

The Childcare Professional EXPERIENCE

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FMLA: Getting Down to the Basics

By: Dawn K. Martini

Enacted in 1993 this revolutionary law today covers over 67 million employees nationwide. While still very far behind many other countries in terms of job protection, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was a major step forward in job protection for American employees. In passing the FMLA, the United States has acknowledged that employees need to balance workplace responsibilities with their familial responsibilities. By providing reasonable job security to employees, this law strives to promote a family's economic stability and security thereby preserving the integrity of the American family.

In an attempt to protect the interests of business owners, Congress limited the applicability of this law to employers with 50 or more employees using the most liberal method of counting employees. If an employer employs 50 or more employees for each day in 20 or more calendar workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year the employer is required to offer FMLA Leave to its employees who meet certain eligibility criteria and who have a qualifying event.

The FMLA Leave is up to 12 weeks of UNPAID leave in a 12 month period with restoration to the same or an equivalent position upon return to work. Upon completion of the FMLA Leave, employees must be returned to their same or equivalent position with no adverse employment consequences for taking the FMLA Leave. If restoring the employee to an equivalent position the employer must consider a number of factors in determining if the position is truly equivalent. The equivalent position

must be the same in status, pay, duties, and possibly location to be considered equivalent.

Employees who have been designated in advance by the employer as being "Key" employees must be permitted to take FMLA Leave but are not entitled to restoration to the same or equivalent position following their return. In order to deny restoration, the employer must demonstrate that restoration will result in the company sustaining substantial and grievous economic injury. In order to deny restoration for this reason the employer must inform the employee prior to designation of FMLA Leave, that the employee is in fact a key employee and that the employee will not necessarily be restored to the same or equivalent position upon their return. The designation as a "key" employee can only apply to FLSA exempt employees who are among the top 10% of wage earners

While on FMLA Leave, the employee's benefits including but not limited to medical insurance must be maintained in the same manner as they would be when the employee is working. If the employee makes contributions from their paycheck to cover the cost of the benefit, the employee must continue to make the same contributions during the FMLA absence. Employees on FMLA Leave are also entitled to any and all bonuses that they would have received had they not taken leave including end of the year bonuses, or attendance bonuses. FMLA Leave can not be counted against an employee's attendance for purposes of determining eligibility for attendance bonuses, or no

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fault attendance policies. Employees would not be entitled to performance based bonuses they would have received had they not taken FMLA Leave, such as a bonus for reaching a sales goal.

The 12 weeks of leave can be taken consecutively, or intermittently depending upon the needs of the employee. For leave to be used intermittently, the employee's qualifying event must necessitate periodic absences from work, with the employee being able to attend and perform job duties between absences.

Intermittent leave is typically taken when an employee or their spouse, child or parent is receiving ongoing outpatient medical treatments like dialysis, chemotherapy or other such treatment. The employer, as policy, may require the employee to use any accrued/earned paid leave time in conjunction with the 12 weeks of unpaid leave time. The employee would then exhaust their paid time off and receive compensation for all/part of the FMLA Leave as determined by how many paid days of leave they have accrued/earned.

An eligible employee is defined as an employee who has been employed for at least 12 months (they need not be 12 consecutive months) and the employee must have completed at least 1250 hours of work during the 12 months immediately preceding the commencement of FMLA Leave. 1250 hours is roughly equivalent to working 40 hours per week in a little more than 31 weeks or if a part time employee, at least 24 hours per week for 52 weeks.

Once the employer is established as a covered employer and the employee is identified as an eligible employee, the employee must submit certification that they have a qualifying event which entitles them to FMLA Leave. Qualifying events include the birth or adoption of a child, the employee's own serious medical condition, or the serious medical condition of the employee's spouse, child or parent that requires the employee's presence to care for their needs. Certification must be a letter from the treating physician or licensed health care provider and must detail the condition which necessitates the absence and the expected duration of the condition. While the employee is out on FMLA Leave the employer may request additional medical certifications detailing the need for leave and that the qualifying event still exists. These additional medical certifications may be requested as necessary to determine eligibility for leave at reasonable increments, generally every 30 days. The employer may also require a "Fitness for Duty" certification prior to the employee returning to work.

