

Collaboration Demonstration Project

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Narrator: The Office of Head Start, with the support of its National Center On Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning, created The Collaboration Demonstration Project to promote increased collaboration between Head Start programs and elementary schools to help them align school readiness expectations, fuel child readiness, and increase successful transitions.

Amanda Bryans: We still have so much inequity and unequal opportunity in access for children and families. And I think this partnership has the ability, the capacity to disrupt some of the status quo and have children walking through the doors of kindergarten with their parents in a way that can really change their trajectory.

Narrator: The Office of Head Start Collaboration Demonstration Project includes 13 teams from around the country, working on common goals toward improving the transition to kindergarten for children, families, and educators in their community.

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: The Head Start Collaboration Demonstration Project has been, really, my flagship of my time here at Head Start. We had a very specific framework within which they would make a plan, and they were expected to leave with a plan and carry it out through the school year, with the support from The Office of Head Start. At the end of the day, if we can get schools engaged in that way, I don't just think we've remedied transitions; I think we've remedied the whole experience.

Narrator: Teams were carefully selected from a large applicant pool, and represent rural and urban areas as well as diverse program structures and current levels of collaboration. Team members include Head Start and public school leaders, educators and families, and they are supported by The Office of Head Start through engagement and learning resources.

Elizabeth Arreola: We had the right stakeholders, we had our superintendent, we had a principal from our district, we had our director from our Head Start at our district, and I was lucky to represent the parent aspect. So we literally had every representative from every section of the process.

Dr. Anita Chu: It's not their success versus our success; it's OUR success. It's OUR children.

Narrator: The project members engaged in many meaningful experiences using strategies based on sharing information, building relationships, and aligning settings.

Dr. Chu: What a beautiful picture that we are talking about. Sharing information. Building relationships. You know, relationships matter so much, especially in the younger age. And now, with all this information and the relationship that is being built, it comes – the alignment of systems.

Narrator: Teams use the strategy of information sharing to help build the bridge between Head Start and kindergarten.

Yolanda Romero: The communication with the parent and the teacher—Oh, my God.

It's the best thing to happen, because you know what you're expecting for your child, you're trying to build that relationship, and it helps a lot with the child learning.

Narrator: Team members from Kansas prioritize sharing health information with appropriate permissions, giving the educators and school health professionals the tools they need to support children's best possible health development.

Team members from Minnesota use information sharing to ensure children in their community have opportunities for high-quality, early childhood experiences and are well prepared for the kindergarten transition.

Teams built relationships with each other and with families using research-based strategies.

Scot West: In order to maximize what you're going to be able to do, you have to have the relationship built first. Then you can expand on how you help serve...our people.

Sandra Gonzalez: I think it's very important to have everyone at the table and being able to really understand what our end-goal is, and be able to work toward achieving that.

Dawn Hall: Fifty percent of our referrals went to the mental health, our mental health partner. Sometimes people may ask, "What does that have to do with kindergarten transition?" Because when these families get their needs met at home, when children get their core needs met at home, they transition to the school much differently.

Dr. Mike Brophy: The earlier we can start this school of family connection, the better. Today, a student's best chance for success is based on the parents' engagement with the child in school.

Peter Finch: Think about if you were in preschool and you're going to kindergarten, and then your kindergarten teacher comes to your home and you get to meet them and how awesome that would be as a kid that you would know who your teacher is going to be. And then when you show up that first day of school, you already know who that teacher is and you're so excited.

Amanda: Our teams have just been overjoyed to find similar people who are equally driven around making life better for children and families, and they have been able to work together with their school district partners to maximize resources. And it's, I think, just been a truly amazing experience.

Narrator: Educators in the project create an alignment between Head Start programs and receiving elementary schools through multiple transition activities.

Sonja Robinson: So we offered a PD, joint transition training.

Sandra: So just from the feedback I heard from the teaching staff, they felt that it really enhanced the work that they do because of that understanding. They also felt that being able to have that time together and being able to understand each other's lives, sort of say, was something that was very beneficial in them going back and being able to further prepare the children.

Sonja: For the teachers, they had an opportunity to actually plan their additional events that they were going to conduct on that day. So they gave them an opportunity to really collaborate, to communicate, as well as to plan around what that day would look like for parents and children. Because a lot of times our teachers, they really just don't have the time to be out of the classroom, so just allowing them that time to plan, I think really helped to impact their whole transition on focus.

Narrator: Their successes and lessons learned will improve future collaboration work.

Deborah: The backend lesson is that you will get good results if you have follow- thru. And with that there does need to be some level of accountability. It helps to keep people focused. There is a lot going on and everyone is busy, so this needs to be a priority... It has to be made a priority, very deliberately.

Stacey Drake: I think if districts are looking to get into this work, something that I would tell them is that it's really valuable time to get a way to develop relationships with your team, having dedicated time to develop true goals with one another in a collaborative way is time well spent.

Susan DeRiso: We're really excited, because one of the celebrations in noting that was that our governor, Gina Raimondo, called out one of our parents during her State of the State address. Her two youngest children didn't have the opportunity to go to Pre-K, and with our new partnership and model...

Mary Varr: And expanding.

Susan: ...and expansion, she now has a child who is able to attend universal Pre-K at Head Start.

Deborah: I really think the sparks are going to come from the result of this – school systems saying, “We did this, and this is what happened.” I think that is where we're going to really see traction. And we'll have people saying, “How did you make that happen?”

Christina Patterson: It was so refreshing just to see the community, the schools, our team, everyone completely buy in to this - just the fact that no one wants to stop, that we want to see what's next.

Mary: Our children in Woonsocket are not going to succeed or do better unless we change the way that we're interacting, starting from early childhood and on. They are our children from the time that we meet them to the time that they graduate and go off to college and a successful adult life.

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