

The First Step adaptation process will be planned during Year 01 of this proposed research and initially trial tested using single subject research methodology. In subsequent project years, a prototype of the adapted program version will be tested during a primary intervention phase, revised and retested in a secondary intervention phase, and finally replicated in another cooperating Head Start site involving the Siletz Native American Tribes of Oregon. A comprehensive dissemination and technical assistance/outreach training program of activities for the final adapted version of the First Step intervention will be planned in project year 04 and implemented during year 05.

Temple University (originally at the University of South Carolina from 2001-2004)

Project Title:

The Companion Curriculum: Connecting Head Start Parents and Teachers to Promote Early Learning and Development

Grantee:

Temple University

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

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Head Start Partners:

GLEAMNS Human Resources Commission, Inc.
Burlington County Community Action Program

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Project Abstract:

Early childhood experts recognize that children's school readiness is nurtured and sustained within both the home and classroom environments. For children attending Head Start, parent involvement in their children's education enhances continuity across home and school contexts. To maximize children's readiness to learn, schools and families must engage in a process of mutual adjustment to synchronize their approaches to promoting development. This project seeks to strengthen home-school relationships to support children's development in three key areas: social competence, emergent literacy and emergent numeracy. The following goals are set forth in this initiative: (a) design and implement a home-based learning curriculum for parents and children, (b) refine our understanding of multiple dimensions of parent involvement, (c) analyze unique contributions of fathers and mothers to children's readiness, and (d) isolate mediators of parent involvement, including teacher attitudes, parent efficacy, and community cohesion variables. Through a monthly Parent Excellence series, an intervention called The Companion Curriculum (TCC) will be delivered to 150 parents per year. TCC involves teachers and small groups of 8-10 parents conducting educational activities together that are designed to enhance home-based learning for Head Start children. All parents will be eligible and encouraged to participate in the program, and all parents will receive the curriculum materials regardless of whether they attend the monthly meetings. Sustained efforts by the community research coordinators will maximize participation through removal of barriers, and accommodation will be granted for families with more difficult circumstances. We expect that families who participate and utilize TCC effectively (i.e. high attendance, reports of use, and communication with teachers) will show benefits in school readiness outcomes, parental involvement, and satisfaction.

Another part of this curriculum involves establishing Family Corners in children's classrooms, where parents can informally engage their children in fun, stimulating activities. Establishment of Family Corners in Head Start classrooms is a mechanism for enhancing children's privacy and attachment to family and school personnel, while also promoting parent involvement at school. The Family Corner will consist of comfortable rugs and furniture that allow parents to sit together with their children to quietly play, read, or just talk. In addition, the materials used in the home-based curriculum will be available in the Family Corner for parents to use with their children. Lastly, pictures of children with their families will be displayed in the corner as an

observable indicator of the importance of families and parent-child interaction. It is expected that Family Corners will serve to encourage parents to spend more private time with their children at Head Start, and teachers can model activities with parents if they choose. The goal of Family Corners is to provide a self-sufficient, attractive, and welcoming environment for parents to engage in readiness activities with their children at Head Start.

Implementation and dissemination of TCC will be studied in multiple sites across the five-year longitudinal project. Expected benefits over time include enhanced readiness outcomes, home learning environments, school-family partnerships, and community social cohesion.