



Encouraging Family Engagement: Lessons from Two Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grantees

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. EHS-CC Partnerships provide full-day, full-year comprehensive child development and family support services that enhance the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of infants and toddlers. The EHS-CC Partnerships also help families (1) fulfill their role as the child's lifelong educators, (2) move toward self-sufficiency, and (3) engage in meaningful ways with the partnership program and their community. To promote children's learning and development and support family well-being, EHS-CC Partnerships must find innovative ways to engage families receiving child care subsidies who typically work full-time, attend school, or participate in training.

This implementation story focuses on the experiences of two EHS-CC Partnership grantee directors who are engaging families through coordinated approaches and responsive practices. The grantee director for the Municipality of San Sebastian in Puerto Rico, and the

director of Family and Community Support Services at the Neighborhood Place for Early Head Start, a division of the Miami-Dade/Monroe Early Learning Coalition in Florida, share their experiences and provide four strategies to engage families.

1. Help families fall in love with the EHS-CC Partnership program

Even before the grant was awarded, staff from the Municipality of San Sebastian met with the families to educate them about the program and encourage them to participate in and support the EHS-CC Partnership. Staff worked to generate enthusiasm for the partnership program early in the process; they explained the benefits of the EHS-CC Partnership and how the Head Start Program Performance Standards would improve the center's offerings. The director stated, "We wanted the families to fall in love with our program. We wanted to form a bond between the program and the families. We wanted them to see how they can transform their lives."





2. Use the results of the community assessment to develop targeted engagement activities

EHS community assessments describe the context in which programs operate and help ensure that services target the appropriate population. The grantee director for the Municipality of San Sebastian noted, “In our community assessment, we identified the need to engage male parents in their children’s lives.” Therefore, staff developed a plan to engage fathers through activities, including quarterly breakfasts, where fathers eat with their children at the center. These efforts have been successful. The director said, “This activity had a big impact. You can see it in the kids’ faces, how excited they are to be eating breakfast with their dads.” Other opportunities for fathers to be involved include volleyball games, karate, and story reading.

3. Ensure the partnership program reflects and celebrates the community it serves

Many programs work to foster a sense of community among child care providers and families, provide services that respect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the families they serve, and hire staff who reflect the cultural diversity of the program’s families. The Municipality of San Sebastian invites its families and the local community to participate in a cultural diversity festival. Local businesses prepare dishes,

and the parents and children wear traditional dress that represents the cultures of the families in the community. The grantee director says this is a way to “celebrate the cultures from different countries that are in our program and the community.”

The Neighborhood Place also ensures that its program reflects the community it serves by hiring family advocacy staff who reflect the cultural diversity of its families. The director said the program builds its staff “very intentionally” by carefully matching “family service staff to the families and child care centers they work with.” She described how the program works to address all the needs of a family, which becomes easier when “the family advocates understand the culture and speak the language.”

“Thanks to those activities, my husband has been able to spend more quality time with our daughter. Sometimes, because of his work, that is challenging. He has been able to see the commitment, the trust, and especially the close bond our daughter has with her teachers and friends. That has been very significant for us.”

Mother whose child is enrolled at the Municipality of San Sebastian





4. Offer opportunities for families to participate in a research-based parenting curriculum

To provide families with an intensive learning experience that focuses on parenting, the Neighborhood Place implemented a 12-week parenting curriculum that created a safe space and comfortable environment to discuss how families can further develop parenting skills such as nurturing, discipline, and teaching. The parenting

curriculum enrolls no more than 12 parents at a time. Two staff facilitators encourage families to self-reflect and provide strategies to “better themselves and be better parents.” The director said, “I don’t think any of us knew how powerful the experience was going to be. It really changed things for some of our families. It helped them look at how experiences in their lives affected them and in turn, this impacts how they parent.”

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.

For more information, please contact:

Municipality of San Sebastian; http://www.headstartprogram.us/city/pr-san_sebastian.
Neighborhood Place for Early Head Start, a division of the Miami-Dade/Monroe Early Learning Coalition;
<http://www.elcmdm.org/parents/our-services/early-head-start>.

Photos courtesy of the Partnership Center.



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships