Making Strides in Early Head-Start Child Care Partnerships

Dewanna Knight: Welcome to the third webinar of the Making Strides in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships webinar series. My name is Dewanna Knight, and I’m with the Partnership Center. Due to technical difficulties, this video has been edited. For your information and reference, this presentation and transcript are available for download. The video will now begin with opening remarks delivered by Linda Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Childhood Development for the Administration for Children and Families.

Linda Smith: ...in June, we released a report in conjunction with the White House State of Women Summit on Compensation. And we know that compensation is very uneven and low, and especially in our child care populations. And we know that now in every state in this country, the average median wage for child care teachers puts them at the cut-off for food stamps program. The SNAP program. The good news is thanks to the Partnerships, more than 8600 teachers have now seen an increase in their benefits salary and professional development. And other support increase the supply of high-quality infant-toddler professionals in the country. It’s, it mirrors what we’re trying to do, what we’re trying to do mirrors, as we said in Pathways policy statement, and the long history of Head Start, where we started out with, basically, an untrained people in our program so many years ago, and have now moved to a point in Head Start where we have 74 percent of our teachers with bachelor’s degrees, and 96 percent with an AA degree.

So we see this work, this Pathway [Inaudible] to think through. We’re also seeing states look at other policies that they can align in, and especially in the area of quality improvement. And this is important work for the states, and we really appreciate the efforts that they’re doing around that. As many of you know, we also work in the, release the, transforming the work force for children, birth through eight with the National Academy of Sciences. The report also stress the need to professionalize the workforce and develop a plan that puts these [Inaudible] on the pathway to a higher education. So how do we move forward? Well, Head Start, as I said, started over 50 years ago with this strategy. And now we are looking to recreate that same pathway for the rest of our programs. I recently visited a program in Minnesota where the Early Head Start programs bring teachers from Child Care to spend time with what they call a laboratory classroom with teachers who have already benefited from professional development. And while they bring those teachers, the child care teachers, into the Early Head Start lab room, they also send qualified teachers back into the Child Care program to replace those teachers. So it’s a swap.

And we’re really getting a two-fer on this one, where, where the training going on in the lab program, as well as back in the Child Care centers. And that was very interesting in watching the results of that, because we do know that it is hard for Child Care workers to get relief to take the training. It’s not as easy as it is in other programs because of their longer days and their commitments. We know that these partnerships haven't been easy. And we know that they take a long time to develop. And we appreciate all of the efforts of all of you on this phone call in what you have been trying to do, and what you have been able to do through the Partnerships program. I think what you’re going to learn from [Inaudible] another example about how they, the partnerships really work, and how powerful they are at the community level. [Inaudible] ...you know, an old African proverb, which our secretary of Health and Human Services often needed herself. It says if you want to go fast go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

And that’s exactly what we’re trying to do with these partnerships, is get people moving together towards the goals of high-quality care for all of our families, but especially our families who are most in need. with that, I’m going to turn it over now, and thank you, again, for all join, for joining us on this webinar. Jani Kozlowski: Well, thank you so much, Linda. Good afternoon. I am Jani Kozlowski. I’m a senior training and technical assistance specialist with the National Center on Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships. I’m really excited to have you all here with us today. I would like to welcome you and thank you for joining us. With us today are staff from an amazing Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership program, Maricopa County Human Services Department. I have recently gotten to know Alecia Jackson from Maricopa County, and I can assure you that you will hear about some strategies to support the infant toddler workforce that are truly innovative. You will be able to see us as we talk.
You see Alecia up on the video screen, as well as Susan Mejia and myself. I'd like to introduce Alecia Jackson. She is the director of the early education division and the assistant director of the Human Services Department with Maricopa County Human Services. We also have Susan Mejia joining us, and Susan is the Education Navigator for the program. She is funded by Rio Salado College. We also have Susan Laurita joining us. Susan Laurita is the owner and director of the Garden City Child Development Center. Susan's webcam wasn't working for us today, so you will have to picture her in your head. We have Susan and Alecia on the webcam with us. Welcome to all of you. Alecia, it's so nice to have you with us and I am so excited we have this chance for you to share some of your innovative professional development strategies that are working for your program.

Alecia Jackson: Thank you for having us.

Jani: Great. Okay so let’s get started with some context. Alecia, can you tell us a little about your program? Alecia Jackson: Let me do a quick check. Can you hear me okay?

Jani: We sure can.

