*Building a Lasting Foundation for High Quality Early Learning Opportunities for Infants and Toddlers through Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships*

Last year, we launched a pioneering effort to bring together Early Head Start and child care programs in new and exciting ways. For decades the country has looked to Head Start as the national laboratory for early childhood. Although we had many lessons learned from Head Start they seldom made the leap into child care and never on a large scale. As the science has increasingly underscored the need for higher quality child care for our nation’s infants, the struggle to provide it has intensified. A major barrier to improving the quality of infant/toddler child care is the cost. Because of the low adult to child ratios, the cost to provide this care is cost prohibitive for most parents. For example, here in the Washington DC area, the cost of infant child care is as high as $18,000 per year making it unavailable for most low income working families.

To address the problem, and create a long term vision for the country, the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP) were created as part of the [Administration's Early Learning Initiative](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/early-learning). The goal was to increase the supply of high-quality early learning opportunities and at the same time create a continuum of care beginning at birth and continuing to kindergarten entry. Communities were asked to identify settings that served children receiving child care subsidies and to create partnerships between them and an Early Head Start grantee. By providing financial incentives, training and technical assistance and other supports, we theorized that child care programs could meet high quality Early Head Start standards. And that has, in fact, happened.

Today, in every state, 275 EHS-CCP grantees and their partners have worked together with support from nearly every sector of federal, state and local communities to bring these concepts to life. Today, I visited a program in Columbus, Ohio that is a real model for what we hoped to see. More than a dozen partners are engaged in the effort. Support comes from the Mayor, the Ohio State University, private philanthropy and many from the non-profit sector. During the event, we released our EHS-CCP Year One Report.

The report provides key highlights about the program, our grantees, and the early successes and lessons learned from first year of the implementation. After just one year,

* More than 21,000 infants and toddlers received comprehensive services, including health and developmental screenings, and enhanced curriculum.
* More than 1,200 child care and 600 family child care partner sites benefitted from the infusion of resources provided to improve facilities and enhance learning environments.
* At least 3,600 classrooms at partner sites received new materials and supplies such as board books, toys, enhanced curriculum and other instructional materials.
* More than 6,600 teachers and staff in child care and family child care received professional development, coaching and enhanced training to meet Early Head Start requirements.
* Thousands of parents and families received family support, referrals and linkages to other social and health services through Early Head Start comprehensive services now available at partner sites.
* Thousands of children who are not eligible for Early Head Start but are served at partner sites are benefitting from the overall quality improvements at the centers.

During the last several months, I have visited many programs and been able to speak to many EHS-CCP grantees and their child care partners. The numbers in the report do not do justice to the ripple effects and transformative change that we are seeing. I still remember one grandmother who came up to me and told me how grateful she was because her grandson had some behavior issues and she did not know what to do. She feared he would be expelled from the program and they had so few options if that happened. She told me how surprised she was when, after meeting with the staff, the EHS-CCP program set up a referral for a health and behavioral screening and assessment. What in many cases would have been a family’s nightmare became a blessing.

I have heard from teachers about how grateful they are because they now have access to additional coaching and training, scholarships to go back to school, and increased compensation through the EHS-CCP. I have also heard from child care directors and family child care providers who feel like they just won the lottery because of the resources available to renovate their classrooms, buy new supplies, books, and other equipment for their classrooms. Other directors now say that they no longer feel alone—they have the team of support through EHS-CCP.

And finally, we have heard from long-time Early Head Start and Head Start grantees who feel that this is one of the most meaningful programs they have been part of and now they have a chance to share the expertise that they have built over the years. This brings this full circle. Head Start **is** the nation’s early learning laboratory and now we are able to turn that laboratory into action.

We began with a concept and although it has not always been easy and we know these partnerships take time, we now know that this is possible. Over the coming year, we will continue to share lessons learned so that more infants and toddlers have the foundation they need to grow, thrive and learn.

The full report is available at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/early-learning/ehs-cc-partnerships>