



# Early Care and Education Learning Collaboratives: Success Stories

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## National Early Care and Education Learning Collaborative

Launched fall 2012, the National Early Care and Education Learning Collaborative (ECELC) is a six-year, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-funded effort, implemented by Nemours Children's Health System and partners. The ECELC was designed to prevent childhood obesity through the spread of impactful, sustainable policy and practice improvements in the early care and education (ECE) setting with respect to healthy eating, physical activity, breastfeeding and screen time (HEPA).

The ECELC project partners with organizations in states and communities to 1) provide an intensive 'learning collaborative' obesity prevention intervention to groups of center and home-based ECE providers (child care, Head Start, pre-kindergarten), and 2) better integrate national obesity prevention standards and implementation support for these standards into components of state and local ECE systems.

As of July 2017, eight states (Alabama, Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Virginia, and New Jersey) and four communities (North/Central Florida, South Florida, Los Angeles, California, Contra Costa, California) have participated in the National ECELC. The intervention typically consists of five in-person learning sessions spread over a 10-month period, ongoing technical assistance for participating ECE providers, and access to tools, materials and resources. As of 2016, Nemours has supported a total number of 109 collaboratives amongst our state partners, impacting obesity prevention efforts in more than 2,000 ECE programs, serving over 200,000 children.

The programs in ECELC are making a difference in the lives of our children. Through participation in the learning collaborative, programs have created a healthy environment for children by meeting these five goals:

1. Nurture Healthy Eaters
2. Provide Healthy Beverages
3. Get Kids Moving
4. Reduce Screen Time
5. Support Breastfeeding

While family engagement is not amongst the five healthy goals, Nemours recognizes family engagement as an important element for achieving all five healthy goals. The following stories highlight just a few of the successes from ECE programs who have participated over the years of the ECELC. They are meant to inspire, motivate, and celebrate all the ECE programs committed to creating healthier environments for children.

To learn more about the ECELC, visit:

<https://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/about-ecelc/national-project>

## Kevin W. Concannon, Under Former Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) visits Taft Head Start Center in Orlando, Florida.

Taft Head Start is one of the 20 Orange County Head Start sites that participated in Nemours Early Care and Education Learning Collaborative (ECELC) from 2015-2016. The ECELC, led by Nemours Children's Health System and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, promotes healthy environments, policies, and practices in early care and education settings to address childhood obesity. Participating child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and pre-kindergarten programs serving young children across nine states work to improve policies and practices around healthy eating, physical activity, screen time, and breastfeeding support.

Through knowledge gained participating in the ECELC, each Head Start site in Orange County installed a permanent garden. With assistance from Nemours, each site obtained seasonal seeds from the Orange County Extension Service Office for two planting seasons. Additionally, a Master Gardener was matched with the site to encourage ongoing gardening and fresh vegetable planting. These partnerships will have a sustained impact on over 1,500 children today and future pre-schoolers, who will learn firsthand about gardening and the importance of good nutrition.

Former Secretary Concannon gave the keynote address at the National Child and Adult Care Food Program's 30th annual conference, in which he discussed new efforts to strengthen nutrition and healthy habits for children. He heard about the success of gardens in local Head Start programs as a result of the ECELC and wanted to see this great work in-person. This project and visit were unique collaborations between Nemours Children's Health System, the CDC, Head Start Programs, the USDA, and CACFP.



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## Country Club's Cooking Camp in Kansas City, Missouri!

Lisa McCleish, the director of the Country Club Christian Church, created a fun idea called “Cooking Camp” while attending the ECELC Healthy Eating Learning Session in 2016. The program’s philosophy includes planning experiences for children to be actively engaged in their learning.

In the Cooking Camp, the children choose activities based on their interests and readiness. For example, if the children love art, they have the opportunity to draw fruits and vegetables or other healthy recipe ingredients. In the dramatic play area, kids are able to set the table, cook and serve healthy “play” food and beverages and also enjoy family style dining. In the literacy center, children can create cookbooks or an individual book about their experiences with healthy eating and beverages.

In addition to the Cooking Camp, many of the discussions shared through the learning session and staff training were incorporated into their weekly camp activities. For example, the music camp has evolved into “Music and Movement” camp, which offers additional ways for children to be active. The camp also features a hiking week, where kids can explore nature and understand the benefits of being outdoors. The campfire treats have also been tweaked to include healthier options!

*“We are grateful for the opportunities to engage with programs who offer a variety of models of delivery. Through the Early Learning Collaborative, our program has discovered ways to improve snacks and offer the meaningful skills children need to be successful.” –Lisa McCleish*



## Green Smoothie 101 at Liyu Home Child Care

When Liyuwork Belaineh signed up for the ECELC Healthy Habits Learning Collaborative in 2016, she was hopeful, yet unconvinced that her home child care center had to make adjustments since they were already an active and healthy center. Liyu quickly discovered there were many things she could do to improve her center's habits including eliminating screen time, expanding the concept of family style dining and establishing a breastfeeding area for nursing mothers.

