

Child Care/Head Start Partnership Snapshot: What the Research Says About Establishing and Sustaining Partnerships

By Diane Schilder



Why Partner?

Partnerships between child care and Head Start have the potential of offering children and families with the best aspects of each program. Specifically, partnerships can offer parents in need of child care for their children while they work or attend

school with full-time, accessible care. And partnerships can provide children and families the comprehensive services and higher quality early learning environments offered by Head Start.

What Does the Research Say about Establishing and Sustaining a Partnership?

To achieve desired results and benefits it is important that child care and Head Start partners have well-defined partnership agreements, have similar goals, and have solid communication. A longitudinal study of 141 child care centers, half of whom were in partnership with Head Start, found that the nature of the partnership predicts desired benefits. Details about the methods employed in the research can be found in the full report (see reference below).

Partners spent an average of **six months** establishing their partnerships. Partners that **met at least three times** before signing a contract were more likely to report benefits than those who met fewer times.

Research shows that **written agreements** regarding specific aspects of the partnership were predictive of partnership duration and outcomes. Specifically, partnering providers that had the following written agreements in place were much more likely to achieve desired results (than those without such agreements):

- A contract between the Head Start agency and the child care provider and
- Policies regarding administrator, teacher and service provider roles and responsibilities
- Partnership goals and objectives that clearly articulate what is to be achieved annually
- Plans describing the financial arrangements for the partnership
- Procedures for communication
- Agreements about the curriculum

Partnering providers reported that the following **processes and agreements** were essential to developing and sustaining the partnership:

- A process for achieving a shared partnership philosophy between child care and Head Start
- A process to orient staff to the Head Start program
- A process to orient staff to Head Start regulations
- A process for resolving conflicts
- A process for preparing staff for new responsibilities
- A process to involve all staff in all phases of the partnership
- Procedures to keep children enrolled if parents lose subsidy eligibility
- Procedures to keep children enrolled if parents lose state-funded Head Start eligibility
- Procedures to manage finances as part of the partnership

Communication is key for partnerships to succeed. Partners who agreed with statements that the following were in place were most likely to report benefits of the partnership:

- Good communication within each organization
- Good communication across organizations
- Mutual respect among each individual working in the partnership
- Respect for each partner's organization
- Feeling that each organization is a full partner
- Feeling that each partner's voice is heard
- Partners can call one another when they need to



Child care and Head Start providers initiating and implementing partnerships should carefully engage in a planning process that results in detailed written documents guiding the partnership, strong communication procedures, and processes for updating decisions based on changing circumstances.