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Teachers Kendra Scarbough, foreground, and Jolie Carr work on early math and literacy concepts with prekindergarten students at AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School's Southwest campus in Washington, D.C.

A FOUNDATION OF LEARNING

D.C. PROGRAM ADDRESSES ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR 3- AND 4-YEAR OLDS

BY NATASHA PARRILLA AND KELLY TRYGSTAD

Every teacher has experienced the achievement gap in his or her classroom at some point and not known what to do.

Instructional leaders face the challenge of supporting teachers to

close this gap, and a variety of research-based philosophies and strategies in the field address this challenge. AppleTree Institute for Education Innovation, a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., is working to close the achievement gap before children

enter kindergarten by providing 3- and 4-year-olds with the social, emotional, and academic foundations that enable them to thrive in school — and increasing educator effectiveness is a critical component of that.

There is a substantial academic

performance gap between children in economically disadvantaged communities and their more economically advantaged peers (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Since the passage of the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008, the District of Columbia has invested in early childhood, making the capital a national leader in access for early childhood education. A 2016 report from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education notes that 70% of 3-year-olds attend preschool and 84% of 4-year-olds attend prekindergarten. According to the report, 83% of these children are considered economically disadvantaged (District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2017).

The district recognizes the majority of achievement gaps are in the urban areas of the national's capital, which is home to one of the widest and most persistent achievement gaps in America (Aud et al., 2010). To close this gap, children require access to a high-quality early education program that will provide a foundation of learning in order to be successful throughout their lives.

THE EVERY CHILD READY MODEL

Since 1996, AppleTree has focused on providing high-quality early education to children in underserved communities in the nation's capital. The goal is to strengthen student academic and social emotional skills, maximize teacher performance, provide



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collaboration opportunities, and cultivate teachers' and instructional leaders' pedagogical skills through a comprehensive instructional model called Every Child Ready, which AppleTree developed through an Investing in Innovation grant beginning in 2010.

Every Child Ready includes a three-pronged approach: what to teach (curriculum), how to teach (professional development), and how to know it's working (assessment and evaluation). Every Child Ready is implemented across nine local education agencies, 23 campuses, and 97 classrooms for nearly 2,300 3- and 4-year-olds in the Washington, D.C., area. Every Child Ready is also implemented in a New York City school in Harlem.

THE PROGRAM

Professional learning is key to providing a quality early child education program. It is common for instructional leaders to be challenged with the responsibilities of providing job-embedded professional learning to their teaching staff. Early childhood educators are charged with the first steps of introducing academics to a young child and held accountable for the decisions made on children's behalf.

This task is not an easy one.

Instructional leaders often lack necessary resources, have several classrooms to support, and are many times pulled away from coaching to attend to operational and logistical needs. This doesn't always leave time for high-quality coaching, and, when there is time to coach, instructional leaders aren't as prepared as they could be. The Every Child Ready professional development program seeks to solve this problem through the development of tools and resources for instructional leaders.

The Every Child Ready professional development program uses professional learning to strengthen instructional leadership, classroom quality, and student achievement for early childhood educators to provide a high-quality education to young children. These goals are aligned to the Leadership standard of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

The Leadership standard calls for professional learning to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students and requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems (Learning Forward, 2011). Every Child Ready's professional development program



Photo by CHRISTINA MILLER

Prekindergarten students at AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School’s Columbia Heights campus in Washington, D.C., pretend to be astronauts at a space station as part of a theme-based unit of the Every Child Ready curriculum.

consists of a comprehensive train-the-trainer gradual release model that includes instructional leader workshops, leadership meetings, and differentiated coaching supports.

- **Instructional leader workshops:** These workshops include a four-day institute where leaders are introduced to the Every Child Ready model, best practices in coaching, and support for data analysis and goal setting. The goal of these sessions is to empower instructional leaders as Every Child Ready experts so they are equipped to support teachers in implementing Every Child Ready at their schools. AppleTree’s train-the-trainer approach allows instructional leaders to take the lead on professional learning

for their teachers to support sustainability in their own network.

- **Every Child Ready leadership meetings:** All instructional leaders are invited to attend these quarterly meetings. They are scheduled around student achievement progress monitoring windows to foster conversations about data and children’s progress toward benchmarks. Leaders analyze data and identify trends, attend sessions that focus on target areas of need, and contribute to a community of practice by sharing best practices and strategies for teachers.
Niesha Cumberbatch, an instructional leader for AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School, says, “Reviewing

the data and the discussion on identifying specific student needs are helpful. I will apply the information about data to help teachers identify specific student needs and develop a plan for each student.” These meetings highlight Learning Forward’s Learning Communities standard, which focuses on learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment (Learning Forward, 2011).

- **Differentiated leader coaching:** Every Child Ready curriculum specialists work with instructional leaders to provide differentiated coaching to meet their identified needs. These supports include co-scoring observations, planning coaching

conversations, goal setting, analyzing data, and creating professional development workshops for their school based on student achievement and classroom quality data.

