



Early Head Start centers in Tennessee adopt LENA Start to meet school readiness goals

In 2013, a group of community leaders in southwestern Tennessee formed a diverse partnership to address an emerging problem: despite economic growth, educational outcomes for local students were dismal.

Known now as “Seeding Success,” the Collective Impact Partnership works in Shelby County — home to Memphis, and the most populous county in the state – using data to improve outcomes for children.

Over the last 18 months, Seeding Success has collaborated with LENA to offer LENA Start classes to parents through local partner organizations. One of those partner organizations is Porter-Leath, a community resource center in Memphis that manages several Early Head Start centers.

“The Head Start Program Performance Standards require programs to have school readiness goals, and we were excited to do LENA Start in hopes of increasing our assessment scores,” said TaWanda Randolph, Education Specialist for Porter-Leath. “We were also excited about the opportunities and potential growth in the children and their families.”

Looking to create stronger school-family partnerships, Porter-Leath launched their first LENA Start class in the fall of 2017.

Increases in parent knowledge and confidence

LENA Start is designed to encourage parents to promote and participate in their child’s learning. Feedback-based educational content helps parents to set personalized goals, and the peer model builds social well-being and community.

“The parents are eager to participate. This helps give them more of a buy-in and makes them more aware of what’s goes on in their child’s classroom. They’re becoming more knowledgeable and conscious of what’s developmentally appropriate, and they want to know more and more so that they can help their children learn more,” Randolph said.

67%

In 2013, 67 percent of children entering kindergarten in Shelby County were not reading on grade level when they entered school.



A LENA Start class meets for a session at Porter-Leath in Memphis, Tennessee.

LENA Start — which is aligned to Head Start performance standards — has been shown to increase parenting confidence. Through a pre/post survey, families have reported increased levels of parenting self-efficacy, confidence in future school success, community engagement, and five other domains.

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In Memphis, Randolph has seen the local buzz about the program grow as parents tell each other about their experiences.

“The first group has been over for almost a year now, and those families are still excited about it and still implementing what they learned,” she said with a laugh.

“This is an awesome tool that goes far beyond just the parents you’re reaching in your sites. When people in the community see the children with the vests on, that’s a conversation piece, and we’ve been able to equip parents to go out and educate others on the science.”

Improved outcomes for children

Teachers have noticed changes in the classroom, too. They began to overhear parents asking children open-ended questions and saw the parents forming deeper relationships with each other. Children came to school using new words and having more meaningful conversations with adults.

And the language scores began to increase. “We saw a growth in not just language, but also in cognitive, and social-emotional domains as well,” Randolph said.

Each child gained three to four points on the E-LAP developmental assessment. The team plans to track the children’s outcomes to see how they continue to progress over time.



Parents began to share stories about their positive experiences in LENA Start with each other.

Currently, Porter-Leath is looking to implement LENA Grow, a professional development program for early childhood teachers, and track how effective the program is at increasing language outcomes for children.

“We plan to use it to help us make decisions on revisions to our school-readiness goals yearly as well as to help us plan for professional development for staff,” she said.

Learn more about LENA Start!



LENA Start is a program for parents that uses regular feedback from LENA technology to help increase interactive talk in order to close the early-talk gap, support kindergarten readiness, and build stronger families.

Visit www.lena.org for more information.