



Early Learning Update

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MARC

Mid-America Regional Council

DEPARTMENT OF
EARLY LEARNING

Metropolitan Council
on
EARLY LEARNING

MID-AMERICA
HEAD START



Mid-America Head Start launches new initiative to combat childhood obesity

On Sept. 26 and 27, Mid-America Head Start introduced “I Am Moving, I Am Learning” — a nationally recognized curriculum designed to prevent and reverse childhood obesity — to nearly 500 Head Start teachers, staff and representatives from partner organizations during an agency-wide conference in Kansas City, Mo.

“I Am Moving, I Am Learning” promotes fitness for Head Start children through increased physical activity and healthy nutrition choices.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood obesity has risen dramatically in the United States in the past decade. This growing epidemic — which can lead to diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol and other disorders — now afflicts more than 30 percent of Missouri’s children.

“I Am Moving, I Am Learning” intends to:

- Increase the amount of time children spend in moderate to vigorous physical activity during their daily routines to meet national guidelines for physical activity
- Improve the quality of teacher-led, structured movement activities
- Improve healthy nutrition choices for children every day



Head Start staff learned how to engage children in movement activities at the September “I Am Moving, I Am Learning” conference.

National trainers and local experts taught conference participants how to integrate “I Am Moving, I Am Learning” principles in their daily classroom routines.

Mid-America Head Start will play a pivotal role in promoting good health for children by introducing appropriate physical activity and informed nutrition choices in the daily routines of the children it serves in Clay, Jackson and Platte counties in Missouri. A deliberate and “active start” in Head Start can improve children’s physical, mental and social development — all of which are critical to school readiness.

Strategic plan makes steady progress

In 2007, Partners in Quality (PIQ) and Mid-America Head Start (MAHS) began the process of blending each group’s strategic plans into one community plan with the goal of building a unified system of quality early learning. In the relatively short time since its inception, the blended Early Learning Strategic Plan for Greater Kansas City has made significant progress toward its goals in each area:

Workforce development and retention:

In February 2008, early learning leaders from Kansas and Missouri unveiled a reciprocal, bistate directors’ credential to enhance the management and leadership skills of early

learning professionals who administer programs throughout the region. This initiative was developed in response to research showing that director training, over longer periods of time and with sustained support, results in increased program quality and more successful outcomes for children.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Association for the Education of Young Children–Missouri will serve as the credentialing agencies in each state. During the next phase of this initiative,

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A sharper focus on child outcomes

New investments to support QRS and CLASS studies

While national data continues to link intentional teacher-child interactions with better outcomes for children, MARC's Department of Early Learning has secured funding from forward-thinking partners to conduct two new studies to look at these critical interactions in the early learning programs of the Greater Kansas City region.

Classroom Interactions Coaching Project

Mid-America Head Start has received funds from the H & R Block Foundation to implement a new teacher coaching project to investigate the effectiveness of specific strategies of teacher-child interactions on child outcomes in Head Start classrooms. Dr. Sue Vartuli and Dr. Jovanna Rohs, University of Missouri-Kansas City, will provide consultation and conduct the research. Dr. Catherine Wilson, Retired, Park University, will also provide consultation.

The Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS) will be used to rate teacher-child interactions as part of the study. CLASS is an observation instrument that was specifically developed to assess teacher quality in preschool classrooms. During the project, information gathered will include general demographics for coaches and teachers, teacher beliefs and job satisfaction, how closely they adhere to curriculum, and authentic assessment of child outcomes.

Coaches participating in the study are those who have completed Strengths-Based Coaching training at the Francis Institute in Kansas City. They will incorporate Strengths-Based Coaching principles into their work with teachers.

The Child Interactions Coaching Project is a two-year study that will culminate with a final report of its findings.

QRS Child Outcomes Study

MCEL is conducting a study of child outcomes focused on children in Quality Rating System (QRS) programs. With the help of new foundation support, the idea of this study is to determine whether the QRS star rating earned by an early learning program correlates to actual child outcomes, and whether it makes a difference in how children learn. QRS programs have been selected for the study and assessors are conducting initial baseline testing on children in those programs for completion by the end of 2008.

While most of the participating programs are in the Kansas City region, the study is also being conducted in St. Joseph and Columbia to show a larger sample size and to get a better cross-section of child outcomes throughout the state and in a mix of rural, suburban and urban environments. One of the goals of the study is to provide more information to support advocacy groups that want to develop a sustainable statewide QRS systems in Missouri and Kansas.

Article on QRS published in national journal

The fall 2008 issue of the University of Illinois' prestigious *Early Childhood Research and Practice Journal* features the findings of Dr. Deborah Ackerman's research on QRS coaching in participating early learning programs in the Kansas City region. Ackerman, the associate director for research at the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted the research with partial funding from an Early Learning Opportunities Act grant awarded to MCEL from the Department of Health and Human Services. Ackerman's work looked at the impact of teacher and director coaching in pilot QRS programs.

