

Summary of Alameda County Green Child Care Ambassadors Kick-off Event

On January 7, 2015, the Alameda County Early Care and Education Program hosted the Green Child Care Ambassadors Kick-off Event to celebrate the success of the Greening Preschools Program, launch the new Green Child Care Ambassadors Program, and build new partnerships to protect the health of preschoolers and the planet. The event, held at Alameda County's REACH Ashland Youth Center in San Leandro, was attended by 40 people representing child care programs and agencies, green technical assistance providers and local policy makers.

Caroline Judy, assistant director of Alameda County's General Services Agency (GSA), gave a warm welcome address giving an overview of the County's ECE 4Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rot) origins, thanking Stop Waste and Altamont Education Advisory Board for their continued grant support, and highlighting the County's national leadership in green child care. "We are really fortunate in GSA and we are unique in the State of California - we have child care in our GSA organization ... This [Greening Preschools] program is unique and you all are path-breaking. We are the only program in the country that is doing this in child care centers. That's a testament to your engagement and involvement and we are really proud that you are here with us."



Alameda County Supervisor Wilma Chan, District 3, gave remarks on the disproportionate impacts of chemicals on children's brain and body development. She urged providers to continue to learn about issues of toxins in child care, make safer choices and inspect their facilities, and finally to advocate for better standards federally. "There is a lot of sensitivity now to child care and early care issues at the federal level. So this a good time to say, 'Not only should you increase Head Start... but let's also keep our kids safe,' because if our kids aren't safe, they aren't going to learn well and we are going to be wasting our dollars. Let's make a package that gives good education and also protects our kids."

Supervisor Chan's remarks were followed by a showing of the **Green Child Care video**. The video, created by Climate Corps fellow Natalie Lessa, features two centers using green child care practices, such as green cleaning, gardening and composting.

"My children don't have a garden - they can't because they live in communities in this neighborhood where there is no space for yards. But when they come out here ... they are learning language that they would probably not get in any other program." - Amapola Beenn, Unity Council De Colores Head Start.

“We have the greatest asset, called children. They can change the world. If we really want to change something, we need to start with them” - Meher Van Groenou, Five Canyons Montessori Preschool.

After the video premier, Kim Hazard and Natalie Lessa, Greening Preschools Program staff, offered a look at the systems in place to make what was shown in the video a reality for all child care centers in Alameda County. They presented how the Greening Preschools Program has produced positive outcomes in preschool education, economic savings to centers, and environmental stewardship, diverting 300 tons of waste from local landfills and educating 1,500 children on the 4Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle, and rot). For every dollar invested in the program, 10 pounds of waste is diverted from the landfill. Kim then gave details of the Green Child Care Ambassador Program, the new phase of the County’s green preschools work (for more information and to apply, email kim.hazard@acgov.org).



To wrap up the discussion on what green child care is and why it is important, **County Supervisor Richard Valle, District 2**, offered a moving speech on the discoveries he has made over the years of engaging youth with science and waste systems. “Whatever you teach these children, when it comes to the environment, it transcends way beyond just the connections between clean water and clean energy. It can also transcend into respect for life, respect for other people and cultures which we hope will eventually eliminate poverty and the dysfunction we find in our society.”

For the remainder of the event, the focus shifted towards **developing a vision and a roadmap for sustained promotion of green child care**. Kim Hazard shared a visualization of the “green child care pipeline” whereby a myriad of different existing programs come together to form a cohesive green support system for child care providers. Kim explained, “We act as a starting point for centers, first setting up recycling and compost and then connecting them to these other resources to ultimately get to the point where they can be certified as a green business because that is the badge of success indicating a center is saving money, providing a safe haven for healthy brain and body development, educating children on positive habits that are taken home, and doing their part to ensure that the children they care for now will have a better world to inhabit as they grow up.”



The event ended with attendees participating in **breakout groups** to identify and share what most excited them, potential barriers, and individual next steps.