for children, families, and early childhood educators and business owners.

To get a deeper dive into the creation of **ECHO** and the goals for addressing barriers faced, we spoke with **ECHO Director, Katie Caples**.

Q: How and why was *Every Child Has Opportunities* created?

Pre-pandemic, York County had **221** early childhood education providers. In three years, that number dropped to **170**. Those who survived the pandemic are operating on average at **85%** of typical enrollment due to teacher and workforce shortages. Early childhood education program waitlists average **50-75** children, and many have stopped adding to their lists. **Every Child Has Opportunities (ECHO)** was created to address our local early childhood education crisis.

In late 2022, a group of community stakeholders, convened by the **J. William Warehime** and **Powder Mill Foundations**, was led by **Community Connections for Children** and **York County Economic Alliance** to create an action plan.

Funding partners stepped forward to assist in forming the program, including **WellSpan Health**, **J. William Warehime Foundation**, **Powder Mill Foundation**, **United Way of York County**, **The Kinsley Foundation**, and **York County Community Foundation**.

Q: What is being done to help address the workforce issue?

ECHO has raised over **\$3.4 million** in annual, multi-year funding, to create a spectrum of new programs to address access to quality affordable childcare, to retain and train more early educators, to expand the capacity of existing centers, establish new childcare centers, and work with employers to support their workforce to access childcare and reduce absenteeism.

In addition to convening three ongoing task force conversations, **ECHO** has launched two new grant programs for early childhood educators. We've also partnered with **Community Progress Council**, York County's community action agency, to expand their **Teacher Aid Program**, which is an effort to attract new professionals to the field. In early Spring of 2024, **ECHO** promoted the early childhood education pathway to thousands of high school students across the region through **Junior Achievement's** virtual career expo. We continue to have **ECHO** as a featured topic for community events such as the **YCEA's Women's Business Center Organization (WBCO) Luncheon, Economics Club**, and a **Forum**.

BY THE NUMBERS:

85% - On average, early childhood education programs in York County are operating at 85% of their pre-pandemic enrollment due to staffing shortages.

50+ - Early childhood education programs average waitlists of 50-75 children, and many have stopped adding names to their lists.

15+ - Home-based providers in York County report wait lists of 15-20 children, and many have stopped adding names to their lists.

57% - In Pennsylvania, 57% of all residents live in a childcare desert, a census tract with either no childcare providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed childcare slots.



Q: How does the lack of quality early childhood education affect the workforce?

Pennsylvania suffers a **\$3.47 billion** impact due to childcare issues in lost tax revenue and employer costs, and **54%** of employers said one of the most significant reasons they lost employees was due to childcare issues. Employers are impacted as parents try to navigate a broken early childhood education landscape, with **57%** of all PA residents living in a childcare desert – an area where there are more than three times as many children as licensed childcare slots.

In a recent **YCEA** survey, **74%** of respondents reported difficulties in accessing childcare impacted their employment. In that same survey, **44%** indicated that they adjusted their work schedule, **20%** began working from home, **8%** quit their job, and **7%** were terminated from their employment.

Q: What can the business community do to help support this endeavor?

We invite the business community into the conversation, to address immediate, crisis issues while developing solutions to long-term, chronic issues. I'd also suggest considering attending an upcoming event, joining a task force conversation, partnering with a local early childhood care and education provider, or funding **ECHO**. Employer engagement is crucial as we continue to positively impact and directly benefit working families across York County.

On January 9, 2024, Governor Josh Shapiro joined Rep. Carol Hill-Evans, the York County Economic Alliance, and Kim Bracey, CEO of YWCA York, to highlight the recent expansion of the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit for over 210,000 Pennsylvania families. The bipartisan legislation, signed into law in December, expands the existing tax credit to match 100 percent of the federal credit, helping families offset the burden of rising costs.



"Affordable childcare is the number one reason for absenteeism in the workplace. ECHO is the first step in expanding access to quality, affordable childcare."

-Kim Bracey, CEO, YWCA York



PAGE 6: Ec Club Group: Katie Caples, far right, with presenters at an Economics Club event, "Innovation and Impact in Early Childhood Education", held at Keystone Kidspace.

PAGE 7: Katie Caples speaking with attendees of the "An Impact with an ECHO: An Early Childhood Education Forum", held on April 24 at Keystone Kidspace, to provide networking and resources with early childhood educators, business owners, directors, and community partners.

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EVERY CHILD HAS OPPORTUNITIES

For more information and resources for providers, businesses, and families, visit echoyork.org