The FMLA requires that where the employee can foresee the need for FMLA Leave, the employee must provide 30 days written notice requesting FMLA Leave. Where the leave is for an unforeseeable circumstance, the employee is required to notify the employer as soon

as practicable. However, case law in this area suggests that when an employer suspects that an employee's absence is for a FMLA qualifying event, the employer should designate the leave as FMLA Leave and then require the employee to submit supporting documentation. If the leave is later determined not to be for a FMLA qualifying event, the employer can retroactively cancel the leave under the FMLA policy. However, if after an employee begins leave or returns from leave, the employer may not retroactively count the leave as FMLA Leave time even if it is determined that the employee had a qualifying event. If a leave is taken and not designated as FMLA Leave the employee is still entitled to FMLA Leave for another qualifying event in the future.

While there have been no changes to the Family Medical Leave Act since it was adopted in 1993, there has been significant court action which has shaped the application of the law through court interpretation. In most cases, case law suggests a trend toward finding in favor of the employee, where the employee has been denied or treated unfairly by the employer in relation to the FMLA. This trend should be a warning to employers to be careful and diligent in their administration of this law. Designating a knowledgeable administrative staff person to oversee the application of this law and the employment policies which are derived from it, would be a prudent decision.

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Publisher

Ronald V. McGuckin and Associates
Post Office Box 2126
Bristol, Pennsylvania 19007
(215) 785-3400
Childproviderlaw.com

Editor

Dawn K. Martini, BS Ed

Contributing Writers

Ronald V. McGuckin, JD
Dawn K. Martini, BS Ed
Jason D. Dalton, JD
Janice A. Nielwocki, BS

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Nurturing "Thankfulness" in Young Children

By: Janice Nieliwocki

Thanksgiving is right around the corner, so once again it is that time of year where we become introspective, count our blessings, and reflect on the things for which we are thankful. In keeping with this topic, many child care centers adopt "Thankfulness" as a November curriculum theme. This seems sensible and simple, but in reality the concept of "being thankful" is not one that comes easily to young children. Nor is the task of teaching "thankfulness" an easy one for child care teachers to tackle and accomplish.

By the very nature of their developmental stage, preschoolers do not understand the concept of gratitude in the same way older children and adults do. However, we all realize the societal importance of raising children whom are both appreciative and thankful. So how do we, as child care providers and teachers, approach this daunting task?

First and foremost, the best way to foster thankfulness in young children is to model appreciative behavior. The simple task of saying, "thank you" to someone when they have done something we appreciate is a good example and demonstrates to children our consideration for others. In addition, offering praise to children when they perform an empathetic gesture towards another reinforces this concept. Eventually as children mature, they will internalize these social courtesies and begin to show their gratitude to others.

Lead the way by letting children know the things for which you are grateful. Concentrate not on material things, but on true values, such as good health, family, and friends. Include shelter and food on your list, things children can easily relate to but often overlook. In addition, let the children in your classroom know that you are thankful for them and the pleasure they bring into your life everyday.

After you've set the example, have a discussion with the children in your class as to the things in their life for which they are thankful. Of course you will get the typical answers such as "my action hero figure", or "my Dora doll" but encourage children to shift the focus to other more important values. You'll be surprised as to how easily the discussion will shift to include appreciation for family, grandparents, beloved pets, sib-

lings, and friends.

Below is a list of some possible activities designed to reinforce the concept of thankfulness and appreciation:

- ◆ Put together a food basket or have a food drive for those who are less fortunate. You may want to ask children to contribute an inexpensive, non-perishable item. (If there are monetary concerns, have a small collection of inexpensive items at your center from which children can choose and contribute.) By stressing to young children that not everyone has some of the things we have and by letting them contribute to solving this situation, empathy and appreciation grows.
- ◆ Take a walk outside and point out nature's bounty. As children observe the world around them, ask them to point out something they are thankful for. Answers may include "the changing leaves", "the squirrel in the trees" and "the warm Autumn sunshine". Take things a step further and set up a "Nature's Bounty table" in your classroom. Place things on the table that you gathered on your nature walk. Include pictures of those things you could not bring inside, such as the squirrel and sunshine!
- ◆ Following your discussion on Thankfulness, make a "Thankful Tree" to

decorate your classroom. Cut a tree trunk and branches from brown construction paper or poster board. Attach the trunk and branches to your bulletin board or classroom wall. Cut leaves from orange, red and yellow construction paper. As children tell you what they are thankful for, write their comments on the colored leaves and attach them to the tree branches.