Alecia: Okay, perfect. Well, Jani, Maricopa County Human Services Department has served as a Head Start grantee since Head Start was initiated back in the summer of 1965. Of course, then we expanded our services to infants and toddlers in 1997, during the first wave of Early Head Start agency grants. The agency is for the first time partnering with child care providers through these partnership initiatives. Geographically except for the City of Phoenix, our Early Head Start child care partnership grant provides services to all of Maricopa County with targeted partnerships in Mason, Surprise, Chandler, Gilbert, Glendale, Buckeye, and Whitman communities. We are currently funded to serve 160 infants and toddlers in collaboration with nine center-based child care centers through this initiative.

Jani: Very impressive. 160 infants and toddlers. Alecia, what did you see as the first step when you were putting together the program?

Alecia: Well, of course, putting together a really great team of staff who understand both the world of Head Start and child care. With those varied perspectives, we definitely knew that putting together a high-quality workforce was going to be essential to ensure positive outcomes for the infants, toddlers and the families that we serve. So developing strategies have really been key to the realization of our intended outcomes. We also recognize that center directors are the gatekeepers to quality. Center directors play a huge role in shaping the child care environment and supporting the staff which, in turn, impacts child outcomes. From our experience as a grantee, we knew how important effective management systems, such as human resources, fiscal, ongoing monitoring, planning, communication are in implementing Early Head Start, and we understood that our child care partners would need to have similar strong and well-developed systems. So any quality improvement we were helping to make would really be sustainable and ensure that our efforts were impacting the entire center, not just the Early Head Start classroom. So, we were aware of some innovative work around professional development that one of our community colleges was doing to retain students and to build capacity in child care directors, so it was easy to reach out to Rio Salado Community College and ask them to help us build on what they had learned and individualize their approaches to work with our programs and our child care partners. Our goal has really been to develop and support a cadre of teachers and directors to become a group of professionals that will strive to provide high-quality services for the families in Maricopa County.

Jani: That's a really inspiring vision, Alecia. How did you go about selecting the child care programs that you would eventually partner with?

Alecia: Well, we started as soon as the funding opportunity was released. So we began by approaching child care providers in the communities we serve, first through an invitation to a public meeting where we provided background information on the intent and purpose and benefits of participating in the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership initiative. We also sought to use these community meetings to present our funding model and get feedback from providers on whether or not what we were asking from them or what we would be asking from them and what we were offering as far as compensation and support services would really lead to their success as providers of Early Head Start. When child
care programs responded to our request for a proposal, we completed what we called validation visits. We used modified versions of the Program Administration Scale to help us assess the potential child care partner's business and management systems. And then we used the Toddler Classroom Assessment Scoring System, also known as Toddler CLASS, to determine the quality of support and teacher-child interactions in the classroom. And we also used the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale to assess the quality of the environment. So Toddler CLASS, the ITERS, and the Program Administration Scale really helped us learn about each potential partner's strengths and challenges. We used what we found to help us select child care partners that could benefit most from the work together, as well as those who had the greatest potential to impact the children and families that we serve. We ultimately contracted with providers who did have some indicators of quality. Some were already participating in the state's quality rating and improvement system; in Arizona, it's called Quality First. And of course, we were thinking about community needs, so we focused on centers in high-poverty areas and centers that already had a high number of children receiving subsidies. We found since that selecting our partners that parents make choices about their child care not only by where they live but often where they work, which has really helped us think a little bit more about partnership recruitment for the future. All in all, these strategies resulted in partnerships with nine centers. Five of the centers are small businesses, and three are corporate centers and one is a local school district.

Jani: That really is a very planful approach that you took, and I think it's interesting to note that you were thinking about parents not only where they live, but also where they work, because we do make different choices about where we want our child care, not necessarily based on where we live. So how did you begin the partnership process?

Alecia: Well, we did create formal contracts and partnership agreements with each partner and because we had completed some validation visits prior to the contracts, we had a pretty good idea about what the facility improvements were going to be needed to be made, where their staff were in meeting qualifications and what type of business and management practices would need to be strengthened. But most importantly, we knew that each of our partners had a vision and philosophy of care that aligned with ours and that shared vision really has become the foundation that we have built upon.

Jani: So that led to the formation of the Director's Academy; right?

Alecia: Yes, it did.

Jani: Yeah? Okay. Well, let's hear a little bit more about that. So, how did you get started with the Director's Academy?

Alecia: Well, as soon as we had our partners on board, we started with a little kickoff event that we called a Baby Shower. We really wanted to bring all of our partners together and celebrate this new partnership and this adventure that we were embarking on. We also used this time to introduce the directors to the Early Head Start Performance Standards, and this started in July of 2015.

Jani: A baby shower is a great way to celebrate; isn't it? I love that.

Alecia: Oh, complete with all the gifts of all the resources that they were going to have to use.

