

EHS and Family Child Care Using Partnerships to Maximize Your Potential for Success Office Hour

Moderator: Welcome to this Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Office Hour. Be sure to download all handouts, videos, and slides prior to viewing the Office Hour. During the presentation, you may be asked to pause the Office Hour and complete an activity, such as viewing a video, reviewing a handout, or reading a resource. Once you complete the action, return to the Office Hour and continue viewing. Now, let's get started with this Office Hour.

Amy Thomas: Good afternoon. I'm Amy Thomas with the National Center on Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships. Today's Office Hour is "Early Head Start and Family Child Care: Using Partnerships to Maximize Your Potential for Success." These are our objectives for this afternoon: We will look at some of the benefits of Family Child Care, think about how to coordinate service delivery, and consider successful strategies to support this program option to enhance quality. Maybe, you have other objectives in mind. If you do, please let us know by using the chat feature. In talking about knowledge of working with Family Child Care, Early Head Start and Family Child Care Partnerships, maybe you have previous experience with Early Head Start but not Family Child Care. Perhaps, you've had previous experience with Head Start but not Early Head Start. So, no matter what your experience, we're here today to strategize ways to maximize partnerships for success.

Here are some of the benefits of Family Child Care. And of course, I'm probably preaching to the choir. Family Child Care is most often in the provider's home. So it provides a warm, home-like setting, which is really wonderful for infants and toddlers. Young children often are best supported in smaller settings. Usually, the Family Child Care provider is the primary caregiver. Frequently, the family and provider share the same language and culture. Often, there are closer one-to-one relationships between the provider and child, as well as the provider and family. Many Family Child Care providers provide home cooked meals. Family Child Care providers often can offer more flexible hours of care, such as nights and weekends. Family Child Care is often preferred by families of young children due to their smaller home-like setting, closer one-to-one relationships, and the ability for siblings to often be cared for together. Parents whose children are enrolled in Family Child Care programs are often more engaged in both the program and policy council. We have to remember that with Head Start, Family Child Care needs to be licensed or regulated within their state.

When we look at potential strengths and challenges, we're all concerned about the quality of Family Child Care. Research shows that just like center care, quality in Family Child Care can be mixed, depending on study and instrument used. Also, we know that setting alone does not determine quality. Quality can happen in any setting. So, what are the potential strengths in Family Child Care? For children: one-on-one relationships, nurturing and responsible care, mixed ages, and a family setting. For parents: convenience, flexibility, affordability for low-income working parents, siblings together, and a cultural match.

And for communities: economic and social asset in the neighborhood. Please share some of the benefits and challenges you're experiencing with the option, using the chat feature.

So, looking at some of the highlights of the Head Start Program performance standards in regards to Family Child Care, some of the highlights are that programs must support Family Child Care programs to meet all Early Head Start requirements and the state licensing and regulations. Family Child Care needs to be approved by the state Child Care subsidy program to provide care for families that meet the eligibility criteria for the state and other agencies that support families of low income.

Family Child Care homes need to be open the hours needed by families. Sometimes, space within the home and outside is at a premium. Family Child Care providers must design plans for safety and injury prevention. Providers must design emergency plans as well. They must be licensed or regulated within their state and following their state licensing requirements. Family Child Care providers must also follow Head Start program performance standards. So, standards must be aligned between licensing standards as well as Head Start program performance standards, and the provider must meet the most stringent standard.

Other things to think about are: How will comprehensive services be offered? Some of those examples of comprehensive services are screening for children's physical, oral, and mental health, as well as developmental, sensory, and behavioral concerns. Follow-up of services is also a part of this. Curriculum, individualizing for children, and ongoing assessment, as well as family conferences and home visits are a part of comprehensive services. And consideration needs to be considered on how you might offer this in the Family Child Care option. There's a resource webinar entitled Implementing Early Head Start in Family Child Care on the ECLKC under the Early Head Start National Resource Center page that might help and be of assistance to think about these.

When we think about ratios and group size, a single provider may care for no more than two children under age two in a group, not to exceed six children. Where there is a provider and an assistant, the maximum group size is 12 with no more than four of the 12 children under 2 years of age. That's also another consideration comparing with licensing standards. In looking at indicators of quality, these are not the only indicators of quality. But these are the indicators that appear to provide a more meaningful alignment to Head Start program performance standards. Some of what we look at are: ratios and group size, curricula and assessment tools, provider's level of education, credentials and experience, provider's pursuit of quality, and the provider's interaction with children.

So, let's look first at the provider's personal commitment to career. With Family Child Care providers, because they are often indicators of a provider's personal commitment to his or her career, these systems provide valuable support to enhance quality. As part of professional development for Family Child Care providers, we have two national systems of credentials and certificates. First, we have the CDA, the Child Development Associate. The CDA credential is the most widely recognized credential in Early Childhood Education.

Any time before the application, candidate must complete initial training requirement of 120 clock hours or education in eight subject areas. Performance of the competency is recorded in all 13 functional areas over the course of one or more consecutive visits. The candidate identifies a CDA professional development specialist to complete the verification visit. There must be at least two children age birth to five present, not related by birth or marriage to the provider. The CDA credential is administered by the Counsel for Professional Recognition. We also have National Association for Family Child Care, which has an accreditation process of quality improvement and professional development. Within three years before the application, the provider must complete 90 clock hours of Family Child Care training or education. The provider must demonstrate competency.