- ◆ Make "Thankful" Thanksgiving turkeys. Cut turkey pieces from colored construction paper, making sure to include head, neck, waddle, body, feet and feathers. On the piece which will serve as the turkey's body, write "I am thankful for..." Have children assemble their individual turkey by gluing the various pieces onto a large sheet of construction paper. Ask each child what he or she is thankful for and write the responses on the paper feathers. Have the children glue "their" feathers onto the turkey.

Although we tend to focus on gratitude in conjunction with the Thanksgiving holiday, keep in mind that in order to truly cultivate thankfulness in young children, it needs to be nurtured year round. As the adults in their lives model appreciation and thankfulness, overtime children will come to be appreciative and thankful for the many things they have.



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New FLSA Regulations: Are Lead Teachers Exempt?

By: Jason Dalton

It's been nearly two years since the regulations defining the exemptions to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) have been revised. In this time, many of the questions regarding interpretation of the regulations have been answered. One issue however, which has yet to be resolved is under what circumstances do teachers in child care qualify as exempt from the FLSA? As the law currently stands there are two categories in which a child care teacher may fit, the "Learned Professional Exemption," and the "Teacher Exemption," each with its own requirements and potential pitfalls for child care providers.

I. The "Learned Professional Exemption" and Child care Teachers

A teacher in child care qualifies as an exempt employee under the "learned professional" exception to the FLSA if three requirements are to be met. 1) The teacher must be paid on a salary basis not less than \$455 a week. 2) The teacher's *primary* duty must be either imparting knowledge, or some other type of work which is intellectual rather than manual in nature. 3) The job being performed by the teacher must require "advanced knowledge in the field of science or learning" which is "customarily acquired by a prolonged course of specialized intellectual instruction." What this last requirement essentially means is that in order to qualify as exempt, the teaching position in question must require at a minimum a 4 year degree from an accredited college or university in a field specific to the job being performed (i.e. a bachelors degree in early childhood education or related field).

If a center employs both teachers who meet the minimum education requirements as well as those who do not, it may be necessary to establish two separate job titles in order to preserve the exempt status of the more highly educated teachers. A center might, for example, have one position and title for exempt teachers which requires a four year degree in a specific field, and a second, separate position and title for those teachers with lesser educational backgrounds.

II. The "Teacher Exemption" and Child care Teachers

In addition to the "Learned Professional Exemption" to the FLSA, the regulations also include a specific "Teachers Exemption." This exception has much more lax educational requirements than the "Learned Professional" exception. In fact, according to a DOL opinion letter published in October 2005, "there is no minimum educational, or academic degree requirements for bona fide teaching professionals in educational establishments." Additionally, unlike the "learned professional exemption" the "Teacher Exemption" has no minimum salary requirement.

At first blush it appears as though this FLSA exception is an ideal fit for day care teachers. However, the "teachers exemption" has one added requirement which makes it inapplicable to most child care providers. In order to qualify for the teacher's exemption the teacher must be employed in an "educational establishment" which is defined in the regulations as a school "licensed by a state agency responsible for the state's educational system or accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting organization for career schools." Because a day care center is in no

way a "career school" this second part of the definition is inapplicable. Therefore, unless the center is certified by the State Department of Education as a pre-school or kindergarten, the "teacher exemption" to the FLSA is inapplicable. One caveat to this rule is Head Start Agencies which have been considered "educational establishments" under other federal legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and therefore could by extension be considered educational establishments under the FLSA.

As mentioned earlier the regulations defining the exemptions to the FLSA are still new, and will require more time before all the intricacies of the exemptions are clarified though case law and DOL opinion letters. Nonetheless, at the present time the above guidelines most accurately reflect the current state of the law regarding the exemptions and should be taken into consideration when determining whether to treat an employee as an hourly or FLSA exempt employee. It is possible that this interpretation will change in the future. For example, the DOL may eventually determine that licensed day care centers accredited by a nationally recognized association such as, NAEYC or NACCP do in fact qualify as an educational establishment for the purposes of the "teachers exemption." At that point the offices of Ronald V McGuckin and Associates will be sure to post an update for you to adjust your policies accordingly, so be sure to stay tuned.

For more information on the FLSA and its exemptions check out the document center on our website at www.childproviderlaw.com or visit the Department of Labor website, www.dol.gov.

Head Start Demographics

By: Dawn Martini

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start has seen a swing in its demographics since 2000.