COACHING PROGRESSION

Every Child Ready instructional leaders use AppleTree’s coaching progression and dashboard to guide their coaching using a variety of observation tools and track their progress toward meeting their goals.

The coaching progression is a tool that instructional leaders use throughout the school year to provide job-embedded coaching to teachers and continuous development. It cultivates a culture of collaboration and data conversations between instructional leaders and teachers. The coaching progression supports Learning Forward’s Data standard to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students using a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

The coaching progression is built on classroom tracks that outline how many hours of coaching classrooms receive and the coaching activities that should occur. (See table above.) Before the school year begins, classrooms are placed on one of four tracks based on the lead teachers’ years of experience teaching early childhood, classroom quality, and student achievement data from the previous year.

Classroom quality data are based on the Every Child Ready Quality Indicators, which is a tool used to measure classroom and instructional quality. The quality indicator is a valid and reliable tool that has shown a strong correlation with student achievement, especially in the area of literacy.

According to an independent data

EVERY CHILD READY COACHING PROGRESSION TRACK INFORMATION			
Classroom track	Coaching per year	Classroom coaching per week	Classroom coaching meeting
1	40 to 50 hours	One hour	One hour biweekly or 30 minutes weekly
2	30 to 40 hours	30 minutes	One hour biweekly or 30 minutes weekly
3	20 to 30 hours	30 minutes	30 minutes biweekly
4+	15 to 25 hours	15- to 25-minute targeted walk-through with immediate feedback	30 minutes biweekly or one hour monthly

SAMPLE EVERY CHILD READY ATTRIBUTE CHECKLIST: READ ALOUD	
Attribute	Observed?
Activate prior knowledge	
Advanced organizer	
Attention to print	
Informal or formal assessment	
Knowledge or recall questions	
Language support strategies	
Materials	
Multiple modalities	
Open-ended questions and prompts	
Repeated use of songs & activities	
Student expression	
Theme-related purpose/ activities	
Vocabulary	

analysis, the amount of coaching hours in the coaching progression was highly correlated with improving scores of students in the bottom quartile for language, literacy, and math. Coaching progression hours have also shown a positive correlation to key quality indicators in the quality indicator tool, including support for diverse learners, independent and guided practice opportunities, and direct instruction opportunities. This highlights Learning Forward’s Outcomes standard by showing an increase in educator

effectiveness and results for students (Learning Forward, 2011).

Using the coaching progression, instructional leaders plan differentiated coaching for teachers’ professional learning. Based on the teacher track, teachers are given an amount of coaching hours with their instructional leadership per year and per week. For instance, in track one classrooms, the first eight weeks of coaching target behavior management and baseline checklists focused on best practices that should be present in any high-quality preschool and pre-K program.

CHECKLISTS

Behavior checklists provide instructional leaders with the opportunity to support teachers in establishing rules, routines, and procedures in their classrooms from the beginning of the school year. These checklists are customizable for schools depending on the classroom management system they use. Every Child Ready curriculum specialists work with leaders to create one that aligns with Every Child Ready and the school’s needs.

The Every Child Ready attribute checklist above allows instructional leaders to determine if teachers understand the foundational best practices in early childhood education before digging into quality. As Erin Hindes, an Every Child Ready instructional leader, says, “These

checklists and supports allow me to target specific areas of growth, as well as highlight areas of strengths, for classrooms.”

The complete attribute checklist contains 28 attributes that are defined in detail for leaders to support classroom observations. Sherrell Lewis, a prekindergarten teacher from AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School, says that, during an Every Child Ready professional learning session, “I will be using the attribute checklist on what is developmentally appropriate to better assist my students in reaching social emotional goals dependent upon their individual needs.” There are also attribute checklists to support leaders in observing transitions and informal learning opportunities such as recess and meal times.

After the first eight weeks, the coaching progression allows instructional leaders to analyze the data collected and differentiate based on the needs of the teachers and children in the classroom.

Shontice McKenzie, an instructional leader for AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School, says, “The coaching dashboard is a great way to track progress and the new updates allow reports to be generated where observation tools are clustered.” Other tools in the coaching progression support classroom management and teacher-child relationships. The coach uses these to monitor progress and help the teacher set goals.