As a native from Ethiopia, food has always been an important part of displaying hospitality to friends and guests. When Liyu's ECELC trainer came to visit, she was invited to join the kids in drinking what they call "Minion Juice," a green vegetable juice that everyone in her home center starts their morning drinking. Minion Juice is a combination of green leafy veggies, fruits, aloe vera, ginger and filtered water. It is both healthy and delicious! The trainer was so impressed with the taste of this juice and the children's enthusiasm; she invited her co-trainer to join in tasting Liyu's breakfast juice. The Minion juice was such a hit that Liyu was invited to demonstrate how to create the smoothie at the following ECELC Learning Session. As a result of this demonstration, many of the participants have adopted the smoothie as part of their morning or afterschool schedule. Her demonstration was so well received at the Learning Session she was also asked to do another demonstration at Happy Home Childcare Center where 35+ children age 2-5 tasted and enjoyed the juice! Liyu's continues to incorporate the Minion juice and other healthy eating practices at her center so the children can enjoy delicious and nutritious meals!

Here are the ingredients to the nutritious green minion smoothie:

### Ingredients:

#### Green vegetables:

- a. Broccoli (1 cup)
- b. Yu choy (2 leaves)
- c. Cilantro (1 tablespoon)
- d. Watercress (1 cup)
- e. Aloe Vera (2" piece)
- f. Kale (1/4 leaf blanched)
- g. Spinach (1 cup)

#### Fruits:

- a. Avocado (1/2 cup)
- b. Banana (1 cup)
- c. Apple (1/2 cup)
- d. Orange (1/2 cup)
- e. Dates (3 pieces)

#### Spices:

- a. Ginger (1 teaspoon)
- b. Turmeric (1 teaspoon)

Combine all the ingredients together and process until smooth.



## Water, Water Everywhere! Making Healthy Changes at St. Anthony's Preschool

Joanne Cendejas, Director of St. Anthony's Preschool located in Los Angeles, California, and her staff were concerned with the amount of juice and sugar-sweetened beverages being consumed by their students. To combat this problem, Joanne attended the ECELC learning sessions in 2013, where she and her staff learned the benefits of drinking water. Her staff began communicating to parents the benefits of water and asked if they could replace juice with water or 1%/nonfat milk when they pack their kids lunches. To date, the center has almost 100% compliance with this request.

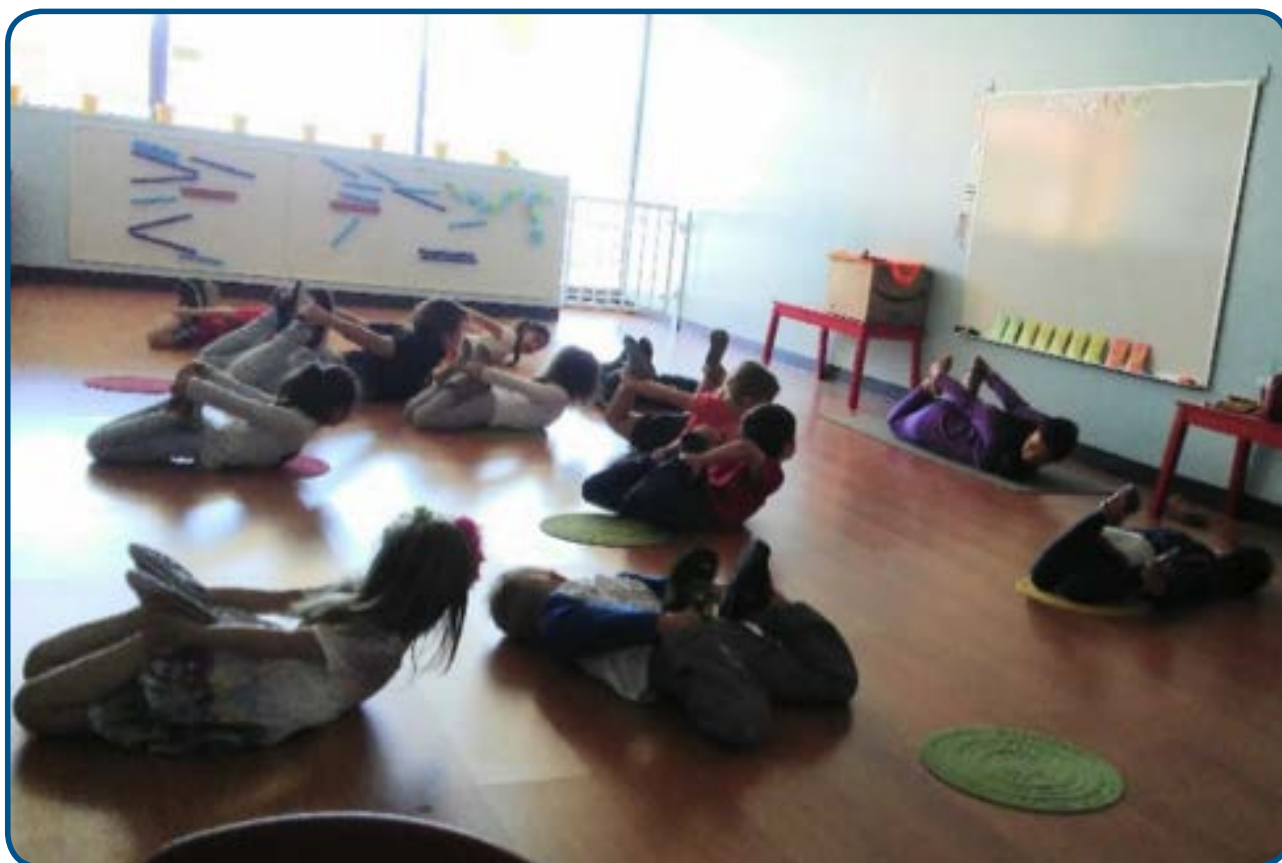
Inspired by their early win, staff began to wonder “*what else can we improve besides beverages?*” During a staff meeting, one of the staff members—a personal trainer at the local gym—suggested implementing regular structured physical activities that would be done as a school-wide effort. This idea blossomed into “Workout Wednesdays.” Every week before class starts, students gather outside for an early morning workout. Students and teachers participate in yoga, stretching, relay racing, obstacle courses and other fun activities. Nicole Cendejas, a lead teacher, found the ECELC materials useful sources to guide their activities.