As of 2004 black and Hispanic children make up 62.3% of the Head Start population. The percentage of black children attending dropping by 3.4% and the percentage of Hispanic children increasing by 2.5% over the four year period between 2000 and 2004. Seeing only a slightly larger drop, white children now occupy 3.5% less space in Head Start as they have in the past.

The Asian and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations with only 1.8% and 0.9% respectively, represent the smallest ethnic groups in the Head Start Program.

CHILDREN'S BOOK CORNER

By: Janice Nieliwocki

Take a leap into autumn with the book, Leaf Jumpers written by Carole Gerber and illustrated by Leslie Evans. Young children will delight in this story, as a young girl and boy, accompanied by their black and white dog, partake in a ritual of the season, by first enjoying the falling leaves, then raking and jumping into the colorful pile they've created.

Carole Gerber's use of poetic prose captures the essence of Autumn, as each leaf and its descent to earth is clearly defined. She richly describes each color and compares the various leaves to common shapes and familiar objects. Her simple, yet descriptive words create a clear picture of the scenario that is taking place and the surrounding environment.

Preschoolers will take pleasure in the accompanying illustrations, which are bold and beautiful. The pictures fill the pages with splendid color, quickly capturing the interest and attention of young children. The illustrations are drawn from different perspectives adding to the overall appeal of the book.

Not only is Leaf Jumpers perfect for story time, you might want to consider adding it to your lesson plans. The book concludes with a simple, but thorough explanation on why leaves change color and also identifies and illustrates common leaves.

After reading Leaf Jumpers to your class, follow up with some related "leaf" activities. You may want to purchase several "child-size" rakes and partake in raking leaves, building on gross motor skills. (Be careful of children with allergies, as leaves can sometimes trigger a reaction). Gather leaves and have a group discussion about their colors and shapes, building and reinforcing vocabulary skills or incorporate leaves into art activities, by doing "leaf" crayon rubbings or creating a decorative wreath by gluing leaves onto a paper plate "ring". Take advantage of the autumn leavesbefore you know it, winter will be here!

Remember to Thank Staff

By: Janice Nieliwocki

In keeping with this season's theme of "thankfulness", why not take some time out of your busy schedule to commend your staff for the fine job they do everyday? This is the ideal time to show your appreciation to your employees for the many contributions they bring to your program.

A high quality teaching staff is one of your agency's most important assets. Good teaching requires dedication, professionalism and a commitment to excellence. Patience, kindness and creativity are additional qualities necessary for teaching young children. When you've found teachers that fit this profile, recognize them for the key role they play in making your program a success.

Teaching is a reward in and of itself, but we all like to be recognized for a job well done. Keep in mind that rewards don't need to involve money or great expense. Small gestures that show respect and appreciation can make a monumental difference in raising morale and building a more harmonious workplace. Ultimately teachers will be happier, because they can feel and see your appreciation of them through your actions.

Let your teachers know how much you value them. Rather than just relying on verbal commendations, consider writing a brief note to each teacher. A simple note on nice stationery or note cards can do a lot to boost morale and encourage teachers through rough days. Focus on the special qualities that each teacher brings to your program and compliment his or her individual strengths.

You can also show your appreciation at your monthly or weekly staff meeting. Print commendation "certificates" from your computer and present them to your employees. If your budget permits, you can present inexpensive "trophies", to recognize a job well done.

Consider involving your entire agency and host a simple "thank you" breakfast. Coffee, bagels, pastries and a letter expressing your gratitude is not terribly time consuming or expensive. If mornings are a particularly hectic time of day at your center, present a dessert buffet after lunch or at the end of the day. These gestures will go a long way and will have a positive impact on your employee's morale.

So, as you reflect and count your blessings, count your fine teaching staff among them. Good teachers are hard to come by. Let them know you value the positive impact they have on your program, not just this holiday season, but year-round.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT RESOURCES FOR CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

- ◆ Model Personnel Policy Manual for Child Care Agencies: 3rd Ed.
- ◆ Model Parent Handbook for Child Care Agencies
- ◆ Model Forms for Child Care Agencies
- ◆ Current Issues in Child



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COBRA 101

By: Jason Dalton
What is COBRA?

No, its not just a deadly snake, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act or COBRA is a piece of legislation passed by Congress in 1986 designed to provide temporary continued health insurance benefits to employees and their families in situations where coverage might otherwise be terminated. Under COBRA certain "qualifying beneficiaries" who undergo a "qualifying event" are entitled to continued health insurance at their own expense for a period ranging from 18-36 months.

