

Delaware Early Reading First Project (DERF)

New Castle County Head Start, Inc. and the University of Delaware have joined together in a three year project to enhance Lambson's, Manor Park's, and Rose Hill's children's language and early reading development. The project's specific goals are to increase the children's speaking and listening vocabularies – the words children know and can use, knowledge of letter sounds; ability to name the 26 alphabet letters, and understandings of why people read and write.

Why are these skills so important for children to demonstrate before graduating from Head Start? These are the skills that research tells us are critically important to children's success as readers. Children who are successful readers tend to be successful in life.

Why “just” three of New Castle County Head Start, Inc.'s nine center? This three-year project for \$3.3 million is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Early Reading First. The Department limited the number of centers that could be included in the project. By the project's end in 2008, the three selected Head Start centers are to serve as models for other Head Start and child care programs in the state and region. The three centers' teachers should be ready to help other New Castle County Head Start, Inc. centers programs' teachers improve their language and early reading practices.

This project is accomplishing its goals by providing –

- extra time for children to learn through one-on-one support from September to May and a five-week summer program
- a special program for parents to help them with the important role they play in their child's language and early reading development
- a powerful professional development program (many group learning sessions and an Early Literacy Coach) to guide the teacher's, teacher assistants', and classroom aides' use of the best practices, reflective of current research, to teach language and early reading
- a new early language and reading program, Doors to Discovery, to support the teachers' teaching of language and early reading
- many new materials (e.g., books, puzzles, posters, games) for the classrooms
- a transition from New Castle County Head Start, Inc. to the Colonial School District program to help ensure children's success in kindergarten

The partnership began its work in the three centers in January 2006. The end-of-year test results showed that these centers' children could name correctly significantly more letters of the alphabet and correctly tell the sounds of the alphabet letters than children from non-participating centers.

Delaware Early Reading First is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through a competitive grant process. Some 600 partnerships submitted applications in 2005. Of those, 33 (.5%) were funded. This is the only Delaware project in existence.