In addition, the students loved sharing what they have learned with their parents. One mom reported that her child made the entire family order water when they went out to dinner. The program's healthy changes not only led to parents making healthy modifications to their child's lunch but also donating water bottles for the program. Nicole says that it's “really nice to see our parents bring in water and care for our other students as well as their own children.”



## Breathe, Stretch, Shake and Let it Go! Yoga at the Glendora Children's Center

Vasthi Calvachi, director of Glendora Children's Center started a weekly yoga program for all the teachers and their classrooms. Vasthi wanted to introduce yoga in her program long before participating in ECELC program in 2016. She read about the benefits of yoga for children and was determined to include it as a physical activity, however, she did not have the resources or support she needed from her staff. The ECELC trainer helped Vasthi talk with her teachers about the benefits of yoga and connected the center with a local yoga studio to receive yoga mat donations. Although there was resistance in the beginning, the teachers are currently on-board and love doing yoga with the kids! The kids get excited about yoga and enjoy doing poses with fun names like "twisting dragon." In addition to incorporating yoga, the center currently has an updated wellness policy that includes Healthy Celebrations, which encourages parents to bring in healthy snacks or books instead of sweets. They have also incorporated weekly nutrition education lessons into their curriculum.





## Get Moving with Bright Start Child Development Center!

Christie Wolfe, the owner of Bright Start located in Louisville, Kentucky, had trouble finding an impactful nutrition and physical activity training program in her community. Christie very excited to hear about the ECELC program and decided to participate in 2016. Christie was determined to learn ways to incorporate more movement throughout the day for the children and staff at her center.

As each learning session progressed, Christie was able to implement ideas presented in the trainings as well as activities suggested by other early child care providers in the ECELC programs. After the first learning session, Christie began gathering materials and resources provided throughout ECELC program. Once these materials were collected, they were placed in an activity cart that could easily be moved from classroom to classroom. This enabled teachers to grab activities from the cart and apply them in their lesson plans. When Christie witnessed her teacher's reactions to the cart, she was eager to make this same impact with the parents.

As a way to engage families in making healthy decisions for their kids, Bright Start created a family communication center. These resources at the family center were helpful tools provided during the ECELC trainings. On the week of Mother's Day, the staff at Bright Start held their first "Muffins and Movement with Moms." It was an hour-long opportunity led by the program staff, which allowed mothers to enjoy a muffin and participate in physical activities with their child.

Christie says she will continue to build upon the areas of health and physical awareness for children, families, and program staff at Bright Start!



## Reducing Screentime at the Jack in the Box Schools

Maria Lignos, director of the Jack in the Box Schools in Closter and Tenafly New Jersey, noticed that the children's desire to play outdoors was decreasing. They preferred to stay indoors and play with iPads, video games and other electronic devices. Although some of these devices were educational, Maria and her staff felt the children in their program were not being active enough.

