



Parent-Teacher Connection Program: A Collaboration Between Gesell Institute and New Haven Public Schools

Background

Gesell Institute, in collaboration with New Haven Public Schools, is implementing a continuation of the Parent-Teacher Connection Program (P-TCP), working in three local early childhood settings with teachers and families of children expected to transition to Kindergarten in the Fall. Begun as a pilot project in the Spring of 2008 and through the 2008-2009 academic year, the program has received an additional 18 months of funding to continue the program and strengthen the applied research model.

The goals of the program include promoting school success and the adaptation of 4-year-olds within their preschool settings, as well as preparing children and families for Kindergarten transition. The P-TCP is based on a successful program previously implemented in Somerville, Massachusetts and currently in Costa Rica, by Tufts University Assistant Professor Martha Garcia-Sellers, PhD. It is a replication of Dr. Sellers' Home-School Connection Program (H-SCP) model, modified to fit the needs of the New Haven community and the participating programs. Dr. Sellers, also a member of the Gesell Advisory Council, served as a consultant in the planning and training phases of the program and continues to serve as an advisor and mentor for program staff.

Overview

The program focus is on supporting families and teachers, fostering an understanding and appreciation of the importance of growth across academic, social, emotional, and physical domains, while also addressing any school adaptation difficulties that children may have due to cultural differences or discrepant expectations between home and school. By visiting children and parents in their homes, observing children in their classrooms and meeting with teachers, program personnel (parent-teacher liaisons) work to strengthen communication between home and school. During home visits and phone calls with parents, liaisons are able to inform parents about school activities, educational expectations, and ways in which they can support their children in the transition to school, whether preschool or the more formal school entry of Kindergarten.

Through on-going communication with teachers and other school staff, recommendations can also be made to help understand children's behavior in the context of their family's values. Added components to the P-TCP include modeling developmentally appropriate activities for parents and other caregivers, setting goals with families to support children's individual development and assist in the transition to Kindergarten, and providing literacy-rich materials for home and school through family resource kits and classroom gifts.

The P-TCP promotes school success and adaptation for children by strengthening the connection between home and school, empowering families with information about the transition to kindergarten and with recommendations for interacting with schools and teachers. The effectiveness of the program will be evaluated through the use of both informal and standardized measures addressing issues of school adaptation, behavior at home and at school, and classroom climate. Surveys will also be distributed at the end of each year to address parent and teacher satisfaction with the program.

Program Components

The program model includes the following components.

- General classroom observations and child-specific observations within the preschool and home settings
- Home visits including a parent/guardian interview, activities with the child, and family resource kits
- Teacher meetings to obtain information about the child, provide feedback, and share recommendations
- Attendance at parent and team review meetings with other key school personnel, such as Head Start outreach workers, school readiness social service workers, and education coordinators
- Follow-up home visits and phone interviews with families involving goal setting for individual children, modeling of developmentally appropriate activities, and feedback from classroom observations and teachers

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