Jani: Of course.

Alecia: About the same time, we were working with Rio Salado Community College, and of course, our newly hired Partnership Team to develop more around the Director's Academy approach and curriculum. We had some models that we wanted to replicate but we really wanted to offer support geared to our child care partners who were transitioning into providers of Early Head Start.

Jani: So about how many people participate?

Alecia: In the Director's Academy, each center could have two people participate. Usually it was the director and an assistant director. Sometimes it was a director and an owner and we have about 12 people who regularly participate.

Jani: Okay. So how does the Director's Academy work?
Alecia: Well, the design is really to bring directors together as a community of learners so that they could support each other but also because we knew that we couldn't really be successful with the professional development our caregivers were getting or any of the other quality improvements if the directors were not on board. So directors came together, received training and support on business practices such as staffing patterns, ratios, marketing plans, customer satisfaction survey and all those kinds of topics. We used the Program Administration Scale as sort of a framework.

Jani: Okay. So thinking of it, quality starts from the top, like you were saying, the gatekeepers to quality. So it started off as training primarily?

Alecia: Well, it started that way, but now they are at a point where they are really sharing challenges with one another as peers and learning about possible solutions for each other. They mentor each other. They share policies with each other. They help each other with activities such as completing a CACFP application, and they really provide the kind of support that only peers can provide. There’s an atmosphere of support and the knowledge that we all succeed together.

Jani: That supportive environment is so critical and I know that the business side of child care can be tricky, especially those of us that don't have that kind of background. Oftentimes we are teachers that are very successful so then we get promoted to be directors but we don't have that business background.

Alecia: Absolutely. And because of that, we included as part of our Director's Academy a fiscal consultant who could work with our child care directors. This accountant has a background in small business practice and knowledge of the child care field. We found that working directly with a fiscal consultant has really increased center directors’ fiscal knowledge and understanding and also a way for us to align the language of both child care and Early Head Start requirements. So we often talk about in Head Start we use words like ERSI and recruitment and enrollment to help the child care align when we talk about recruitment and enrollment, this is really aligning with a marketing plan for the child care. Or when we talk in Head Start about parent engagement, it really aligns with this idea around customer satisfaction. And that sort of understanding of the requirements and the terminology between Head Start and child care has really helped directors for their whole center, not just for their Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership classroom.

Jani: It's a huge benefit. And today we are honored to be joined by one of your child care partners, Susan Laurita. Susan and her husband, Larry, are the owners of Garden City Child Development Center in Buckeye, Arizona. Susan has been in the early childhood field for 37 years and she’s not on camera, but if you could see her, she does not look that old. She is the author of children's books, including God Made the World & Me and Stepping in Wet Cement. And Garden City was just recently awarded Business of the Year from the City of Buckeye. Congratulations on that, Susan.

Susan Laurita: Thank you very much.

Jani: Yeah. You have been with the partnership since the beginning and you attended those community meetings that Alecia mentioned. You developed a contract with Maricopa County and you had firsthand experience with the Director's Academy as well. What do you think are the most important components for the directors who participate?

Susan: Well, there are a couple of things. First of all, we were offered free college classes through Rio Salado College towards an administration and management certificate, which was very helpful. Also, we were treated to a national conference and that really helps us to feel part of a larger early childhood community. Sometimes it's really easy to get focused on your own program and forget there's a whole world out there of other people doing the same thing, so that was very helpful as well. But probably the most lasting help is the meetings and meeting directors from other parts of the valley that we wouldn't have met normally. We get together and we talk about what's going well, what's not going well. In May, we set up a Barriers Board, what's kind of getting in your way of success, so that we could look at those things and address them in the future.

Jani: That's amazing. I think that being a director can be kind of isolating and this was a way to bring people together and create that supportive environment. It's very cool.
Susan: Absolutely.

Jani: Yeah, anything else about how the Director's Academy strengthened your program or provided you with networking opportunities that you didn't have before?

Susan: Well, I think that being able to get together with other people that share the same passion that you do, the same vision that you do, and understand the importance of early childhood has really been helpful. We really get to rally around each other and I know there were a couple of times when a call went out and said this program is in need of this kind of help or that program is struggling in this way and directors were able to either provide support over the phone or just get in their cars and drive over and just provide the hands-on support that the other program needed. So, instead of feeling like we were competitors, we became colleagues and friends. Secondly, I think it's really wonderful that the child care partnership staff themselves are early childhood educators. So when we have a barrier or something that comes up that's kind of getting in our way, we are able to voice that and they understand what we are saying instead of just kind of listening with one ear. And since they do understand, they can make appropriate changes and we can problem solve around those barriers. So it's been very helpful as we move forward.

