

THE EARLY HEAD START FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE PROJECT

In 2010, the Office of Head Start, with its partner the Office of Child Care, contracted with ZERO TO THREE (ZTT) and its subcontractor, Mathematica Policy Research, on the Early Head Start for Family Child Care project. The purpose of this demonstration project was to design, implement, and evaluate a replicable framework that supports partnerships between Early Head Start and family child care providers. The project aimed to improve the quality of care for low-income children in family child care homes by leveraging comprehensive services, including health and social services. ZTT and Mathematica, in partnership with the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care, identified the following four overall goals for the project:

1. Higher quality care for low-income children in family child care homes
2. Coordinated and comprehensive services for families
3. Support to increase capacity for family child care providers
4. Strong partnerships that support coordinated service delivery in communities

The project framework includes a set of short-, medium-, and long-term goals at the local, state, and national levels. The framework is built on the premise that if these local, state, and national level goals are met the project can achieve its four overall goals.

In order to determine the feasibility of implementing the framework, ZTT selected 22 partnership teams to participate in a ten-month demonstration project. The partnership teams had to include an ARRA-funded Early Head Start agency, as well as a child care partner (such as child care resource and referral agencies). The partnership teams represented 22 communities across 17 states. The partnership teams were supported by a child care partnership coordinator (CCPC) who provided consultancy to the teams for 52 hours per month.

Each team developed a work plan designed to help them achieve the project's goals. Each work plan included the outcomes the team aimed to achieve and the activities they planned to carry out to help them achieve their outcomes. To inform the work plans, each team completed a local and state self-assessment, designed to help each team identify which outcomes in the framework they had in place and which outcomes they needed to work towards. The types of activities teams carried out during the project period included: (1) connecting family child care providers to resources and conducting direct training and professional development for providers; (2) raising awareness about family child care as a child care option and building partnerships with relevant stakeholders; (3) identifying family child care providers in the community (including those interested in partnering with Early Head Start; (4) identifying state and local funding streams and quality improvement resources to support family child care providers; (5) developing or aligning standards, benchmarks, and policies relevant to family child care; and (6) developing and implementing policies regarding recruitment and enrollment of families into Early Head Start in family child care.

The Fairfax County, Virginia Partnership Team

One of the partnership teams operated in Fairfax County, Virginia. The team included an Early Head Start representative from Head Start/Early Head Start program and a child care representatives from the Child Care Assistance and Referral, both from the Office for Children, Fairfax County Department of Family Services. Through its Early Head Start for Family Child Care project, the partnership team aimed to (1) strengthen the capacity of the community of Early Head Start designated family child care

providers to provide quality comprehensive services and (2) increase awareness of the challenges to seamless service delivery of Early Head Start in family child care. The partnership team implemented two key strategies. First, the partnership team hired two consultants to convene meetings with state-level stakeholders and the Head Start state collaboration office, as well as focus groups with Early Head Start directors about the barriers to partnering with family child care providers. Based on the information learned from those discussions, the consultants worked with the team to produce a report on the policy and procedural barriers to seamless service delivery of Early Head Start in family child care. Second, the team developed and tested a course to improve the English language skills of family child care providers, using a practical vocabulary of child care situations.

Evaluation Overview

ZTT partnered with Mathematica to evaluate the Early Head Start for Family Child Care project. The evaluation aimed to (1) document the characteristics of the grantees, their child care partners, the CCPCs, and the communities in which they operate; (2) describe how the grantees and their child care partners implemented the framework at the local and state levels, including how much progress they made to their targeted outcomes; (3) identify the types of partnerships formed to support collaboration between Early Head Start grantees and family child care providers; (4) assess the sustainability of the partnerships formed through the project; and (5) highlight lessons learned about collaborations designed to create more seamless service delivery for families.

The study relied on four data sources: (1) eight months of administrative data from the project web-based system; (2) telephone interviews with a purposively selected group 13 partnerships teams, including interviews with 8 Early Head Start agency representatives, 8 child care partner agency representatives, and 9 CCPCs; (3) descriptive quality indicators and Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data about family child care providers implementing Early Head Start in family child care; and (4) project documents including the teams' applications and work plans.

Selected Findings

Forming and Strengthening Relationships Across Agencies

The collaboration between Early Head Start and child care partner agencies resulted in a number of successes including: (1) staff at each organization gained a better understanding of the programs and services offered by the other, (2) organization leadership gained a better understanding how the programs can combine efforts to serve more families with scarce resources, and (3) organizations developed the infrastructure to share information about providers and families, jointly administer trainings and other supports, and support ongoing communication between staff. With the successes also came a number of challenges, including: (1) some teams faced feelings of competition and turf issues among staff; (2) as staff at the organizations worked more closely together, some issues arose related to differences in agency cultures and resources; and (3) occasionally teams reported that one partner was more engaged than the other, which hindered the ability of the other partner to implement the activities in the work plan.

Lessons Learned about Building and Sustaining Partnerships

- Partners with existing relationships may be able to begin collaborating more quickly. Whereas partners with a more limited history of collaboration need to invest time in

relationship building between team members and their agencies to address issues related to trust, turf issues, and concerns about competition.

- Organizations with a longer history of providing services in a community could more quickly establish relationships with relevant partners and get buy-in from stakeholders. Organizations offering a new service in a community (regardless of how long the organization has operated in the community) need to spend time educating key stakeholders about the service and overcoming concerns.
- MOUs, or other contractual agreements, can help solidify and formalize relationships.
- When engaging state and local stakeholders in an initiative, project leaders should be cognizant of contextual issues that may impede stakeholders' willingness or ability to commit.

Addressing State Policy Issues Related to Integrating Systems

As the partnership teams explored plans for implementing new or strengthening existing Early Head Start services in family child care homes, they encountered a number of policy issues. They found that overcoming these obstacles meant moving beyond their local communities and engaging state-level stakeholders. These specific issues included:

Ratios and group size. In some communities, a barrier to identifying family child care providers interested in implementing Early Head Start in family child care was limitations on the number of children a provider could care for in order to comply with the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Eligibility criteria. For teams' using (or interested in using) child care subsidy dollars to pay for part or all of the time a child is in care, differences in eligibility were seen as an obstacle since families often experienced periods when they were ineligible for subsidies.

Child care licensing regulations on provider education. Early Head Start grantees interested in implementing or expanding services in family child care homes often have to work with providers to help them meet the education requirements specified in the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Lessons Learned about Addressing State Policy Issues

- As communities and states seek to create more seamless services for families, careful attention should be paid to the differences and similarities among standards, benchmarks, and/or policies relevant to service providers involved. By carefully exploring alignment issues and engaging local, state, regional, and national stakeholders in these discussions many alignment issues can be addressed. On the Early Head Start for Family Child Care project, two lessons specific to alignment issues emerged:
- When planning new professional development opportunities for providers or other child care providers, states and communities should consider how they can link these opportunities into existing professional development systems.

The evaluation report is forthcoming. For more information please contact: Patricia Del Grosso at pdelgrosso@mathematica-mpr.com.