Since participating in the ECELC program in 2016, Maria decided to limit the use of computers in the classroom by using iPads strictly as a teaching device. The teachers allocated a special time when preschoolers are allowed to use the iPads for class discussions. Along with this change, she added more gross motor equipment to their indoor and outdoor space.

Maria also decided to incorporate additional outdoor activities such as building a greenhouse and growing fruits and vegetables. The children are responsible for the maintenance of the crops. Once the crops are in full bloom, the kids will prepare and eat them!

Maria and her staff are so amazed at how the children's interest to be outdoors has grown and their desire to watch a screen has reduced!



## Creating a Breastfeeding-Friendly Space for Child Parent Centers

Child Parent Centers, Inc. (CPC) is the regional Early/Head Start grantee that serves Pima, Santa Cruz, Cochise, Graham and Greenlee counties in Arizona. The program is primarily center-based but also uses home-based, and Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership models. In 2014, CPC Early/Head Start participated of the Empower PLUS+ project (Arizona's brand of the Early Care and Education Learning Collaborative) with several sites in Pima County. While participating in Empower PLUS+, CPC sites implemented small-scale goals such as establishing a garden and increasing physical activity during the project year. However, their long-term goal was to provide a breastfeeding-friendly environment for the entire agency. The staff began writing out a timeline and discussing with the Arizona State breastfeeding program on policies and reviewing facilities. The CPC staff went through great lengths to begin the process of providing a breastfeeding space and faced many obstacles including administrative changes.

By 2016, the revised Head Start Performance Standards called for early childcare programs to provide a breastfeeding-friendly space. The performance standards gave the CPC staff the administrative support they needed to fulfill their long-term goal. CPC has formed a breastfeeding sub-committee to identify and implement the breastfeeding initiative. They used questions from the Go NAP SACC tool with site managers and staff to assess attitudes, beliefs and environments related to breastfeeding support. Next, they determined if modifications to site locations were necessary in order to create a breastfeeding space. In the next few months, the CPC breastfeeding subcommittee plans to purchase equipment needed for each site and constitute a breastfeeding policy for use throughout the agency. They are currently working with approximately 40 sites throughout the five counties.

CPC is leading the way for this breastfeeding-friendly initiative in Southern Arizona. Although it took time to see results, they were equipped with great resources and tools provided through the ECELC program!



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## Settle Down and Breastfeed in Childtown Child Care Center

Sheila, Director of Childtown in Shelbyville, Kentucky, openly welcomed breastfeeding families in her child care program; however, she did not understand how to fully support families until she participated in the ECELC project in 2016. As part of her action plan goal, Sheila and her staff decided to transform the storage room into a breastfeeding room. After hard work and dedication from Sheila and her staff, the Childtown child care center now has a breastfeeding room. The breastfeeding room is equipped with a glider, breast pump, magazines, breastfeeding resources/posters, changing area, and a radio. Sheila says the response from the nursing mothers in her program has been wonderful! They have shared how delightful it is to have a comfortable, quiet, and private space to feed and bond with their babies.

One of Sheila's mothers stated:

*"I was so excited to learn that my children's childcare center had created a nursing room. Since I work nearby, the opportunity to feed my baby during my lunchbreak is one of the best parts of my day. When I used the room for the first time, my excitement grew even more! Not only did the room have all of the essentials, but it has so many wonderful details (music, baby photos, nice scent). I am so grateful for this space and look forward to many happy moments there with my daughter."*



## Let's Dance! Line Dancing with Families at Fairmont Head Start

In 2016, Fairmont Head Start located in Birmingham, Alabama, enrolled in the Early Care and Education Learning Collaborative (ECELC) with the purpose of enhancing the family engagement and physical activity practices in their program. The staff came together and developed a plan to offer free line dancing classes to the family members of the children they serve. The teachers offered these classes the entire school year during end of the day. The center also provided child care during the time of the class so that parents or guardians could take a few minutes to focus on their own health by dancing away some of their stress before picking up their children. Many parents take advantage of this class and Fairmont hopes to exceed family engagement each school year.

The line dancing has been a great opportunity to engage their families and educate them on the importance of being active and making healthy choices. The classes provide opportunities for participants to share healthy tips and build better relationships with the families. Parents report feeling refreshed and energized after each session and the center leadership also reports this activity increases the level of physical activity for the staff.

The Fairmont Leadership Team was invited to lead the ECELC in a dance during the learning session on physical activity. While they encouraged everyone to get up and dance during the session, they also challenged other child care centers to consider engaging with families they serve by offering similar classes. Since the launch of the Fairmont line dancing classes, two other child care facilities in Jefferson County began offering dance classes as well.



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