Jani: Thank you for sharing, Susan, and thank you for all that you do for children and families in your program. Let's shift gears now a little bit and hear about the caregiver strategy that Maricopa County has created, which is called the Education Navigator Initiative. So Alecia, if you could tell us a little bit about the Education Navigator.

Alecia: Sure. Well, again, this was a real tight partnership that we have with Rio Salado Community College. So Susan Mejia, who you will get to hear from today, is our Education Navigator. She has been invaluable for our teachers because she works with them regularly to help them evaluate transcripts and training records. She helps to determine any gaps in training that will need to be filled so that they will be eligible for CDAs. Susan helps with scholarship applications, college admissions, and has really worked to create meaningful professional development plans that are individualized for each teacher.

Jani: Wow, that sounds very hands on.

Alecia: Absolutely. Susan even delivers textbooks to her students. She serves as a liaison with faculty, so if students are having difficulty she can step in and talk to faculty on their behalf, and she has even set up weekend study sessions, college-level writing labs. Really, she is so committed to making sure that they can all be successful in obtaining their CDAs. She is amazing.

Jani: She sounds amazing. And we are pleased to have Susan here with us. Susan, if you would tell us a little bit more -- she is here to tell us more about the Education Navigator strategy and Susan is employed by the Rio Salado Community College, and she has worked for several years in the Early Education and Human Development Department at the College. Susan has worked on student retention for that department and has relevant experience to bring to Maricopa County to their Partnership program. Susan, it sounds like you are very dedicated to this work.

Susan Mejia: Thank you. Well, I feel that our students are very special people, and in some cases, the challenges are simple. For example, if a student can't afford to pay the CDA application fee, that's an easy one for us to help with. But what has really been the most impactful is the education cohorts we've formed and the ability for students to help each other.

Jani: That's pretty cool. Tell us about the cohorts, how they were formed and what purpose they serve.

Susan: Well, we formed the cohorts based on the student's needs. So for example, we formed study groups for students that are taking the same courses or students that work together in the same center. It's really, really helpful because they can work on assignments together, study together and students who are working on their CDA can work together to finish up their portfolios. I have also been able to reserve the library for the group so they can get together to study, use the computers and help each other. It makes for a more social experience and takes away some of the fear that students also bring to the college experience.

Jani: Yeah, because sometimes the early childhood student is the first person in his or her family to
ever go to college. Right?

Susan: Right. That's right. I work closely with college faculty to make sure that they understand this particular population of students. Some of the students in the cohort are just learning the basics, like how to read a syllabus, how to write a college-level paper, or even how to speak in a respectful way to the college instructor. So these are important keys to success that can easily be overlooked in a typical college experience.

Jani: Yeah, that's a really good point. Can you think of any students in particular that have really benefited from the program?

Susan: Yes, I can. We had a student with a learning disability that was interested in working with the Early Head Start program at her center and needed to get her CDA, but her parents who were very involved in her life were very concerned that she struggled so much in school that she would be unsuccessful in college. They worried that she would be down on herself as a result of trying. But the student really wanted to try, so I convinced the parents to let her try. I told her that we can make it work with some additional supports and then she ended up making straight A's and now she is on the path to her AA degree.

Jani: That's amazing. You didn’t know that you were going to be a family counselor as well, right, when you took this job?

Susan: No.

Jani: It's really inspirational. It sounds like it was a win for the student and a win for your program, too. Alecia, what has been your success rate for the Education Navigator program?

Alecia: Well, you will see in this slide kind of the culmination of that first 18 months of our implementation. Our Education Navigator, Susan, she worked with 96 caregivers in that first 18 months to begin the pathway towards obtaining a CDA. The efforts resulted in 34 of them obtaining a CDA so far so we are getting there. This chart, like I said, reflects the work of those caregivers -- with those first 96 caregivers. You can see some caregivers already met the requirements and maybe just need a little help in applying for a CDA. Others needed the full nine credits of coursework, and others needed less. Of course, others were just starting to have their training references evaluated.

Jani: I am being impatient with this, Alecia. Hopefully it will pop up. There is a pie chart that Alecia is speaking to that you all are missing. Hopefully it will pop up. I think technology might be slow.