What Plans are Covered by COBRA?

COBRA applies to group health care plans for employers with 20 or more employees on more than 50% of its typical business days in the previous calendar year. Both full and part-time employees are counted in determining whether a plan is subject to COBRA with part-time employees counting as a fraction of an employee proportional to the amount of time the part-time employee works compared to a full time employee.

Who is Entitled to COBRA Benefits?

Employees covered by a group health plan, their spouses, and their dependants will generally qualify as beneficiaries under COBRA if they were covered by the plan on the day before a "qualifying event." In certain circumstances retired employees, their spouses and dependants will also qualify for COBRA coverage. "Qualifying events" are specific events

that would cause an individual to lose health coverage. For employees and their families "qualifying events" triggering COBRA coverage include; voluntary or involuntary termination of employment for any reason except for gross misconduct and a reduction in the number of hours worked. For an employee's spouse and children, qualifying events may also include; the covered employee becoming entitled to medicare, divorce or legal separation of the covered employee, death of the covered employee, and loss of the dependant child status under the plan rules.

What Notices are Required?

When the qualifying event is termination of employment, a reduction in the number of employment hours, or the employee's death, it is the duty of the Employer to notify the health plan administrators of the event within 30 days. If, on the other hand, when the qualifying event is divorce, legal separation, or a child's loss of dependant status, the duty to notify the plan administrator is extended to 60 days and rests instead on the beneficiary. After receiving notice of the qualifying event the plan administrator must then send an election notice to the beneficiary within 14 days. Finally, the beneficiary then has a period of 60 days following the later of the coverage loss date or the date of the COBRA election notice to decide whether to elect COBRA coverage.

What Benefits are Covered by COBRA?

Qualified Beneficiaries who elect COBRA coverage must be offered identical coverage as that available to

similarly situated beneficiaries who are not receiving COBRA coverage under the plan. This coverage is typically the same as the coverage available to the beneficiary immediately before qualifying for continued coverage. Qualified beneficiaries must be allowed to make the same choices given to non-COBRA beneficiaries under the plan, such as during periods of open enrollment by the plan.

How Much Will COBRA Cost Me?

The actual amount a beneficiary will be required to pay for COBRA coverage will vary depending on the insurance plan and provider. The premium cannot however exceed 102% of the full cost of the coverage. Because an employer will typically pay all or a portion of the actual cost of the plan coverage for its employees, COBRA coverage will generally cost more than active employees are required to pay. However COBRA coverage is ordinarily less expensive than individual health coverage.

How Long Does COBRA Coverage Last?

When the qualifying event is a covered employee's termination or reduction of work hours COBRA coverage will typically last for a maximum period of 18 months. For all other qualifying events, or a combination thereof, the maximum period of coverage is extended to 36 months.

Please note: this article is a generalized overview of COBRA, for additional information please visit the US Department of Labor website at www.dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm

FMLA: Federal v. Individual State Laws

By: Jason Dalton

As though the Federal Family Medical Leave Act ("FMLA") weren't complicated enough, employers in a number of states must also comply with the leave laws of their individual state. As mentioned in the article in this news letter: *FMLA:Basics*, the Family Medical Leave Act is a federal statute. This means the provisions of the FMLA are applicable throughout the country. Whether you live in Alaska or Florida you are subject to the federal FMLA. There are, however, 11 states that have established their own state statutes similar to the FMLA with provisions different or additional to those in the federal act.

According to the US Department of Labor, these states currently include: California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin, as well as the District of Columbia. Therefore if you are an employer located in one of these states, you must be familiar with not only the Federal but also your own state's family medical leave laws to assure full compliance.

One major way in which the individual state laws may differ from the Federal FMLA is with regard to the requirements necessary for an employer to be covered by the act. As you may already have learned in the article: *FMLA:Basics*, the FMLA applies to employers who employ 50 or more employees for each day in 20 or more calendar workweeks. For some state laws however, this threshold is lower, and for others it is higher.

For example: Vermont's medical leave act law applies, in some situations, to employers with 10 or more employees, whereas in Connecticut the number of employees necessary for the state law to apply is 75, counted as of October 1st annually.