The coaching progression also supports implementation of the coaching cycle (preobservation, reflection and goal setting, and post-observation). The tools and resources in the coaching progression help support professional learning, as noted in Learning Forward’s Resources standard, to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students

SAMPLE COACHING DASHBOARD												
Month		Reflection activity										
		Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	Average	
Amount in progression Track 1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Amount in progression Track 2		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Amount in progression Track 3		1			1			1		1		
Amount in progression Track 4		1			1			1		1		
Class	Track											
1	1	9/30	10/27	11/18	12/16	1/31	2/10	3/9	4/12	5/2	100%	
2	2	9/30	10/29	11/18	12/16	1/19	2/10	10/27		5/20	88%	
3	1	9/29	10/5	11/16	12/14		2/8	10/27	4/25		78%	
4	3	10/5			10/27			10/27		5/16	100%	
Total											92%	

including prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

COACHING DASHBOARD

Instructional leaders document all of the coaching activities in a customizable coaching dashboard. The dashboard holds all of the information they collect in one place, including data collected from observations, coaching meeting notes, and a tracker that allows them to easily see what coaching activities have been complete and what still needs to be done for the month.

The dashboard is created based on the classroom tracks and the coaching hours classrooms should receive. “I appreciate the coaching dashboard for a lot of reasons,” says Jessica Brewster, assistant principal at E.L. Haynes Public Charter School and an Every Child Ready instructional leader. “First and foremost, it helps me provide equitable support to teachers of similar need. It shows me where I’ve spent more time and helps me reflect on how

that may be impacting teacher success and therefore student achievement.”

The coaching dashboard is automated so that, once a task is completed for that month, it is marked as complete. This way, leaders can easily see what they have completed for each classroom and also see changes in data and improvement over time.

“Another reason I appreciate the dashboard,” Brewster says, “is that it houses all types of observations I might do within my early childhood classrooms so that I can keep information in one place instead of having multiple documents and tracking systems.”

The coaching dashboard keeps a running record of all observational data collected, reflection activities that occur to support teacher learning and what leaders and teachers discuss in their meetings, goals they have set, and next steps.

The table above is an example of what leaders see when they enter the coaching data into the dashboard.

Leaders are also able to see notes and pull up previous data they have entered to review with teachers and keep a running record of what they have coached on. The data in this table show the dates the reflection activities took place as well as the average occurrence of reflection activities overall for each classroom and for all classrooms. The cells will turn red if the data is not entered after the due date.

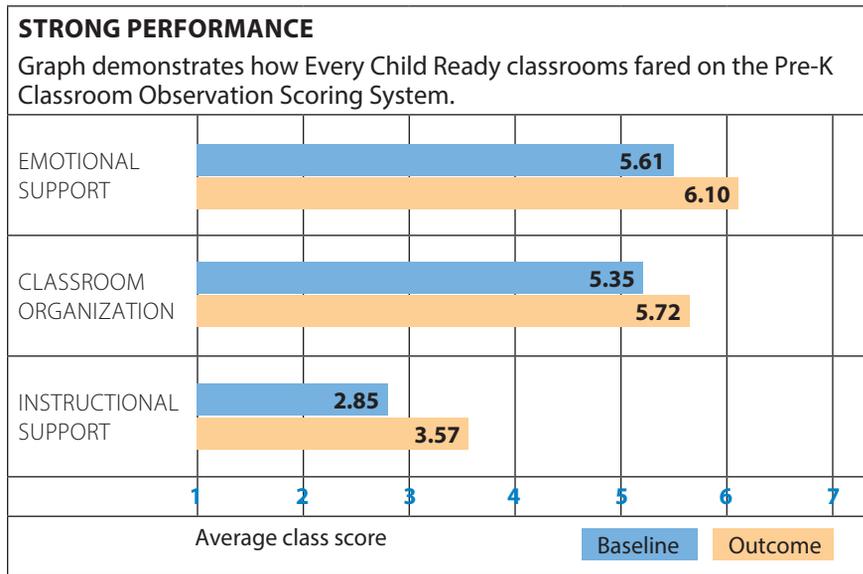
The Every Child Ready coaching progression and dashboard provide guidance to instructional leaders and accountability to support sustainable change within schools. AppleTree’s train-the-trainer approach to instructional leadership aligns with Learning Forward’s Implementation standard, which highlights the importance of increasing educator effectiveness and results for all students to have sustainable, long-term change (Learning Forward, 2011). The Every Child Ready professional development program aligns with Learning Forward’s approach to professional learning and supports the mission of helping early learners with the highest need.

OUTCOMES

The graph above demonstrates that, on average, classrooms implementing the full Every Child Ready instructional model demonstrated strong performance in all domains of the Pre-K Classroom Observation Scoring System (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008).

Further, Every Child Ready classrooms significantly outperformed other classrooms in the instructional support domain. Significant differences were present in each dimension of instructional support, including concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling.

Previous research in this area has found that differences of this size are associated with higher child outcomes (Burchinal, Vandergrift,



Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010). These positive outcomes suggest that a comprehensive instructional model can support teachers in quality instruction, an important step to closing the achievement gap.

Coaching teachers and leaders plays a big role in the success of the Every Child Ready model. “Having a team to reach out to makes this so much easier,” says Erin Hindes, instructional coach at AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School. “Sometimes an extra set of eyes or a specialist’s observation can either confirm your initial concerns or help quell them.”

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