Alecia: Okay. Anyway, while the end results are positive, we experienced a lot of turnover when we got started. Susan worked with a lot of caregivers and she really went above and beyond with each of them, but for some caregivers the commitment was just too great and they dropped out of the CDA program. And of course, we struggled with a high staff turnover rate that exists in child care in general. It meant a lot of work for Susan, who was starting and orienting new students all throughout our initial 18-month start-up period and continuing into year two. One thing that I think is important to mention is that a lot of our caregivers didn't really know what they were kind of getting into. Some of our partners sort of just told teachers, hey, you are going to be in the Early Head Start classroom, you need to take these classes for CDA. We found that those were the ones that were more likely to drop because they didn’t really have the buy-in, didn't really understand what they were getting into. We since learned that when the caregivers can self-select themselves to participate, there's a much better commitment to that. And I think it's also important, it was very important to us to have a great community college partner like Rio Salado because they were willing to give credit for prior learning and training when they could, and then they were the ones who employed and supervised our amazing Education Navigator as our retention strategy. And I think it was really important for us to make sure that our caregivers were getting college credit for all their work and all the training and coursework they were doing. It's been really important for us to help our caregivers see themselves on a career pathway and being able to award college credit was really important to us and to Rio Salado.

Jani: I can see why that would be so important to the students and for your program as well. It's amazing to be able to give that real-world credit. So Susan, you were able to leverage funding through
a state-level program in Arizona, correct?

Susan: Correct. We accessed scholarship funds provided through First Things First in Arizona. And First Things First is an initiative in Arizona funded through the state tobacco tax funds. It's dedicated to ensuring that all Arizona's children are ready to succeed in school and in life. The initiative provides scholarships for teachers that are working toward higher education goals.

Jani: Excellent. And we've included the link to that program in the resources slide that will be coming up. Hopefully we'll be able to see that resources slide. But most importantly perhaps, is the change in teacher behavior that you've seen as a result of this work. So on our next slide, we have a little bit of data, so hopefully this will pop up. Can you tell us about the Toddler CLASS observations that you conducted, Alecia?

Alecia: Sure. It doesn't look like the data came up on this slide, so you will have to take my word for it. It was really significant. So the chart, if you could see it, there were labels on it. In March, when we did our validation visits, we did sort of a modified version of Toddler CLASS to kind of see what engagement scores looked like. Then a year later we went back and did the full Toddler CLASS. And what we really saw was really significant changes. Of course, the caregivers that we observed during that validation visit was not always the same caregivers that were there a year later, but even so, what I feel we saw was a clear link to improved interactions with children as caregivers were learning more about basic child development and developmentally appropriate practices. Other changes that occurred at the center, from just the supplies, equipment, furniture and of course from just reducing the ratios, I think all contributed to improved caregiver and child interactions.

Jani: That's amazing and that is ultimately why we do this work, to be able to see those changes in teacher-child interactions.

Alecia: Well I think we found that in many cases just changing the environment alone led to more responsive caregiving practices.

Jani: That's excellent. I remember that when we spoke earlier you mentioned the change in the outdoor environment at Susan Laurita Center. Susan, what exactly happened?

Susan: Well when we first started our playground was just one giant sandbox and no matter how often I said to the teachers you really need to interact with the children it just wasn't inviting and so nobody was down on the ground with the children. It was just kind of pretend you're at the beach every day and that was it. The slide that you see there is within a week after the new playground was opened. You can see that without me saying anything the teachers naturally are down on the ground. They're interacting with the children. It was very easy, very natural and very effective. Our infants are outside for the first time in years and it was just wonderful. I would also like to mention that if you look at the slide, none of those teachers had credentials before we started the program. Four of the five teachers that you see there now have their CDA and that's as a result of this program.

Jani: Wow, that is amazing. You know, I can imagine if it were a big, giant sandbox, that sand was probably pretty hot in the Arizona summer. You can't really blame them for not wanting to get down on the ground.

Susan: Very hot and very much into everything so nobody wanted to be there. Yeah.

Jani: Yeah, so you really turned that challenge into an opportunity for teachers and an opportunity for the children as well. An excellent example. So Alecia, what would you say are the keys to your success?

Alecia: Well, you just heard from both of our Susans, who are definitely a part of that, having people that have a shared vision and commitment for what we are trying to do. But it's really hard to think about just one or two things because I think it's really the combination of multiple strategies that's really making a difference. For example, just reducing ratios has really been huge. I have to laugh when I think about an owner who told one of our coaches who was out working in the partnership, she said those Early Head Start kids are so well behaved. And the coach replied that's because there's only 8 of them. So the switch from having 12 children in the class to only eight makes teaching so much more effective and a lot more fun, too, for everyone.
Jani: Absolutely. So the children didn't just change their personalities overnight. The lower ratio. And I bet the parents noted the change too, huh?