An employer who meets the initial threshold for one law, but falls short of the other, will obviously only be required to comply with the law that applies. On the other hand, should an employer meet the initial requirements to be subject to both the Federal and state FMLA laws, the employer is re-

quired to comply with both acts. The consequence of an employer being covered by both the Federal and state laws is that in situations where the two laws differ, or overlap, the Federal or state provision that provides the greater protection to the employee must be followed.

For example: If state law allows leave to be taken in order to care for an eligible employee's parent-in-law, and that situation arises, the employer must at the least give leave for the period of time required by the state law, even though the FMLA may not require any leave be offered in the same scenario.

The threshold an employee must meet to be protected by the act may also vary between state and Federal law. For example, unlike the Federal act which requires 12 months of employment and a total of 1250 hours in the preceding year before an employee is eligible for leave, in Hawaii an employee becomes eligible for state family medical leave after only working for 6 consecutive months. Minnesota, by contrast, is similar to the FMLA in that an employee must be employed for at least 12 months before becoming eligible for leave, however the 1250 hour requirement is not part of Minnesota state law. Again, if an employee only qualifies for one or the other (state or federal leave), they need only be given the leave to which they qualify.

Another way state and federal family medical leave act laws differ is the number of weeks leave time an employee must receive. As you may recall, the FMLA requires covered employees be given up to 12 weeks unpaid leave in a 12 month period. For most state laws this period of time is shorter.

In Maine, the state law only requires 10 weeks to be given in a 2 year period, in Hawaii the maximum state leave is 4 weeks during a calendar year. In Connecticut employees of covered employers may receive as much as 16 weeks leave, however, like Maine this amount is calculated in a 2 year period. Employers covered by both laws must give eligible employees the longer of the two leave periods

available under either law. In some situations this may result in an employee receiving more than 12 weeks unpaid leave.

For example: In a state where 16 weeks unpaid leave is required to be given to eligible employees, and an employee is eligible in that state for both federal and state leave it will be necessary to give the employee up to 16 weeks unpaid leave thus satisfying both statutes. This isn't to say an employer needs to add up the leave periods, as most states allow the state and federal leave to be given concurrently.

In addition, 3 states (California, Minnesota and Washington) offer paid family leave, and other states are exploring proposals to establish paid leave systems though the state's unemployment insurance programs, through temporary disability programs or through some other wage-replacement mechanism. In these states an employer covered by both acts must offer the longer period of leave available and pay for leave in accordance with the state statute for at least the leave period mandated by the state statute.

Individual state and Federal laws also vary with regards to a number of other elements including; which events trigger leave eligibility, the employee's reinstatement rights, the right to intermittent leave, the key employee exemption, the amount of notice required, etc. It would be impossible to analyze all of the subtitle differences between each of the 11 state laws and the federal law in one article. However the United States Department of Labor gives a helpful overview of the differences on its website at www.dol.gov. A consolidated chart comparing each state law and the federal FMLA is also available on our website at www.childproviderlaw.com.

Finally, employers are encouraged to utilize the resources available on their own particular state agency's Department of Labor website in order to obtain more complete information about a state's laws affecting employment leave for family, medical, and other purposes. Links for these websites are also available on the US Department of Labor's above listed address.

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE DIVERSE CLASSROOM

By: Janice Nieliwocki

'Tis the season for holiday celebrations and, once again, child care professionals must make the decision on how to incorporate the holidays into their classroom curriculum.

For many years, Christmas seemed to have "cornered the market" as the predominant winter holiday. Holiday displays and decorations typically involved Christmas trees, Santa, the Nativity scene, and perhaps an Advent wreath. As time went by and awareness grew, Hanukkah began to emerge on the forefront and menorahs and driedles were added to holiday displays. Today with our diverse culture, Christmas and Hanukkah have been joined by Kwanzaa, Diwali, Ramadan and Eid, just to mention a few. Many public schools, and governmental agencies, unsure of how to correctly address and include the numerous holidays, banned all holiday displays and activities with any religious connotations, opting instead to focus on "winter" celebrations.

As the holiday season emerges, television commercials and store catalogues and brochures constantly remind us that the holidays are upon us. As families make preparations, young children are aware of the accompanying excitement and begin to anxiously anticipate the holiday celebrated in their home.

That being said, it is only natural for young children to come to school eager to share their related holiday thoughts and experiences. Rather than opting to exclude holiday celebrations from the classroom, this can be the perfect opportunity for young children to learn about other cultures and valued family traditions. Yet how do child care educators make the decision as to what holidays to include in their curriculum?

