

Head Start CARES for Migrant and Seasonal Families

Adapting a Preschool Social-Emotional Curriculum

Supporting the development of young children's social-emotional skills and competencies in preschool programs, including Head Start, is increasingly viewed as important. At the same time, there has been greater recognition of the need to adapt evidence-based programs for special populations such as the children and families of migrant and seasonal workers.

The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) CARES (Classroom-based Approaches and Resources for Emotion and Social skill promotion) case study provided an opportunity to evaluate the adaptation and implementation of an existing evidence-based, social-emotional curriculum for use in the

MSHS program. The "Preschool PATHS" (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum, which focuses on improving children's social-emotional problem-solving skills, was selected for adaptation from among three strategies that were tested in the national Head Start CARES demonstration. The study team and the curriculum developers worked with two MSHS grantees to identify needed adaptations to the program model, and two classrooms from each grantee implemented the adapted curriculum.

Focusing on the two grantees' implementation experience, this report describes methods for delivering social-emotional programs in

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MSSH settings, as well as features inherent in MSSH centers and the characteristics of children in MSSH programs that can inform adaptations of other program models to these settings. Lessons from this study are relevant to the debate about how to balance the competing demands of fidelity to an evidence-based model with the need to adapt programs for special populations or circumstances.

KEY FINDINGS

The MSSH CARES experience suggests that adaptations can account for important cultural differences while staying true to the core principles and components of evidence-based programs. Specific adaptations to Preschool PATHS fell into three categories: (1) structural adaptations, many of which addressed the varying lengths of MSSH school years and the wide age range of MSSH students; (2) cultural adaptations, including a strong focus on the role of parents; and (3) language adaptations involving the translation of PATHS materials into Spanish.

- The PATHS developers led the adaptation process. Together with stakeholders' input, they maintained the core theory and

integrity of the enhancement while responding to the particular needs of MSSH programs and the families they serve.

- Participants viewed the strong professional development model — including teacher training, weekly coaching, and technical assistance — as essential to the implementation of PATHS in MSSH classrooms.
- Sensitivity to language and cultural fit were important to delivering the enhancement and coaching in the bilingual, bicultural MSSH settings.
- Implementation of PATHS went well in all the classrooms. Despite varying program durations of 10 weeks, 5 months, and 7 months, teachers delivered the program as planned. However, 10 weeks may not allow enough time to implement the curriculum, unless the content can be reduced without compromising the integrity of the program.
- Adding a parent component to Preschool PATHS was very important to the MSSH community, and parents from both grantees had a very positive impression of the program.

OPRE Report 2014-43 June 2014

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Contract Number:
HHSP23320072909YC

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Suggested citation:
Fishman, Mike, and
Jessica Wille (2014). Head
Start CARES for Migrant
and Seasonal Families:
Adapting a Preschool
Social-Emotional
Curriculum. OPRE Report
2014-43. Washington, DC:
Office of Planning,
Research and Evaluation,
Administration for
Children and Families,
U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services.

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