

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

A monthly DIEEC spotlight feature that highlights the variety of programs delivering quality care to children in Delaware.

JUNE 2023

Let Us Introduce You to the 2023 DIEEC Educators of the Year:



Photo credit: Lindsey Mulvena

LINDSEY MULVENA

**Center-based setting winner
(St. David's Episcopal Day School)**

Lindsey is known for being the most patient and kind teacher who strives to create fun experiences for her students while teaching and keeping them safe. Her director referred to her as “an extraordinary teacher who is loving with the children and a strong communicator with their families.” Lindsey started in the two-year-old classroom and is currently teaching pre-kindergarten. She has her master’s degree and teaches courses at Wilmington University.



Photo credit: Kirsten Swift

KIRSTEN SWIFT

Home-based setting winner

Playful learning is one of many things that describes Kirsten’s approach to teaching. With twenty-nine years of experience, she is known for her varied innovations and ability to balance child-led and teacher-led learning experiences that result in a meaningful play-based environment. Her level of dedication, kindness, respect, and love for the children in her care, while celebrating their unique differences, shines through in the videos she shares monthly with her families. She is also growing an outdoor learning space which adds to the thriving growth of her students. Kirsten has her bachelor’s degree.

WE ASKED KIRSTEN AND LINDSEY TO SHARE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THEMSELVES.

DIEEC: How did you choose early childhood education as your profession? Who is someone who inspired or influenced you?

Lindsey Mulvena: "I began my teaching career as an elementary school teacher. Once I had my own children, I stayed at home with them. When my youngest child was two, I registered her for the two's program at St. David's and was notified that a position was open there. I was fortunate enough to get that position as a Pre-K teacher. I enjoyed my own children so much while they were preschoolers that I knew preschool would be a great fit for me as an educator. So many of my colleagues at St. David's have inspired me throughout the years—from my director (and her dedication to our staff through COVID), my assistant teachers (who are so patient and compassionate with the children), and my fellow teachers (who work so hard every day to make St. David's a welcoming environment.) I also learned so much from Bev Igo, a seasoned three's teacher, who retired during COVID. She inspired me to make connections with each child and provide activities and books that were developmentally appropriate for our students."

Kirsten Swift: "I knew from a young age that I wanted to not only be a teacher but to also one day have my own preschool. This dream was inspired in me by my preschool teacher, Mrs. Kelly. I fondly remember being a little girl in her home-based preschool. From singing and crafting in the classroom to rolling down the hill and climbing the big stone wall outside, I remember feeling happy and free. I hope to provide this same happy and carefree feeling to my little sprouts as they come to school each day."

DIEEC: What do you see as your philosophy on teaching young children?

LM: "My philosophy for teaching young children is to treat them as my own children. It is also important to show them respect first, valuing their thoughts and feelings. Once that is established, they will naturally mirror my respect."

KS: "This is the philosophy I have shared on my website: 'Teachers who love teaching, teach children to love learning.' - Robert John Meehan

When a teacher is passionate about learning, she sparks a thirst for knowledge in the children she teaches. Teaching is an opportunity for me to nurture the curiosity of my students. As a teacher, it is my goal to love the children I teach, while instilling in them a love of learning. I hope that each day when my students walk through our classroom door that they feel loved and valued. When my students feel treasured as individuals, that they, in turn, feel safe to be risk-takers in their learning. As a teacher of young children, I strive to foster an environment where my students celebrate their own personal accomplishments and achievements and those of their classmates. Through both shared and personal exploration and experiences, my students will begin to understand that it is through their discoveries with trial and error that their authentic learning begins. Through my twenty-nine years as an educator, I have come to understand and believe that, by fostering a sense of wonder and collaboration within my indoor and outdoor classrooms, my students will learn, and more importantly, they will love to learn!"

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DIEEC: What is a piece of advice you would share with a fellow early childhood educator?

LM: "How important it is at the end of the school year to reflect on successes and areas for improvement. It is also extremely important to focus on one or two elements for the following year, so it is not too overwhelming."

KS: "Step back and let the children lead. When I let go of my expectations, authentic learning experiences unfold naturally through the eyes and hands of the child. This can be a truly magical experience for all members of the classroom. Another good one is to expect the unexpected and be ready to pivot at any moment. Life in the classroom with three and four-year-olds throws any teacher its fair share of curve balls. Seeing this and adjusting is key to meeting the needs of the children I teach."

DIEEC: Can you tell us about a recent accomplishment you experienced as an early childhood educator that you're proud of?

LM: "One recent accomplishment I am proud of was last year I was lucky enough to have a student who had a severe communication delay. Although we had challenges, he made me a better teacher and person—I cared for him as my child."

KS: "I am proud of my ongoing effort to enhance the outdoor classroom of Little Sprouts School. As I opened my preschool last June, I took my foundation in outdoor education and applied what I had gleaned from previous experiences to develop our outdoor learning space. Recently, I was fortunate to be selected as a recipient of the Let's Go Outside initiative this spring, which was just awesome! I am very excited about the improvements and enhancements underway...and all the ways they will help foster and encourage collaborative and joyful learning in and for my students."

Tune in this fall to learn more about Lindsey and Kirsten on the DIEEC podcast, X Why Z: Reflections from Early Childhood Professionals, where they will share more about their journey in early childhood education.