In keeping with the concept of parents and child care providers working together in partnership, incorporate parents input when making holiday decisions. You may want to distribute a questionnaire inquiring about the holidays celebrated in the home and related family traditions. This helps to ensure that the diverse popu-

lation of your classroom is represented and no cultures or religions are excluded. Many times parents are more than willing to come into your classroom to share their particular traditions with the children. This can be a rewarding experience for all those involved.

Work to create an environment where children are able to share information about their holiday celebrations, while cultivating respect for others' traditions. Keep in mind that you do not need to "celebrate" each and every holiday, but let children know that all holidays of those in the classroom are meaningful and important. You may want to include activities related to the specific holidays, ensuring that they are developmentally appropriate and provide a significant learning experience. Playing music from other cultures, sampling different "holiday" foods, and art projects related to cultural traditions are ways to raise children's awareness of various heritages.

When presenting historic information, try to ensure accuracy. A trip to your local library can be a great source of information. Make an effort to incorporate interesting pictures in your presentation. Be sure to include pictures which represent not only the historic element of the holiday, but

ones which also show families enjoying the holiday celebration today.

If you are serving children in your center whose religious beliefs prohibit them from taking part in celebrations, have a discussion with the parents to see how to best provide alternative activities for those children.

As the hustle and bustle of the holiday season grows, so does the related anticipation, stimulation and excitement. You can almost feel the exhilaration in the air as you walk into the child care center! Keep in mind that some children have a particularly difficult time coping with this added excitement and feel the stress associated with the holiday season. For this reason, many child care agencies choose to keep celebrations "low-key", distancing themselves from the commercialism of the season, instead focusing on the "giving and sharing" aspect of the holidays.

The holiday season in the early child care setting can be a time of great excitement and joy! Take the opportunity to also make it a time of great learning. By teaching children about different cultures and their related holiday traditions, we not only expand on respect for others but also increase our children's knowledge about the world around them. Happy Holidays!



Coming Spring 2007

Learning Stations for the Pre-School Classroom

- * A Curriculum Guide designed to enhance and enrich your Pre-School Educational Program
- * Designed for small group interactive learning
- * Each "station" is equipped with activities and materials designed to teach/reinforce a specific skill or concept
- * Learning Station Activities are developed from and center around popular Children's Literature

Learning Stations for the Pre-School Classroom is a comprehensive curriculum guide with over 50 activities and includes everything needed for implementation including: Lesson Plans, Reproducibles, a Management Guide, Organizational Tips, Parent Newsletters and a Concept Chart.



WHERE IN THE WORLD...

Ron, Dawn and Jan will be traveling to the following cities for Local, State, Regional and National Conferences on the dates indicated. We welcome you to attend the conferences. Information has been provided so you can contact the organization conducting the training/conference.

If we are going to be in your state or area, we welcome you to contact us about coming to your program or organization to do a private training. The cost of bringing us in to your program or organization is significantly reduced because we are already traveling to your area. We certainly don't mind adding a day or two to our travel schedules to work with you.

Contact us at (215) 785-3400 to see if we can visit your program when we are in town.

Oct 7: Buck County AECY Conference, Buck County Community College. For information contact Conf. Co-Chairperson Alison Sheridan (215) 702-1686

Oct 6 - 7: Georgia Association on Young Children Atlanta, GA. For information go to gay-conline.org.

Oct 19: Pennsylvania Child Care Association Harrisburg, PA. For information go to pacca.org

Oct 27: New Jersey Child Care Association, Annual Conference. For information go to njcca.org Ron will be giving the Morning Keynote.

Nov 2 - 3: West Virginia Child Care Centers United Roanoke, WV For information contact Helen Post Brown at sun-beamccc@aol.com

Nov 3 - 4: New Jersey AECY Annual Conference. For information go to njaeyc.org.

Dec 5 - 6: Pennsylvania Head Start Association Harrisburg, PA. For information go to pahead-start.org.

Dec 15 - 19: National Head Start Association: Parent Training Conference Boston, MA. For information go to nhsa.org

Jan 25 - 27: Chicago Metro AECY Chicago, IL. For information go to

Feb 21 - 24: Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education Norfolk, VA. For information go to vaece.org

Mar 8 - 10: California AECY San Jose, CA. For information go to caeyc.net

Mar 21 - 23: National After School Association Phoenix, AZ. For info go to naaconference.org

The Childcare Professional
EXPERIENCE