The accreditation observation visit is completed by a trained, impartial observer using the accreditation workbook. The observation must be of at least three children, of which two cannot be the provider's own children. Program accreditation is administered by the National Association for Family Child Care. When we look at Quality Rating and Improvement System, we need to think about, does your state have a quality rating and improvement system for Family Child Care? Will you require your Family Child Care providers to participate in QRIS?

Some states require providers to participate in QRIS to receive provider payment for subsidy. Some states' QRIS systems provide higher payment tiers for providers, as well as other incentives. These are all things to think about in support of your Family Child Care providers. Then, we talk about the professional development registry or career ladder. State registries support the professional development of early childhood practitioners by tracking teacher qualifications, degrees, and credential information. Career lattice ladders are a component of the qualifications, credentials, and pathways element of a professional development system. This career lattice or ladder defines levels of mastery connected to a progression of roles. A progression of training and education in the early childhood field is shown through this ladder. It's a framework for providers and training registries which are tied to core knowledge and competencies. Some of the states with quality rating improvement systems have included the attainment of levels on career lattices or ladders as part of the QRIS standards for professional development.

Some states have also linked incentives for providers to the different levels, such as wage incentives, scholarships, and professional recognition awards. Another partner to consider are professional provider associations. Family Child Care networks and associations provide wonderful support to Family Child Care providers and are wonderful partners in this work. Is the provider a member of at least one association? And is he or she a leader in that association or does he or she actively participate?

Last but not least is the provider's interactions with children. Many programs use checklists and observations to assess the quality of a provider's interactions with children. Some do this as a part of their interview when selecting Family Child Care providers. There are some examples of these on the Family Child Care toolkit.

So now, recruiting for Family Child Care providers. When recruiting providers, set high qualifications and criteria. Here are some ways to look for qualified providers to maximize partnership success. Check the National Association for Family Child Care website at NAFCC.org to see the list of NAFCC-accredited providers in your state. Check with your Child Care licensing agency or your Child Care Resource and Referral agency to find providers who are degreed, have CDAs or NAFCC accreditation who are at the upper levels of the QRIS, or who hold state credentials. Check with the USDA CACFP to see what family Child Care providers are already participating in their program. You can use checklists, such as the Early Head Start Child Care Partners Assessment Form found on the Family Child Care toolkit. When recruiting Family Child Care providers, plan for incentives and supports ahead of time. For example, you may need to offer some incentives to compensate for the differences in ratios and funding streams. Consider whether you want to hire providers or contract with them as private business owners. Sample contracts can be found on the Early Head Start Family Child Care toolkit.

Here are some examples of incentives that Family Child Care providers find enticing. Family Child Care providers are often isolated in their work and lack opportunities for networking and professional development compared to other group care settings. These are some examples of incentives Family Child Care providers find appealing. You need to do crosswalks of systems to determine alignments. For instance, you may want to do alignments of Head Start program performance standards, state licensing standards, and NAFCC-accreditation standards. By doing alignments, you may be able to leverage funds to accommodate many such incentives.

In working with Family Child Care providers, it's all about respect. Family Child Care providers have varying degrees of education and experience. Scheduling of training needs to be considered, since many Family Child Care providers work long days and may have young children. Some may not have access and/or little experience with technology. You're entering something they take great pride in — their homes. Cultures also vary. There are many right ways to individualize support based on all of these. Family Child Care providers benefit most from support that is relationship-based.

The Family Child Care Network Impact Study conducted by the Erikson Institute found that practices most promising in their ability to impact quality were direct services to Family Child Care providers by specially trained coordinators. The most promising practices were the coordinator's prior experience with children as well as his or her specialized training. The use of a formal quality assessment tool, high frequency visits (at least ten times in six months to Family Child Care homes focused on working with children), and onsite training at the network for providers.

Monitoring visits have to occur at least every two weeks. Some programs actually visit weekly, alternating between program managers, such as the Education, Health or Disabilities Coordinator one week, and the Child Development Specialist the next. Monitoring visits can actually be the greatest benefit to Family Child Care providers when thoughtfully done with intentionality.

Remember the best practices in supporting providers, and challenge yourself in strategizing how to use your other partners so that there isn't duplication. For instance, how might you use the CACFP monitoring visits, or the licensing specialist visits to avoid duplication? Another valuable resource is the webinar, Family Child Care and Effective Program Option for Children, Families, and Communities, from the virtual 2013 BTT Conference. You have other strong partnerships to use as tools for quality. Think about possible tools you can use such as the food program monitoring, licensing monitoring, and inspection results. How might you use the family service worker and the health manager as support? How about the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency? Consider how to use NAFCC-accreditation standards and eligibility criteria as well as CDA standards as tools to support quality. Have you begun to compile a list yet of your partners? Partners could be national, state, local, all of the above. You can start putting some of your partners listing in the chat feature. Our ultimate goal is to strengthen the community of Early Head Start-designated Family Child Care providers by building their capacity to provide sustainable quality comprehensive services for low-income children.

Here are some resources for your work in supporting Family Child Care providers. If you haven't received your copy of the Family Child Care toolkit yet, but would like to receive one, please send me an email with your request and kindly provide your shipping information. I hope this has helped you think about strategies to maximize your potential for success. Please post your questions using the chat feature.

Moderator: Thank you for participating in this Office Hour. Be sure to post your questions and comments in the chat room to the right to connect with your colleagues, as well as the content area experts.