



Coaching as a Tool for Delivering Professional Development: Lessons from One Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Program Specialist

The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships

In March 2015, the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded 275 Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership and EHS expansion grants. In the years since 2015, Congress has approved additional funding which has resulted in additional partnerships and expansion grants. As of December 2017, the EHS-CC Partnership and Expansion Grants had preliminarily reported partnerships with 1,600+ child care centers and 1,070+ family child care homes. In 2018, Congress approved additional funding (\$115 million) for new partnership and expansion grants.

The EHS-CC Partnership grants support partnerships between EHS programs and local child care centers and family child care providers serving infants and toddlers from families with low incomes. The partnerships support working families by providing expanded access to full-day, full-year child care and comprehensive services to children and families.

A key goal of the Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnerships is to increase the supply of high-quality early learning environments for infants and toddlers. One way EHS-CC Partnership programs do this is through investing in the infant and toddler child care workforce and expanding professional development opportunities for caregivers who work directly with children (including center-based teachers and family child care providers). Obtaining a CDA in order to meet the Head Start Program Performance Standards can be challenging for staff, whose levels of experience and credentials vary. To facilitate staff learning and help staff obtain their CDA, one EHS-CC Partnership grantee developed a flexible program that addressed some of the challenges staff faced in becoming CDA certified.

Some EHS-CC Partnership grantees use coaching to support the workforce and provide professional development to caregivers.

A Regional Office of Head Start program specialist who works with providers in Colorado, described her experience working with a grantee that used coaches to provide extensive training and support to partner staff. The model the grantee established included frequent interactions between the coaches and the child care partners. The program has five coaches, all of whom have their bachelor's degrees and their state coaching credentials. The state coaching credential requires three years of experience in early childhood education, including 1,820 hours working directly with young children and their families, and successfully completing the Relationship-Based Professional Development Training program.¹ Each coach provided weekly coaching to an assigned group of child care partner staff. The coaching included intensive coaching which satisfies the requirements of the Head Start Program Performance Standards.²

¹ <http://www.cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html>. The state coaching credential also requires coaches to submit professional references.

² <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-92-training-professional-development>





The program specialist highlighted what she considers five best practices for grantees that use coaches to provide professional development opportunities to child care partner staff, based on her work with EHS-CC Partnership grantees.

1. Invest in the relationship and build trust

When child care partners feel supported, they are free to ask questions and get advice. Coaches can become a valuable resource; coaching fosters a sense of collaboration and encourages staff to look to coaches for advice. The program specialist noted, “We find that the agency and their partners have faith and trust in each other and that the coaches can support the partnerships so they can thrive.”

2. Don’t try to change the child care partners; meet them where they are

The program specialist reflected that child care partners work hard on their programs and bring many different strengths to the partnerships. Being nonjudgmental and communicating openness to partners is important when grantee staff and coaches begin working with child care partners. In EHS-CC Partnership programs, relationship building is particularly important because the coach, who is usually part of the grantee staff, suggests changes in how child care partners run their programs. According to the program specialist, the child care partners must feel like they still have autonomy over their programs.

3. Ensure coaching is effective

The program specialist credited successful coaching as an effective tool for grantees to retain child care partners. She noted that when grantees neglected to provide effective coaching, sometimes the partnership was terminated, “They recognized early on through a series of lost relationships that good coaching and support...will stabilize our programs.”

4. Hire enough coaches to adequately support partners

When coaches were assigned to work with too many child care partners, they were not as effective. The program specialist noted, “You need the proper amount of coaches per grantee to be successful. We see coaching as something to invest in...we try to catch them and support them early.”

5. Consider how coaching can contribute to continuous improvement

Lastly, the program specialist offered this reflection on using coaching as a professional development tool, “The end goal...is that these partners show behavior changes in their fundamental practices... and that will lead to continuous improvement, not just compliance to Head Start Program Performance Standards.”

“The grantee provided a model that said, ‘We will meet you where you are within the expectations of being at a certain level, and we will work with you systematically.’ Not just giving partners a bunch of checklists, but sincerely working with them.”

Regional Office of Head Start program specialist

Implementation Stories. This brief is one in a series that highlights the ways in which specific grantees implement EHS-CC Partnerships. By highlighting the work of partnership programs through the voices of grantees, child care partners, T/TA staff, and families, the briefs aim to share stories of implementation with others in the field.

Photos courtesy of the Partnership Center.