Alecia: Yeah, I think the parents have been really positive about the whole project. And we learned a lot from our child care partners about supporting parents too. One child care partner told us about a web-based application that can be accessed on tablets and smartphones, and it's a way to give real-time data to parents throughout the school day. So teachers send photographs and notes to parents about their child throughout the day. It's very engaging for parents, as you can imagine. So other centers adopted that strategy and are now using a web-based application for parent communication in all of their classrooms at their center. It's really an effective marketing tool too. And because of their experiences, we are exploring the strategy with our Head Start classrooms as well.

Jani: Excellent. I am sure that parents love that additional connection to their child throughout the day. That's got to be very comforting for them. Alecia, when you spoke earlier, you described the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership program as transformative. What did you mean by that, and would you share an example for how the program has transformed teachers in the classroom?

Alecia: Sure. I mean, I do think the word "transformative" really works to describe what's happened, not only for our caregivers, but in our own Early Head Start program. One of my favorite examples of the changes that we witnessed in our teachers was from a young caregiver in a toddler room that as we were training her and teaching her about the Early Head Start performance standards, we had to tell her that they were going to be required to support brushing teeth, and she became really upset and convinced that she was going to get bitten. She didn't want to try to help with tooth brushing and was really resistant to this idea. But we continued to work with her, and a few months later, during a site visit, I had noticed how much affection there was between her and the children in her care. And so when I brought that to her attention, that this child seemed to really love her, she began to explain all about the importance of early attachment, about continuity for children, about primary caregiving, all the things that you could see she had really absorbed what she was learning and it was really evident in her practice.

Jani: I love that story. She really came a long way from not wanting to do teeth brushing to really building in what she learned into her teaching practice. It captures what we want for our infant-toddler workforce as a whole and for the children they support and care for.

Alecia: Absolutely. And you know, our organization has changed too. Investing in child care and really learning about their challenges and successes has helped to make us to be more humble and grateful for what Early Head Start can offer. Seeing the commitment of our teachers and directors and our community partners to make sacrifices to attend classes in the evening and weekends, to open their businesses and their management systems to us with such honesty and transparency, it's really been inspiring. I've also really been touched by the efforts that our partners make each day to care for the most vulnerable children in our communities. They reach out to parents and they do so much with the limited resources that they may have. It has really been a pleasure for us to support them and provide the assistance that they deserve for all that they do.

Jani: Well, your description is a description of a true partnership. Knowing that Head Start brings a lot to the table, but clearly, the child care partners are bringing a lot to the table as well, and I think the fact that you recognize and appreciate that, it's got to do wonders for your partnership. It's really clear that the love and attention that you all have put into your program is it shines through. And thanks so much to all three of you for sharing your story with us.

Alecia: You are welcome.

Susan: You're welcome.

Jani: So here are some of the resources that Alecia and Susan and Susan shared with us today. It's clear that this program works in a very collaborative way, really leveraging the other resources in the state. You'll see that in Arizona, there are some excellent resources available for the workforce, and the Maricopa program has incorporated the state-level resources into the tapestry of initiatives that support the staff in their programs. Thank you again to Alecia and Susan and Susan for joining us today.
for the webinar. I know for sure that the information you shared will inspire other programs to think differently about their professional development strategies. So, we have time. Its 3:18 Eastern by my watch, so it looks like we have time for a few of the questions that have come in. So this first one is related to the statement that you made earlier, Alecia, about the center directors being the gatekeepers to quality and that they play a huge role in shaping the child care environment and supporting staff which, in turn, impacts child outcomes. So we had a participant ask if you could expand on that some more.

Alecia: Sure. I think early in my career, I had an opportunity to do some training for child care teachers and caregivers, and I remember many times getting to parts of the training where we would talk about continuity of care and primary caregiving and small group size and all of these things that caregivers could hear, and then they would say but we’ll never be able to implement that when we leave this training because they were going back to centers that didn’t understand the importance of primary caregiving and were assigning caregivers to different classrooms every day. And I realized that we could do all of this training for these caregivers and teachers, but if we couldn’t send them back to centers that could support those strategies for quality, it wouldn’t matter how much they learned or how much they understood or how much they believed in those principles. So we really understood that the center directors really are the gatekeepers to quality. They needed to understand and be supported in making changes to support those things that we were talking about in those trainings.

So I think that’s where the Director’s Academy was really about that same idea is that they understood what we were trying to do around the quality and they were ready to support those teachers. So take for example the teacher that we are talking about brushing teeth. If that director couldn’t be right on board with it and saying yes, we are going to provide you with the support and resources so that you can brush teeth in the classroom, it wouldn’t have happened. So I think that really expands that idea of what it means as the center directors as the gatekeepers of quality because they really have to set the environment for the quality improvements to be able to flourish.

