

# Bringing Partners Together for Family Style Dining in Kentucky



## Background

The National Early Care and Education Learning Collaboratives (ECELC) Project, led by Nemours and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, promotes healthy environments, policies and practices in early care and education (ECE) settings to address childhood obesity. In Kentucky, participating child care, Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs serving children ages birth to five have worked to improve policies and practices related to healthy eating, physical activity, screen time, and breastfeeding support.

Each ECE program selected a Leadership Team of three members (e.g. program directors, teachers, cooks). The ECELC model empowers this team to champion improvements within their centers and with their fellow staff members. Leadership Teams participated in five, in-person Learning Sessions held approximately eight weeks apart. Each Learning Session was attended by up to 28 other ECE programs to form a Collaborative.

An Action Period followed each Learning Session, during which Leadership Teams trained their program staff to complete action tasks (e.g. self-assessments, training their own program staff, and creating Action Plans) and began implementing changes in their respective programs. During Action Periods, programs also received in-person and remote Technical Assistance (TA) from Trainers on homework and related obesity prevention efforts within the state.

## The Problem

Serving food family style instead of pre-plating meals is among the best practices that centers could choose to work on improving. Benefits of family style dining include preventing children from overeating, promoting nutrition education, promoting motor skill development, and promoting language and social development. Family style dining, shown below, is encouraged by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association and many other national groups as a best practice for children in early care environments.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 2012. *Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education: Selected Standards from Caring for Our Children: national Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs; 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.* [http://cfoc.nrckids.org/WebFiles/CFOC3\\_updated\\_final.pdf](http://cfoc.nrckids.org/WebFiles/CFOC3_updated_final.pdf)

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During Learning Sessions in Kentucky, participating programs voiced concerns about implementing family style dining. Participants informed the trainers that they had previously attempted to switch to family style dining, but were cited with food safety violations during local health department inspections. These previous experiences left them hesitant to attempt family style dining again, for fear of another food safety violation.

Further research in Kentucky revealed that though the food safety codes are written at a state level, interpretation is left to the local department, resulting in inconsistencies across the state. Programs wanting to implement family style dining in one area of the state were told that children needed to wear gloves to meet food safety regulations while programs in other areas of the state were told they could not do family style dining at all without receiving violations.

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (KCHFS) decided to take action to address these inconsistencies in messaging. KCHFS wanted to work with the food safety branch of KCHFS to clarify the rules on family style dining, in order to implement the practice throughout the state.

### **Key Players**

Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (KCHFS): Department for Public Health: Prevention Branch

As the state implementing partner for the ECELC project in Kentucky, KCHFS was trying to help participating centers implement family style dining.

Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services: Department for Public Health: Food Safety Branch

The Kentucky Food Safety branch recognized the value of the practice but was hesitant about promoting family style dining due to concerns about norovirus, cross contamination, and food safety.

Child Care Health Consultants, Kentucky Child and Adult Food Care Program State Agency (CACFP), Kentucky Division of Child Care

These three organizations were consulted throughout the process and helped to provide support to the discussions about food safety and family style dining.

### **Getting to Action**

In order to support centers to adopt family style dining without food safety violations, the ECELC project coordinator in Kentucky, Rebekah Duchette, and her supervisor, Elaine Russell, met with the Food Safety Branch Manager at the Department of Public Health. Rebekah wanted to create a “tips sheet” to equip ECE programs with the knowledge and resources they would need in order to implement the practice without violating food safety regulations.

Rebekah and Elaine provided the Food Safety Branch Manager with a list of recommendations for family style dining as well as a draft of information they would like to see distributed to the state inspectors. This list was shared with inspectors across the state to gather feedback. In addition, calls were made to food safety divisions in other states to see how they were handling family style dining. The Kentucky food safety branch provided Rebekah with a list of

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strategies to reduce food contamination while serving meals family style. Though the food safety branch had concerns about food safety, they still saw value in the practice and wanted to give those programs the support needed to implement safely. Rebekah used these recommendations and strategies as well as feedback from other partners to create a one-page document on [Family Style Dining in Early Care](#).

The fact sheet highlights the benefits of the best-practice, helpful tips and food safety considerations for child care centers/family child care homes looking to implement the practice, and contacts and resources for learning more about family style dining. The tip sheet is meant to educate ECE programs by equipping them with accurate information and linking them to resources. Information on the tip sheets came from existing documents available through CACFP, Head Start, as well as guidance from other states. Food safety considerations were provided directly by the leadership at the food safety branch. The tip sheet has been shared with all Kentucky ECELC programs and has been posted on the websites of the Kentucky Child and Adult Food Care Program State Agency, Child Care Health Consultants, Food Safety, and the Kentucky Division of Child Care.

### **Conclusion**

This experience in Kentucky serves as an example of successfully working within a state health department to create and promote consistent state-wide messaging. The entire process from learning about the problem with food safety violations to developing the tips sheet took about ten months and required continuous communication between all the key players in Kentucky. The tip sheet has been posted online and can now serve as a resource for other states having problems implementing family style dining.