

Head Start Forward: PACE Head Start

Tabitha: We are excited to introduce to you members of the PACE Head Start community. Joining us today is Angie Lange, Head Start Director. We have Tanya Bezy, the Education Manager, and we have a special guest, Katherine or Kate Trowbridge, who is our parent representative, and also a Policy Council parent with PACE Head Start community.

Today, PACE will share with us their program's approach to ensuring funded enrollment and targeting recruitment to identify families hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Angie, what strategies did your program use to ensure it met its funded enrollment?

Angie Lange: Well, we are excited to say that we began services on August 9th, this school year, and we are fully enrolled. We have a current wait-list at all of our locations, so we're really excited about that. We hit recruitment hard and it is an expectation, just like in kind, we expect all of our staff to participate in recruitment.

We have done special events, such as recruitment days, where all staff participate in those. Our cooks, our home visitors, our teaching staff, our managers, all staff participate in these recruitment days. We've put little bundles together that have applications and some giveaways, like at pool parties. We've done little rubber ducks that say PACE on them. We participate. We do recruitment days throughout the school year, as well as we do a lot of summer events, we participate in ... do a lot of summary events. We participate in pool parties, parades, art in the park, Latino festivals, the national night out.

We really collaborate with our community partners and recruit in any capacity that we can. We also really have a great relationship with our first steps program and our special education cooperatives. We work very closely with them. They refer children to us. Not only does that help us with our funded enrollment; it also helps us with our 10% of disabilities, which is awesome. We're thankful for our community collaborations. They really help us with our recruitment.

Marco: I don't know if it's fair to say, but it almost seems like recruitment is everybody's business. I think it's part of your strategy. I know one of the questions that some of the folks that are listening to you right now might have, considering where we're at, I know that a lot of folks are concerned about exposure. They're thinking about mitigation strategies as it relates to COVID. As all these folks were engaged in your recruitment efforts, what did you do to kind of help address any of these mitigation strategies? Or was there any concern from the staff as they were going out to engage in recruitment?

Angie: Well, we did a really good job of using the COVID funds to purchase health and safety equipment to keep our staff safe. When we were out on those recruitment days, delivering those supplies, the applications and just different things for them to keep around their house that has the PACE contact information on it. We bagged those and staff wore masks. We purchased PACE masks. Therefore, people out in the community knew who our staff were. We went over health and safety protocols so that they felt safe, and they had an understanding of things that they could do to keep themselves safe. We did a lot of the activities outside. Whether it be on a family's front porch or at the park or just in the front yard, we did a lot of activities outside for better vent ventilation.

Marco: Great. Catherine, what did the program do to make you feel comfortable with their child returning to in-person services?

Katherine Trowbridge: Well, again, it comes back to communication. We were virtual, did all the virtual activities, and we would receive a call once a week from the teacher, checking in, seeing how the family situation was, seeing how we were doing with our learning activities. Then, they began talking about, hey, we might be coming back to school – How do you feel about that? – gauging our concerns and listening to us, and then giving us their rundown of the things that they would do in the school. Now, they didn't allow the parents into the building, but they would take pictures all the time.

They would post them on ClassDojo, so you could see them at the end of the day. She would give a little tidbit of stuff that they had done that day. They would talk about the hand-washing and this and a hand sanitizer. Then, they had dividers up on the tables for the kids so they could still be together as a class, but they were still safe, keeping their germs to themselves. We did parent-teacher conferences outside, distanced apart, still on the property. But she always said that if you didn't want to come to the property, that she would visit us at home, which is what my home visitor did. We did all our visits outside on the porch or in the backyard. Then, our drop-off and pick-up line was no contact. Then, we hung a little sign up in the thing, in the car, and the teachers would bring the children out, and you'd sign them out or sign them in. They got a little escort to and from the car.

I bet it made them feel special too, but I never did have to worry really, because I knew that it was just very safe and it was just communicated so well. I knew that if I had any issues whatsoever, they would have definitely catered to them.

Marco: Tanya, it seems to me that some of the stuff that Katherine was just talking about was a planned effort. Did you plan it to return to one person's services or was this built on something that you started doing much earlier?

Tanya Bezy: It was really something we started with when we were doing virtual services. We knew that we had to keep families engaged if we wanted them to return when we did return in person. It was a stressful time, so it was important to us to make sure that we did communicate with parents. We created e-learning parent web resource pages on our website. Katie talked about ClassDojo. It was a real easy way to communicate with parents where they could see pictures or videos of their kids. When we did return to in-person, they were still able to see, "OK, they're putting things into place that are keeping my child safe, the dividers, the masks, the hand washing and all of that." We really started that last year and then just built on it. Our families could return August 9th, feeling safe and feeling good about, "Yes, my child's getting back into the classroom, getting back to that education piece."

Marco: Great. This is building on stuff, then that started like foundational so you leap up from that. Angela, how do you identify families to receive services?

Angie: Well, this is where we really strive to listen to our community partners. We have fabulous relationships with our community partners. During this COVID time, they were also contacting us. We received a call from one of our local colleges, Vincennes University. They said we have seen a drop in our students because a lack of preschool available for our students. We really worked with them. We took action and we put together some applications and some pamphlets and supplied Vincennes University with that information, as well as we have a whole page on Vincennes University website that talks about

some of the success stories that we've had in the past where they've had University students that have successfully graduated with degrees while their children attended Early Head Start and Head Start.

We really built on that and we're able to establish some referrals from Vincennes University. We also ... We're utilizing with some of the COVID funds, we are doing a family meal program in our communities. We are getting calls in for families that want to participate on the family meal program. Through that, we were able to identify some families that also were in need of Head Start and Early Head Start services.

Tabitha: Thank you so much. I'm hearing partnerships, partnerships, partnerships. Partnerships with the community, partnerships with families. This has been an extremely enlightening conversation. Thank you so much, Tanya. Thank you, Kate. Thank you, Angela, for sharing your strategies and approaches with the Head Start community. We will now learn from our next grantee about the approaches they use to return to fully in-person services.