Jani: Absolutely, and how frustrating that would be for teachers to learn about those good practices when they are in school and then come back to their center and not being able to implement. So having the directors on board is critical. So it looks like the second question is directed at Susan Laurita. Susan, you mentioned that early on in the partnership you had the opportunity to work with a fiscal consultant. And the participant wants to know what that was like for you and have you ever worked with an accountant before?

Susan: We had worked with an accountant to do our taxes, but not in an ongoing way. My husband is actually the one that takes charge of the finances and knows where all the money is coming in and where it goes and he's pretty thorough. But his accounting practices didn’t match what the accountant was looking for, so it was really helpful for us to see what's common practice in the accounting world, what is it that they are looking for and what ways. And so that’s helped us streamline it a little bit, I think. It was really positive. They had good things to say about what he was doing and just a few suggestions on what they wanted to see in the future.

Jani: Great. Well, we really have lots of questions streaming in here, so maybe I can get to a couple of these. There’s a question, on average, how long did it take your uncredentialized teachers to earn their CDA? Do you know about how long that was? That might be for Susan Mejia.

Susan: It took approximately up to 14 weeks per person. So depending on each student, it was different because some of them took one course at a time and some took three courses. So three courses, some of them decided to take three courses at 8 weeks. And so it was a faster pace. Yet we have the ones who wanted to go a little bit slower and took the courses at a 14 week. So it varied. It took anywhere from, like I said, anywhere from three months to six months per person.

Jani: Okay. That's interesting that it really depended on the person and the other things going on in their life.

Susan: Exactly.

Jani: Yeah. Okay. This is a question for Alecia. This person wants to know if you included communication systems and expectations in your partnership agreement.
Alecia: Yes, to a certain point. We probably were not as thorough as we should have when we first started. And I think the communication systems is a really great example of the other management systems that for those of us that have worked in Head Start for a lot of years, we are really familiar with planning, communication, recordkeeping and reporting, ongoing monitoring, self-assessment, Human Resources, we kind of know those pieces. And I think that, again, in my experiences, that whatever challenges you have in your program they can usually all be drilled down to either a system that needs to be strengthened or be enhanced. So communication system is one of those. How are we going to communicate not only to our parents and our partners, to our Board and our Policy Council? And it probably wasn’t as robust as it has become now as we’ve really worked with our partners internally about our process for communication, what kinds of reports are we going to ask for, what are we going to share with our parents and our program governance. I think all of those pieces of that management system has been a lot of work for us that we probably didn’t put as much detail in the initial contract, but I think have been developed over time, and there are better systems in place as we’ve worked through some of those challenges with communication.

Jani: Great. So here’s another interesting question. Has the center staff turnover rate dropped as a result of the various strategies that you’ve employed? Do you have a sense of that?

Alecia: Yeah. I know Susan Laurita can tell you a little bit about her center because she has a pretty stable group of staff and they had been stable before our partnership and I think they’ve probably been pretty stable since then. And then Susan Mejia probably has some good comments about what type of turnover happened at the beginning, towards the end of our 18-month implementation.

Susan: What I have seen as far as the turnover, at the beginning, like Alecia had stated, there was a big turnover. Since we had them go through the courses and completed their CDA, there hasn’t been a turnover since. It’s very minimum now so there’s been a big change in the turnover.

Jani: That’s amazing because usually we hear that once staff get their education, they leave. But it sounds like in this case, they’ve chosen to stay.

Susan: Yes.

Alecia: Well, and I think it’s in addition to their working environment is getting better too. So as they are getting their CDA, they are also getting an opportunity to participate in things that make them feel better as teachers. We’ve gotten a lot of feedback from our caregivers saying the first time they did a parent-teacher conference or did that home visit, they felt like teachers. They felt like they were really doing this work as a professional. And I think that has contributed to lower turnover is because they are able to really professionalize their work, and they are getting these professional development opportunities and they are working with smaller numbers of children. The same frustration that a lot of caregivers of turnover when they are in high ratios and not getting support and they are feeling devalued, we are really able to help a lot of those other pieces in addition to the CDA, but making the work environment better for them and for them to feel like they are really part of a professional group of early childhood educators.

Susan: I can echo that. I can remember doing a performance review for one of our teachers just recently and I was telling her how much I had noticed an increase in her professionalism, just her attitude about herself had really changed and I told her I think it boils down to the fact that a year ago you saw yourself more as a child care worker. Today you see yourself as a teacher and she just about cried. She said yeah, that’s true.

