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Treasure Coast teachers encouraged to get into T.E.A.C.H.

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — The Teacher Education and Compensation Helps Early Childhood's Scholarship Program is celebrating this year 10 years of service in Florida.

Administered through the Children's Forum and funded through The Agency for Workforce Innovation-Office of Early Learning, T.E.A.C.H. provides scholarships for early care educators and center directors to work toward earning an associate's degree or credentials in early childhood education.

T.E.A.C.H. provides the majority of college tuition and books, but there also is a partnership for the sharing of expenses by the teacher receiving the scholarship and the sponsoring child care center or family child care home which represents a three-way commitment.

T.E.A.C.H. participants receive a stipend for travel or Internet access, three hours of paid release time while classes are in session and bonuses once their scholarship contract is complete. In turn, they agree to continue employment in their sponsoring early childhood facility for a specific period of time, typically one year.

In most cases, T.E.A.C.H. reimburses a portion of the costs for child care facilities to provide release time for scholarship recipients.

"The average rate of compensation for teachers in early care and education programs is around \$9 per hour and more than 30 percent of individuals employed in a child care setting will leave within the first year of employment," said Lori Stegmeyer, Director of Early Childhood Workforce Initiatives at the Children's Forum. "Without T.E.A.C.H., many teachers would never be able to enhance their education, receive an increase in pay or remain employed which all reflect positive outcomes for young children."

In 2007, there were 209 T.E.A.C.H. participants in Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin counties.

To date, 22,084 T.E.A.C.H. scholarships have been awarded to 14,633 participants. Of these recipients, 5,683 have earned their Child Development Associate credential or equivalent and 435 have graduated with their associate's degree.

"Early learning programs, teachers and children all benefit from T.E.A.C.H.," said Dr. Brittany Birken, Director of the Agency for Workforce Innovation's Office of Early Learning. "Early care and education programs experience reduced turnover, teachers are better compensated through their participation in the program and children receive quality care from teachers who are specialists in early childhood education and child development." For more information about T.E.A.C.H, call (877) FL-TEACH or visit www.thechildrensforum.com/teach.htm