



Supporting the Whole Child

Why should early childhood health and education go hand in hand?

From birth to age eight, children take the first steps in a lifelong learning journey. In just the first few years, young children's brains form 700 to 1,000 new neural connections every second. As they move from crawling to running, all of children's early experiences at home, in their communities, and in early learning settings shape how their brains develop. During these years, support for children's well-being paves the way to their long-term success in school and life.



In a recent study, kindergarten teachers reported that being physically well, able to sleep, having enough of the right kinds of food, and feeling safe were the most vital contributors to school readiness. Other studies show that each dollar spent supporting children's well-being yields significant benefits to society by fostering a productive, healthy future workforce. Research also indicates that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), such as poverty, violence, and

neglect, can cause lifelong, negative physical and mental outcomes.

EDC is on the frontlines of addressing ACES. Across the U.S. and around the world, we lead prevention and promotion efforts that support "the whole child"—mental health, physical health, social emotional health, and safety—and free children to learn and become thoughtful, productive members of society.



What barriers stand in the way of supporting the whole child?

To help all children reach their full potential, all families and caregivers need to be able to rely upon strong, coordinated systems of care that treat them as key partners.

Three persistent barriers stand in the way of coordinated systems of care and weaken capacity to support the whole child.

1. Need to Improve Service Quality
2. Need for Cross-Sector Collaboration and Communication
3. Need to Strengthen the Workforce

How is EDC helping remove these barriers?

Solution 1—Systemic Approaches to Enhancing Quality: With the support of U.S. Agency for International Development, EDC’s Enhancing Services and Linkages for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS program is improving the health, well-being, and economic security of 47,000 orphans and vulnerable children and 16,000 households in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We are strengthening social welfare systems to provide a coordinated continuum of care that meets short-term needs and builds children’s longer-term resilience.

As managing partner of the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, we are promoting innovation and providing systems-change support to help leaders of all 50 State Education Agencies improve early childhood opportunities and outcomes. Our work includes guiding states in ensuring that programs use evidence-based health and safety practices that prepare children for success in school and life.

Through two Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Networks (CoIINs)—the Child Safety CoIIN and the Home Visiting CoIIN (HV CoIIN)—EDC provides leadership and

expertise to those serving the most vulnerable families. Through the Child Safety CoIIN, our Children’s Safety Network helps states and jurisdictions establish, expand, and improve their use of evidence-based child safety interventions and reduce fatal and serious injuries. The CoIIN builds upon our over 25 years of developing innovative resources that support state health departments in using data and effective strategies to create injury- and violence-free environments.

EDC’s HV-CoIIN uses the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s Breakthrough Series model to help home visitors improve maternal and child health outcomes across federal home visiting programs. In its first three years, HV CoIIN achieved, and often exceeded, its targets to enhance services. For example, over 80 percent of participating mothers are now screened for maternal depression at appropriate intervals, a figure well above the national average. Nearly 100 percent of HV CoIIN home visitors are now trained in infant feeding and lactation, supporting a key area of infant health. And, HV CoIIN home visitors now provide individualized developmental screening to 85 percent of the children they serve.



Solution 2—Leading Initiatives that Advance Cross-Sector Work: Through the Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, EDC is helping states, Tribal Nations, and local communities build children’s mental health consultation programs from the ground up. We are supporting state and local leaders in collaborating with and tapping into multiple partners’ resources to bring all caring adults in a child’s life together to promote strong mental health. The Center of Excellence recently completed a Toolbox of resources related to models, systems, financing, research and evaluation, communication, competencies, and workforce development.

With a grant from the Heising-Simons Foundation, EDC is leading a study to examine how communities are using partnership models to better serve children and families. By studying the models—Cradle-to-Career partnerships, approaches to wrap-around services for preschools and schools, and P-3 Partnerships that support prenatal through Grade 3 alignment—EDC seeks to advance the efforts of communities nationwide that are interested in forming partnerships to enhance child outcomes.

Under the umbrella of the American Academy of Pediatrics, EDC is a partner in the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. We are advancing best practices for linking health and early childhood education systems, health professionals, and families, and providing high-quality evidence-informed technical support to advance the development of comprehensive, coordinated health and wellness services. Our services help improve the health, safety, and school success of over one million Head Start children in 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, the territories, and American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Migrant/Seasonal communities, as well as 12 million children from low-income families served by programs subsidized by the Child Care Development Fund.

Solution 3—High-Quality Professional Learning Opportunities: With decades of history in training and technical assistance, EDC leads the way in designing and delivering professional learning that strengthens the workforce and build capacity to support the whole child. EDC’s Center for Early Learning Professionals offers comprehensive, free courses to early childhood professionals in Rhode Island on physical health, inclusion,



and social and emotional development. Since 2014, the Center has provided over 50,000 hours of professional development to 2,100 early childhood staff from 802 center-based and family child care homes.

EDC's Rwanda Early Childhood Caregiver Professional Development and Certification Program was the first nationally recognized training and certification program for early childhood caregivers in the country. An evaluation showed that EDC's training helped caregivers develop a solid knowledge base about early childhood development topics and reaffirmed the importance of holistic, play-based methods for early childhood programs.

In addition to supporting early childhood educators, EDC is helping Federal Home Visiting Program grantees use preventive promising



practices to ensure at-risk pregnant mothers and families have the resources they need to raise children who are physically, socially, and emotionally healthy and ready to learn. Our Home Visiting-Improvement Action Center Team provides professional learning, technical support, and resources to grantees in 50 states, D.C., and 5 U.S. territories—benefiting 145,500 parents and children in 825 counties.

When we all focus on the whole child, how does our world begin to change for the better?

Children who feel healthy and safe—both physically and emotionally—are ready to learn. We have the brain research and evidence to support this. When we focus on one aspect and not the other, we fail to wrap a program around a child that offers the best support for positive outcomes today and tomorrow.

Today is the day to join forces to foster physical and emotional health for all children. Across the U.S. and around the world, children and families are living in conditions of extreme poverty and violence with no strong, comprehensive net of services to catch and

hold them. Every adult in a child's life, community, and larger circle of concern and care can be part of the solution. When we share, collaborate, and partner to focus on the whole child, we are, quite simply, investing in our future.



Education Development Center (EDC) is a global nonprofit that advances lasting solutions to improve education, promote health, and expand economic opportunity. Since 1958, we have been a leader in designing, implementing, and evaluating powerful and innovative programs in more than 80 countries around the world.

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