Susan: Some of the things that I’ve found with the students, as far as when they are completing, when they are going through the courses they are saying it’s really hard and I don’t know if I can do this. And once they’ve completed everything, when we do a transitional goal, they are so excited because they want to know how can I go on for my associates? So you see a big turnaround in the experience, in the professionalism from when we first started. So you see the professional level just goes up because, again, they see themselves now as a professional, as a teacher, not just a caregiver. And so I see a lot of benefits in that and I see the self-esteem really low when they first start and then at the end the self-esteem is just really high.
Susan: Absolutely.

Jani: That's amazing. It's wonderful to hear and really affirms this belief that we have that teachers are leaders and if they are given that opportunity they will really rise to that challenge and it benefits the staff and the program as well as the children and family. Thank you so much. We have so many other questions that I would love to be able to address, but what we will have to do is take a look at those afterwards and we will get your answers and put that up on our website when we post the webinar recording. And now I'm going to turn it over to Linda. Linda you have had the chance to do some closing thoughts and reflections for us.

Linda: Okay, I accidentally muted myself rather than unmute. Well, this is has been just an amazing webinar, and my hats are off to Alecia and the [Inaudible]. I mean this has been a very informative webinar. And I've been taking notes as I've been listening to it. And I think, there's several things that, sort of, stand out in my mind, and I want to congratulate them on the thoughtfulness that they put into the project. And, it, it just, and that thinking through each and every level of what needed to happen and I think that, you know, the director's credential and the director, the work with the director, the work around business. Those things are so important. I say when I talk frequently that there's no single solution to a complex problem. And, I think this project looks at it exactly the way it needs to It's a complex problem, and they dealt with it that way. So. My hats go off to them. I think what I heard coming through, too -- it almost brought a tear to my eye -- was the respect for their Child Care partners. And I think that, you know, that is the thing that has been lacking in this country. It's the respect for the hard work that goes on in Child Care. And the fact that what they're, they're, what they're dealing with, but also what they have to offer. And I heard that coming through here, and I thought that was so, so nice. I am such a supporter of the directors at the gate, the gatekeepers. I'm dating back my own history [Inaudible] and my workforce. And I said, "Oh no you're not. I'm training my workforce." And, you just don't take people's work force out from less than [Inaudible] to have good results [Inaudible] And I think that, really great. And then I think the last one, and I've watched this, now I've visited many, many conferences. And I didn't think [Inaudible] this project did on the playground. I still see a real need, and it's time for us to deal with the outdoor play issue. And we, I appreciate that this is hard, and it's extensive. But I, also, watched the folks that took that on So, I got a lot of takeaway from this. And I found myself thinking I've got to brace the leadership [Inaudible]. Next week on early childhood, again, and I wish I could bring these people in and then have them tell their story, that it would be so much more impactful than what I can say. So again, just congratulations to everyone. It's exciting to hear, and it's very gratifying to hear, for those of us who, you know, who worked in these, you know Washington, in the Washington bureaucracy, kind of things, to head the kind of change that are coming about as the result of these partnerships. So, thank you all for being on this. And again, we really appreciate what you're doing.

Jani: Well, thank you, Linda for your leadership. It's been fun to see this vision come about.

Linda: Yes it is.

Jani: Okay. And Rae, I think you are muted, but Rae is going to wrap us up. We are a little bit over time, but thanks for hanging with us. And Rae, you are still muted. Maybe star six. Rae Anderson: Can you hear me now?

Jani: Yes.

Rae: All right. Fabulous. Thank you, Linda, for your reflections, and Well the only thing that I would add is that I am so impressed with the way that -- first of all, thank you, Susan and Susan and Alecia, but I am so impressed with the way that your program uses data. From the very beginning, when I listened to you talk about your recruitment efforts and all of the different tools and resources that you use to help you select your partners, and then the way you talked about improving your environments, and then the outcomes that you achieved in just watching the growth in teacher-child interactions, and then to hear your stories about the professional growth and development of your infant-toddler workforce. I mean, you have this sort of complete package. So it is wonderful to hear your story. So we have a lot to learn from you and to share with other Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships so we look forward to continuing to share. And so I would just like to say there are lots
of ways for us to stay in touch. We hope that you'll visit the Partnership Center webpage. As Dewanna and Jani mentioned, this webinar will be posted there. We hope you are subscribed to the Partnership page. We hope that you get regular updates. We hope you will be watching for the announcement on our next webinar, which is going to be about family-community engagement. We hope you are regularly visiting the Partnership 411 and looking for our next newsletter, which will be focused on professional development and will be highlighting Maricopa in that newsletter. So, I think we are ready to sign off for this afternoon. But thank you all for joining us, and most of all, thank you for Maricopa and their partners for their stories and for sharing today. Have a great afternoon, everybody. Bye.