Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

LENA Start: Encouraging Early Language Development with Baby Talk

Statement of Problem

Language development in early childhood is integral to future academic performance; however, children from low-income households have increased risk for early language delays, contributing to income-based academic inequities later in life. In fact, language development at the age of 36 months predicts school success in reading and math, so it is important to encourage families to nurture language development in the infant and toddler years. However, this can be difficult for caregivers given busy schedules and competing priorities. We know that in order to increase school readiness of low-income children, we must start by building parents' capacity to support child language development at home.

Description

Our team will conduct a randomized control study to determine the efficacy of one potential tool in building parent capacity and nurturing child language learning—LENA Start, a group skills-building intervention that uses "Fitbit-style pedometer for words" technology. As part of the study, parents will participate in interactive group information sessions during which they will learn more about the importance of early language exposure and how to incorporate communication in their daily routine with their child (e.g., during bath time, meal time and story time). Using LENA Start technology, parents will receive weekly feedback detailing the number of words directed to and the number of conversations had with their child. Previous research has demonstrated that this type of feedback encouraged parents to speak to and with their children more often.

In our study, there are three possible groups parents could be placed in when they enroll. In the first group, parents will attend LENA Start sessions and they will also receive feedback from the talk pedometer. The second set of enrollees will also take part in group sessions; however, they will not receive feedback. The final control group will not attend the LENA Start sessions and will not receive feedback.

We'll measure each child's language development, parental beliefs about child development and parent satisfaction. We will also study if family characteristics are associated with the impact of the program.

Next Steps

With this project, we hope to build an evidence base to support the use of LENA Start among families, ultimately leading to more community agencies adopting and using this technology on their own. With successful implementation, LENA Start will continue to connect and empower communities to encourage and nurture language development in children, providing a better future for generations to come.

For study recruitment information for both community agencies and families, click here.

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