Our mission is to coalesce, inspire and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Leading by Exemplar: Teacher Professional Development

This brief focuses on the practices of five exemplary Head Start programs from the Leading by Exemplar research project. Below you’ll find details on the teacher credential requirements and the selection process used by each program. You’ll see that each of these programs uses data to better understand which professional development strategies are the most successful, which skills to focus on, and which teachers need additional support to reach their individual goals. NHSA shares this brief in order to share the findings of the Leading by Exemplar work and to support high-quality practice in the Head Start field.

Combine coach and supervisor for closer relationships with teachers

Acelero’s professional development efforts have four components: workshop-style trainings, individual coaching, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and digital professional development. Individual coaching comprises the bulk of their professional development strategies. At Acelero, site directors serve as both coaches and supervisors, unlike many models where these roles are separate. This allows site directors to form deep relationships with teachers and improves their ability to supervise and guide the performance of their teachers.

Collect data to know which professional development strategies work

CAP Tulsa provides professional development through two main approaches. First, all teaching staff have coaches that observe their teaching, provide feedback on instructional practice, and support individual goals. The second approach uses professional learning communities to bring staff together regularly to collaborate, share best practices, and workshop specific challenges. CAP Tulsa regularly reviews data and feedback to improve professional development strategies, identify content for workshops, and topics for professional development communities.

Support teachers individually to meet their professional goals

With the help of a master teacher, teachers at Educare Miami-Dade set goals for themselves using a tool called the Performance Management Plan. Throughout the year, master teachers provide coaching sessions that cover topics based on classroom data. They also observe classrooms weekly and review their findings and specific strategies with the teacher. Master teachers use reflective supervision sessions each month to move past specific strategies and instead address each teacher’s goals and performance overall.

Be flexible to meet teachers’ needs

Teachers at Fairfax County have access to the district-wide professional development system. Teachers in each school often set their goals together at the beginning of each year so that they are complementary and teachers can work together to make progress. These goals are informed by child- and classroom-level data from several sources. Teachers also receive formal coaching from resource teachers, who have significant experience in the field and are seen as extremely valuable supports. Rather than establish one, rigid set of protocols, such as how often each teacher is observed, Fairfax County allows flexibility in the schedule based on each teacher’s needs.

Use data to understand which topics and teachers to target for additional support

Utah Community Action has three different categories of professional development. First is full-staff trainings on critical strategies and practices. Second is targeted trainings for groups of staff. Based on performance data and observations from coaches, teachers are grouped by training needs so they experience tailored training opportunities with similar teachers. Finally, UCA provides individual professional development from program specialists and coaches, the content of which is driven by goal-setting and PD plans, data, and classroom observations.

Key Takeaway

Flexibility is key in meeting teachers’ individual needs and creating a successful set of professional development opportunities. Data and feedback can identify successful professional development strategies, skills to develop in a staff, and individual teachers in need of support to reach their goals.