The article, titled, "Coaching as Part of a Pilot Quality Rating Scale Initiative: Challenges to—and Supports for—the Change-Making Process," can be found online at <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v10n2/ackerman.html>.

Top Five QRS Findings

In June 2008, Kathryn Fuger, Ph.D., completed a comprehensive study of the Quality Rating System (QRS) of Greater Kansas City. QRS includes rating, coaching, targeted goal planning and other enhancements. The following are Dr. Fuger's top five positive findings from the study:

- 1 Both home-based and center-based programs that stayed in QRS for all four years improved in quality and increased their star rating.
- 2 Environments for children in preschool classrooms and home-based programs that stayed in the QRS Initiative for four years improved.
- 3 Classrooms with good environment ratings had a lower percentage of children with remedial scores.
- 4 Staff training in curriculum or child literacy improved children's receptive language and other pre-reading skills.
- 5 Turnover rates were significantly lower between each rating cycle for staff receiving wage supplements (23%, 26% and 22%), compared to rates for staff who did not receive them (37%, 42% and 33%).

Strategic Plan (continued from page 1)

the two credentialing agencies will work together to develop application procedures and agree to a reciprocal set of policies to follow when awarding the directors' credential.

Access to quality:

The Quality Rating System (QRS) began as a pilot project in 2004 to help providers and parents measure and improve the quality of early learning programs. Since its launch, more than 150 community-based programs have benefited from the quality assessment tool on both sides of the state.

The current goal of the community is to develop sustainable statewide systems. In 2008, MCEL began to transition the local QRS pilot programs into the Kansas and Missouri QRS systems. This next phase will help programs adapt to statewide systems while promoting increased state funding to sustain these emerging systems.

The QRS program is also focused on studying child outcomes as they relate to the program's star rating system (see story on page 2).

The "Strengths-Based Coaching" curriculum and training was originally developed by the Francis Institute for coaches and technical assistance specialists, but there is now a version for program directors as well. More than 900 individuals have been through some version of the training, and the program is now getting national attention, with agencies in other states requesting the training for their coaches and technical assistance specialists.

Family support:

By developing a series of sophisticated family and community outreach systems, MAHS has made great strides toward engaging the families of young children and working to connect them to appropriate health and social services.

The creation of the Family Assessment Matrix Worksheet is one tool MAHS staff developed in 2008 to help family advocates work closely with families to accurately assess needs. This interactive document allows family advocates and families to collaborate toward writing family goals for such life areas as finance, education, health and nutrition. The document is already in its second printing and is available in English and Spanish.

Public policy:

Each year a public policy agenda is approved through Partners in Quality (PIQ) and the MARC Board of Directors. Direct service providers are also engaged for their input on early learning policy issues.

MCEL has focused considerable effort on working with the Coalition on School Readiness in Kansas on early learning policy issues and advocacy for early learning. MCEL and its partners in Missouri are working together to establish a Missouri Coalition for School Readiness.

Evaluation:

In 2007, MCEL published the report "From Dream to Reality: The Growth of Early Learning in Kansas City." This comprehensive analysis of milestones in the development of a complex and sophisticated system of early learning in the Kansas City region takes a close look at successes, lessons learned and next steps.

MCEL contracted with UMKC's Institute for Human Development to complete work on an analysis of key aspects of the Kansas City region's early learning system, including evaluation of coaching data and other system inputs to determine the overall impact of specific tactics on improving early learning programs.

Region shares early learning success stories and challenges with visiting New Mexico official

In September, Dan Haggard, director of New Mexico's Office of Child Development, visited MARC to learn more about the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning's success in convening community and business leaders around early learning and children's issues through groups such as Partners in Quality (PIQ) and the Early Learning Leadership Board. He spent two days in Kansas City meeting with staff at MARC and partner organizations.

At the September PIQ meeting, Haggard discussed New Mexico's groundbreaking efforts to provide professional development opportunities to child care providers in the Latino community, especially those operating in-home, and family-run programs. Members of the PIQ group were also interested to learn more about New Mexico's statewide pre-kindergarten voucher initiative that assigns value to programs based on a quality rating system.



Jim Caccamo, MARC's director of early learning (left), and Dan Haggard, director of the New Mexico Office of Child Development, share successes and challenges at a Partners in Quality meeting in September.



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Early Learning Update

Plaza de Niños finds new home at Francis Move to MCC Penn Valley campus expands capacity

On Oct. 1, Guadalupe Centers Inc.'s Plaza de Niños early learning center began serving families at its new location at the Francis Institute at the MCC Penn Valley campus in Kansas City, Mo., and celebrated the move with a grand opening party on Oct. 23. The partnership builds on the Francis Institute's commitment to expand its services to Latinos.

This new location will increase Plaza de Niños' serving capacity to over 50 percent more families than they could serve at their previous location on Broadway Street. The new Plaza de Niños facility also boasts several additional classrooms, a painting room and a first-class playground.

Plaza de Niños offers Head Start services for which Mid-America Head Start is the grantee. The program also specializes in serving latino families and providing a bilingual education.

